

This Means War 1 - Surprise Snog

"I'm sorry, Ginny. I can't go out with you any more."

"What?" The red-haired witch looked stunned.

"Look, I like you a lot, but I'm not prepared to stand up to your brothers. Do you have any idea what they threatened to do to me? I want a normal girlfriend."

"But," Ginny started, "Dean..."

Dean shook his head. "Sorry," he muttered, turned on his heel, and ran away.

Ginny collapsed against a nearby wall. To say she was stunned was an understatement. She tried to work out how she felt. Dean had been a decent enough boyfriend. Not too bad in the kissing department, ok in the attention department, but not much else really.

She realised she wasn't too upset about losing a guy who wasn't willing to fight for her, but that was hardly the point. What she was upset about were the overbearing twits who called themselves relatives, who had interfered in her life, again. Again.

Her feelings of hurt were quickly replaced by anger as she regained her feet and started to stalk back to the Gryffindor common room. She entered to find it mostly deserted. As it was a Saturday, most of the House was out doing a multitude of different activities. Only Ron and Hermione were sitting together, pretending to study.

"What would you know about Dean?" Ginny asked her brother with an expression of innocence on her face.

"What do you mean?" Ron asked, looking a little shifty.

"A roommate of yours and my boyfriend. You wouldn't have been talking to him, would you?" She kept her deceptively sweet voice intact.

"Err, I might have mentioned that a few of us didn't think it was quite suitable for him to be finding cupboards for you two to snog in," Ron admitted.

Hermione looked at the two of them, then, showing the intelligence she was famed for, backed away very slowly, leaving them to it.

"And who gave you the right to decide whether or not it was suitable?"

"I'm your older brother - that gives me the right."

Ginny's voice lost even more of its volume, as she leaned in closer to her brother. "You and those overbearing prats have just lost me a perfectly good boyfriend. You are all going to pay for this, pay like you wouldn't believe."

Ron had an expression of fear on his face, as he realised just how close he was sitting to an extremely angry witch.

"I was planning on doing this at the end of term, but you have forced me to move my plans forward. I will have a new boyfriend shortly, my darling brother. I will be finding closets to kiss him in. I will even happily let him find out what is under these robes, and there will be nothing you can do about it. But that's only the start. It will be then that we, and I mean my new boyfriend and I, will start to get revenge on you, then the twins, then Percy, then Charlie, and finally Bill. Every one of you will pay." The witch didn't shout, didn't scream, she just looked into Ron's eyes with a fierce self-belief.

"No one will go out with you," Ron said smugly. "I've already put the word around that any one who dares will receive the full wrath of the six of us. I might not be that intimidating on my own, but with the others, the boys all understand."

Ginny looked deep into her brother's eyes, and slowly smiled. "I've been planning this for a long time, far longer than you can imagine."

Ron watched as his sister slowly walked away, as she did, she started to laugh. For some reason, the sinister laugh sent chills down his back.

"Ron," Hermione said quietly. "I love you, but you just made the biggest mistake of your life."

Ron looked at her, and grinned. "Nah, what can she do, she's just one girl against the lot of us. We always won when we were growing up." He shrugged, "She's just mad now, she'll get over it."

Hermione shook her head, "I don't think so, Ron. And when it happens, I'm not going to protect you."

Ron laughed loudly, "I'm not going to need protection."

From: Ron
To: The Weasley Boys
Subject: Success

Hey guys,
Just wanted to let you know that today's actions were a complete success. Whatever Fred and George said to Dean worked a treat, and our sister is back to being single.

Ron

From: Charlie
To: The Boys
Subject: Re: Success
Congrats guys. Is the word out now?
C.
-- *Draconis dominium*

From: Gred
To: Our ever-loving siblings
Subject: Re[2]: Success
Quilled Charlie:
> Congrats guys. Is the word out now?
It sure is. No one is going to go near her. She is safe again.
Forge
-- *Weasley's Wizard Wheezes – coming soon to Diagon Alley.*

From: Ginny
To: The Burrow
Cc: Dad's office
Subject: Prats
Hi Mum, Dad,
Well, it's finally happened. Fred and George had a word with Dean today, and scared him off. I know I said I would wait till I was sixteen before I put it into action, but they crossed the line today.
I found out that it was Ron that scared off Michael as well.
As a result, the Plan is going to go ahead, but I will need that letter I suggested.
Love you both,
Ginny – I got an O on my transfiguration homework.

From: Mum
To: My darling daughter

Cc: Arthur

Subject: Re: Prats

Ginny,

Congratulations on getting an O. We are both proud of you.

Are you sure you want to go through with this, dear? I know you've been planning this for years, but are you sure it's the right time? And whom are you going to have help you?

Love,

Mum,

From: Ginny

To: Mum

Cc: Dad

Subject: Re[2]: Prats

Yes, I am sure.

And as for the person, who else would I choose?

Ginny

From: Dad

To: Ginny

Cc: Molly

Subject: Re: Re[2]: Prats

Gin-Gin,

We'll write the letter when you want us to. Good luck, and please go easy on the boy, he won't know what's hit him.

Dad

-- The Ministry of Magic routinely monitors the content of Mmails sent and received via its network for the purposes of ensuring compliance with its policies and procedures. Employees must never send or store Mmails or attachments that acknowledge the return of 'He Who Must Not Be Named', or defame the name of Cornelius Fudge. Mmails of this nature sent in or out of the Ministry of Magic network may be intercepted and stopped by highly trained Aurors, and perpetrators will be sentenced to 10(ten) years in Azkaban. The Ministry of Magic is not responsible for any changes made to the message after it has been sent. Where opinions are expressed, they are not necessarily those of The Ministry of Magic, or Cornelius Fudge. This Mmail and any files transmitted with it are confidential and intended solely for the use of the individual or entity or being to whom they are addressed. If you are not the intended addressee, or the person or being responsible for delivering it to them, you may not copy, forward disclose or otherwise use it or any part of it in any way. To do so may be unlawful. If you receive this Mmail by mistake, please advise the sender immediately.

Ginny smiled as she received her last Mmail. With her parents on her side, she only needed one more person to get this going. The only problem she had now was how to convince him to help her. It would take a special sort of boy to be able to stand up to the combined pressure of 6 large and intimidating Weasley boys. There was only one person in the school who would have the guts, with the right motivation, to help her.

With a confidence she didn't truly feel, she walked out to the Quidditch pitch. Harry was there, as he always was when he wanted to relax. He was doing some loops and dives, not really practising, but more just having fun.

She watched him with a smile content to lean against the stand and indulge in some Harry watching, which was her favourite pastime.

Harry closed his eyes; the wind rushing through his hair and on his face was one of the greatest feelings of freedom he had.

He opened his eyes, and struggled not to grin as he spotted the distinctive red hair of the only female Weasley. He pulled to a stop, and floated down to meet her.

"Hey, Ginny," he grinned at her. He was always more relaxed after a good flight.

"Hi," she smiled at him, a little sadly.

"What's wrong?" he asked, instantly going into caring mode. He felt a lot closer to Ginny these days with Ron and Hermione finally dating. He had almost automatically turned to the youngest Weasley to talk to lately. With her dating Dean, it had been a safe choice, and free of distraction.

"Dean broke up with me."

Harry stumbled in surprise. "Oh, Ginny." He gave her a quick hug. "I'm sorry."

"It's ok; I'm not too upset about it. It's not his fault."

He looked her directly in the eyes, while seeming to search for something; regret, maybe. Eventually, he stopped and smiled at her. "Come on, it's time for dinner."

She smiled, "I've already eaten. I need to get back and do my Potions homework."

""Kay, Ginny."

She smiled, then grabbed him by the front of his robes, pulled him down and kissed him as hard as she could.

It was obvious after a second that she had more experience than he, but she didn't seem to let that bother her. She lightly parted her lips, and touched her tongue to his.

Harry was almost frozen in place. 'It's Ginny!' his mind screamed to him. 'You don't think of her like that'. He couldn't deny that the kiss was a lot more enjoyable than the one he had shared with Cho, or that she had a soft taste that he really wanted to get to know better.

Ginny released him suddenly, shot him an impish smile and skipped off merrily, leaving him stunned in place.

It took nearly five minutes for Harry to regain enough motor control to make his way to the Great Hall for dinner.

Ginny dashed all the way to the common room, then straight into her dorm. As soon as she checked that it was empty, she shut the door tight, and then squealed "I kissed Harry Potter!"

She fell backwards onto the bed. "I kissed Harry Potter. I am definitely doing that again!"

"Are you all right, Harry?" Ron asked, as he sat down next to his friend.

"What?" The boy jumped.

"Are you all right?" Ron repeated, looking strangely at him.

"Oh," Harry squeaked, and then regained control of his vocal cords. "Oh, yeah, I'm fine."

"Are you sure?"

'No,' Harry thought to himself. 'I've just had the best snog of my life, from your little sister – who has somehow got herself so deeply into my mind, that I can't stop thinking about the snog, and doing it again. Please don't kill me'. "Yeah, didn't get much sleep last night," he lied.

"Anyway," Ron moved on. "Good news. Dean's dropped Ginny. I had Fred and George explain a few home truths about relationships and how Ginny isn't ready yet."

"Oh," Harry said, quietly.

"Are you sure you're all right?" Ron asked.

From: Harry

To: Padfoot

Cc: Moony

Subject: erm, help?

Hey guys,

Hope you're both well. And that you're not getting into too much trouble.

Look, I need some advice. A girl I thought I was just friends with met me after I went flying today. We were talking normally, and then suddenly she grabbed me and snogged my brains out, before skipping away, leaving me in a daze.

What the hell am I supposed to do now?

H.

From: Snuffles

To: Raving Werewolf

Subject: *sniff*

Look, our little Harry, all grown up and being hunted by girls.

Lucky bugger, I never had someone just "Snog my brains out" when I was at school. It normally took weeks before we got to that stage.

S.

From: Professor Remus C Lupin

To: The Reprobate

Subject: Re: *sniff*

Down boy! Bad doggy. Have you had your shots yet?

Although I can see your point, you can see why. He's got his father's hair – how many times did we hear some girl whisper about how they wanted to run their fingers through it/ And his mother's eyes and we all loved those.

Any idea what you might say to him?

Moony

From: I escaped from Azkaban

To: The sell-out

Subject: Re: Re: *sniff*

Yes, I have had my shots, thank you very much!

You can go for the respectable, helpful advice, just add this for me...

"Harry, you little devil you – making your godfather proud. Next time – Kiss Her Back!"

S.

From: The last true marauders

To: The boy who got kissed

Cc: The mangy mutt who avoided getting kissed

Subject: Re: erm, help?

Harry,

Padfoot and I are both well. We're hiding out at the moment on Order business. Don't worry, neither of us have any plans to get into trouble.

I honestly don't see the problem. I'm guessing that you like this girl. Who is she?

Look, if you don't like her, explain gently. If you do like her, and the "left me in a daze," was a bit of a clue, I'd recommend kissing her back and seeing what happens.

Sirius adds: Harry, you little devil you – making your godfather proud. Next time – Kiss Her Back!

The werewolf and the dirty dog

From: Dazed and Confused

To: The unhelpful twits

Subject: It gets worse.

SHE DID IT AGAIN!

I was coming out of Potions, Snape had me stay behind to rant at me, and she grabbed me from behind, pushed me against the wall, and snogged me again, leaving me slumped in the corner gasping for air.

Ron came back to look for me and now thinks that Malfoy hexed me!

H.

From: The Love Doctor

To: The patient

Subject: Re: It gets worse.

Harry,

Did you kiss her back this time?

And why don't you just tell Ron? I'm sure he'll be happy to offer assistance.

Padfoot.

From: Getting irritated

To: Why the hell did I come to you for advice?

Subject: Re[2]: It gets worse.

I didn't have time to kiss her back.

And as for telling Ron....

IT'S HIS BLOODY SISTER!

H.

From: Your favourite godfather

To: The boy who won't live for much longer

Bcc: That other guy

Subject: Re: Re[2]: It gets worse

Harry, there's no need to shout.

Oh, and my dear boy, you have problems. Six older problems - and a redhead who's been determined to nab you since she was eleven.

Can I have your broom if you don't make it?

Padfoot.

From: James' other best friend

To: The idiot

Subject: Harry

Padfoot,

ARE YOU INSANE?

Joking about death to Harry 'I'm number one on Voldemort's death list' Potter!

Moony

From: The good-looking one

To: The other idiot

Subject: Re: Harry

No need to shout.

And yes, I am quite sane. I think it's time Harry had some normal problems for a teenage boy. Hopefully it will keep him occupied and not concerned about certain prophecies.

P.

-- *woof woof*

From: Shocked and Stunned

To: Padfoot

Subject: Re: Re: Harry

Padfoot, are you ok? Not got any signs of dementia?

That was almost profound!

And I guess I agree.

Moony.

"Harry," Hermione said as she approached him. "What's up?"

"What do you mean?" Harry asked, looking around.

"You might be able to persuade Ron that nothing is wrong, but I can obviously see that something is. You never sit still anywhere; you look like Voldemort is hiding around a corner ready to jump out at you."

"I don't know what you mean," Harry replied, peering around the corner.

"You're even doing it now," Hermione said bluntly.

"Excuse me, Hermione" Ginny said, suddenly appearing. She brushed past the bushy-haired girl, grabbed Harry, and kissed him again, before releasing him and vanishing as fast as she had arrived. Harry, once again, was left using the wall to keep himself upright.

"I see," Hermione said quietly. "How long has this been going on?"

"Two days," Harry groaned. "She just appears from nowhere, grabs me, kisses me, then leaves me in a wreck."

"Ahh," Hermione said quietly. "And you have no idea when she'll do it next?"

"No! She's everywhere, stalking me. I only feel safe in my dorm, and I can't stay there all day. Oh, damn, and I'm late for Quidditch practice." He turned, and dashed off.

Hermione Granger, Prefect, collected herself. Sedately, she walked up to the Gryffindor common room and into her dorm room. Carefully, she lay down on her bed and closed the curtains. She pressed her face into the pillow, and finally gave into the hysterical laughter that had been trying to escape for so long. Tears ran down her face as she laughed harder than she could imagine.

Eventually, she sat up and opened the curtains.

"Good laugh?" Ginny asked with a grin.

Hermione nodded. "I'm impressed, Gin. I'm guessing that he is the new boyfriend you were threatening Ron with?"

"He will be," Ginny said calmly. "But not for a few more days yet. You have no idea how much fun this is."

"You do know that he is as jumpy as a long-tailed cat in a room full of rocking chairs?"

"Of course," she replied confidently. "Why do you think I'm doing this? I want him so off his rocker that he'll say yes when I ask him out without thinking about it."

"Why Harry?" The question was asked seriously, as Hermione changed into the persona of someone who loved Harry dearly.

"I've been in love with him for four and a half years now. I know it, I've tried dating other people, and they are simply not him. Even though I'm kissing him, they are better than anything I have ever felt. We belong together. The problem is that Ron's been brainwashing Harry for so long that he doesn't know how he feels about me anymore. Well, I'm set on changing that mentality."

Hermione nodded slowly. "I can guarantee that thinking of you as a sister is the last thing on his mind at the moment."

Ginny rested her chin on her hands, and placed her elbows on her knees. "Ron and the gits are stupidly over-protective off me, and while it's nice at times, they need to learn that I am not a little doll they can play with. I am my own person, who's seen more evil than I ever want them to. I grew up when Voldemort possessed me, and there is only going to be one person who ever understands that." She smirked. "The fact that he's got the most gorgeous eyes in the world is a bonus."

"And to be honest, Harry is the only person who, when making a decision, will not be swayed by anyone else. I need that stubbornness in my life. When my brothers find out about Harry, they will threaten him, playfully at first, and then prank us on end for days."

Hermione's eyes widened as she looked at the girl before her. She had never heard Ginny talk so candidly, and was impressed by it. "Oh Merlin! And when they prank you, Harry will dig his heels in harder than they will believe."

Ginny nodded. "It will be war, Harry and me against the six of them. I have Mum and Dad on our side already."

"Officially," Hermione said slowly, "I will be neutral during this war. However, if I was to accidentally come across a spell or two that might help and was to somehow point it out to you, my neutrality would not be compromised, would it?"

Ginny grinned. "Not at all."

"What about Him?" Hermione went serious again.

"Voldemort? I know he's after Harry, but I'm on his list to kill as it is. And I am not going to let Lizard-face interfere any more than my brothers."

Hermione nodded and smiled. "Wait here." She jumped up, scribbled a note, and dashed out of the room.

She returned a few minutes later, cradling something. "Harry's Invisibility Cloak," she said, handing it to Ginny. "I left him a note saying I needed it for a midnight library trip. He said earlier that he only felt safe in his dorm. Time for you to remove that." She finished with an evil grin.

Ginny reached out and hugged her friend. "Thanks for understanding."

"I don't agree with what Ron has been doing. It's sexist and overbearing, especially considering what he considers decent nocturnal activities."

Later that night, when everyone was asleep, Ginny silently slipped out of bed, and into the cloak. She glided down the stairs, and up into Harry's dorm room. She knew what bed he slept in, and quietly moved back the curtains.

She stood, frozen for a second, and watched him sleep for the first time. He seemed so innocent and young. He wasn't wearing his glasses, and the moonlight picked up the features of his face perfectly. In that second, she fell in love with him again, as she had before.

As if he could feel her watching, he stirred, slowly opening his eyes. She knew he couldn't see her, yet he was looking at her directly. Ginny dropped the hood of the cloak, and met his gaze steadily. He didn't show any surprise. As softly as she could, she bent down and touched her lips to his.

They stayed still for a second, touching each other in this strangely intimate manner, before she moved slightly and kissed him properly.

It wasn't a hard kiss, like before. She didn't try and push him, she just kissed him softly. For the first time, Harry kissed her back, matching her exactly, with the same amount of pressure. Slowly, he opened his mouth, in an invitation. It was one that Ginny accepted gratefully, sliding her tongue into his mouth for the first time. There seemed to be hardly any passion, but enough raw emotion to almost knock her out.

Slowly, she pulled back, watching him.

He seemed to be expecting it, knowing that she was keeping to her rules for now. Harry reached out, and softly stroked an errant lock of her hair behind her ear. He slid his hand down brushing against her silk-soft cheek, and then let his hand fall to the bed. Slowly, Ginny covered her head with the cloak again, vanishing.

She moved back to her own bed, crawled in, and went to sleep with the softest smile on her face.

"Well?" Hermione demanded the next morning, as she sat on the side of Ginny's bed.

"He kissed me back," she whispered, still not quite sure it had happened.

"And?"

Ginny looked up at her friend. "I've never felt so vulnerable. So small. For the first time, I was glad that I was possessed in my first year."

Hermione climbed on the bed fully, casting a Silencing charm around it

"Do you ever think about who Harry is?" Ginny asked.

"What do you mean?"

"The boy who lived', the person who scares Voldemort the most, Harry James Potter. You remember how we laughed when Harry told us that it could have been Neville in the prophecy, not him?"

"Yes," Hermione's voice was quiet, barely breathing the answer.

"We laughed because the idea of Neville facing the greatest Dark Lord in history was ridiculous. Yet at the same time, we accepted that Harry would do the same. We had no doubts that Harry was up to the task."

Hermione smiled slightly, nodding.

"We think of Harry and Quidditch, Harry and Defence, Harry and bravery. Yet we never think of Harry and Voldemort. We never wonder how this boy can face someone so powerful, so much older, and so evil."

Ginny's eyes pinned Hermione's, leaving the girl nowhere to go.

"I felt it last night, when Harry kissed me back. Inside him is a raging inferno; surrounding a core so hard it puts steel to shame. And anyone who gets past the persona he puts up, and into his heart, could easily be swallowed by that fire and ice. He has the ability to defeat Voldemort and to do what ever he wants.

"I almost felt like a moth, drawn to flame so bright that it would set me on fire.

"If I was a Ginny Weasley who had never been possessed, never been saved by him, I would be running away from him now. I would be running so fast I'd never look back. I'd *know* that I would lose myself in him, and never be the same again.

"I'm not that Ginny. I've been strengthened by what I've lived through. I know without a doubt that he is the only person alive who can handle me, handle what I've been through, and handle who I am."

Her eyes seemed to glow with intensity. "I now know that I am the only girl alive who can handle Harry, who can accept him for what he is, and not by what he appears to be. I can help him bring that core out of hiding, and help him use it to defeat Voldemort."

"What are you going to do?" Hermione asked in a hushed voice.

Ginny shook herself slightly as the moment vanished. "Continue the plan," she grinned impishly.

From: The boy who kissed

To: My family

Subject: *smile*

Well guys, I took you advice, and finally kissed her back.

I think I'm falling in love with a redheaded witch.

It's 5am at the moment, the dorm is silent, and I can just see the beginnings of dawn in the distance, a gradual lightening of the room. I can't sleep, and don't want to sleep.

I kissed her back, and could feel it.

I sit here, with only the steady flicker of a candle for company, yet feel warmer than I have in my life.

We kissed.

I'm not afraid, not scared. I'm simply happy.

I knew she was there, under my Invisibility Cloak, watching me.

She moved the cloak back, and her glorious hair was pulled back in a pony tail, that seemed to emphasise her dark chocolate eyes – eyes that remind me of a warm safe place where I can hide, where I'll be protected.

Then she kissed me, but not like before, she just touched her lips to mine.

She started to move, so I matched her. It was almost unreal. We moved together, there was no passion; it wasn't the time for that. I could feel her heart, feel what is inside her. I feel like she touched my soul, and left a bit of her own with me.

I'm not sure if I ever want to sleep again.

Harry James Potter

From: Sirius

To: Remus

Subject: Harry

What the hell was that?

Harry writing what looks like dodgy teenage poetry?

"I'm not sure if I ever want to sleep again?"

James never did that!

Sirius

From: Moony

To: Padfoot the serious

Subject: Re: Harry

Well, that was a curious couple of Mmails to wake up to.

Harry's falling in love, and I couldn't think of a better person for him. Remember that discussion we had about Cho? That clingy girl who was always crying? How she wasn't suitable for him? Well, I taught Ginny, and she is smart, mentally strong, and despite being possessed by Voldemort and having 6 older brothers, she has a strong personality.

I think they would be good for each other.

And as for James never doing that, I think I should point out that this is HARRY we are dealing with. Not James. And Ginny is not Lils either. They are their own people who are following their own path. Sure, there is the odd similarity, but that's purely superficial. I just hope they have different luck.

Moony

From: That's Sirius, not serious

To: Moony the Professor

Subject: Re: Re: Harry

I guess your right, it's just a shock to wake up and find that your godson spent the night writing dodgy poetry into an Mmail to us.

I suppose he just wanted to share with his family.

laugh Oh god, I'm going to have to tease him about that.

I do know that he's not James. Sometimes I do come close to forgetting, to thinking that 'James would never do that'. I miss him, even after all these years.

And damn it! If Harry is serious about Ginny, then they certainly will have different luck. I don't care what it costs me!

Padfoot

-- *Woof woof*

From: I howl at the moon

To: You howl at passing cars

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Harry

Ok, so maybe the poetry was a little dodgy, but it's better than some of the other stuff we have received. 'I saw Voldemort killing' rends my heart every single time I hear it.

I miss James and Lily too. I even miss Wormtail. Not the bastard he became, but the last Marauder that I used to know. Not a day goes by when I don't think of them. They tell us that school is the best time of our lives, as a joke. For us, I think it truly was.

I have two purposes in life. Revenge on Voldemort, and protecting Harry. The rest of the world can shove off for all I care.

R.

From: I have a cute purr

To: You sound like a rabid tiger

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Harry

I want revenge on Wormtail as well as Voldemort. As for protecting Harry - you know, we never talked about this, but I agree with you totally. I've been to hell, and will not go back there. I will spend the rest of my life dedicated to those three goals.

I know that, when we do die, we will be able to look James and Lily in the face and tell them how much we missed them, and that we did everything we could.

S.

From: Better a tiger than a tigger

To: You couldn't sound cute if you were paid

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Harry

Hear Hear!

Damn, this is a maudlin conversation. Wanna write back to Harry, or shall I?

R.

From: What the hell is a tigger?

To: The insane lunatic

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Harry

I'll write him back, it's my turn.

How many dogs does it take to a change light bulb?

Golden Retriever: The sun is shining, the day is young, we've got our whole lives ahead of us, and you're inside worrying about a stupid burned out bulb?

Rottweiler: Make me.

Lab: Oh, me, me!!!! Pleeeeeeeze let me change the light bulb! Can I? Can I? Huh? Huh? Huh? Can I?

Boxer: Who cares? I can still play with my squeaky toys in the dark.....

Irish Wolfhound: Can somebody else do it? I've got this hangover.....

German Shepherd: I'm not trained to change bulbs, just to guard the house. So don't try anything!

grin

Snuffles, the adorable

From: Scratching his head in disbelief

To: What the hell have you been sniffing

Subject: Jokes

They, were truly awful – and I thought you looked more like a Grim than an Irish Wolfhound/Labrador/Boxer cross breed.

laugh

Moony

This Means War 2 - Who Wants to Play - Kiss Chase?

From: Padfoot

To: The Dodgy Poet

Subject: *Shakes head*

Harry, I love you, but please don't ever send me your dodgy midnight ramblings again. I had to brush my teeth after I had read it just to get rid of the syrupy taste.

Now that's out of the way, you do realise that turn-around is fair play?

S.

--

Woof Woof

From: *hurt look*

To: The critic

Subject: Re: *shakes head*

Dodgy midnight ramblings!? I pour out my soul to you, and this is how you repay me?

Ok, I've looked at what I sent you, and maybe it is a bit dodgy. Hey, I'm young and in love, what are you expecting? William Blake?

What do you mean by "Turn-around is fair play?"

H.

From: Your favourite godfather

To: Prongs Junior

Subject: Re: Re: *shakes head*

Who's William Blake?

It's time for you to give her surprise kisses.

Padfoot

--

Woof Woof

From: Prongs Junior

To: My only godfather.

Subject: Idea

Padfoot, you're a genius!

H. – Muggle Poet

"You seem in a good mood this morning, Harry," Ron said, shovelling eggs into his mouth, as if eating fast would ensure that Salmonella would have no chance of infecting him.

"I had a Mmail conversation with Padfoot," Harry explained with a grin. He was enjoying his sausages.

"Oh, what did he have to say?"

"Ron, don't talk with your mouthful," Hermione said, leaning back to avoid being sprayed.

"Sorry," Ron mumbled, his face fell as he shot puppy dog eyes at his girlfriend.

Harry proved, in that instant, that he was a heroic Gryffindor by refraining from rolling his eyes at the two of them.

"Where is he?" Hermione asked.

"Dunno," he shrugged. "He said he was out on Order business with Moony."

"Oh," the conversation seemed to dry off as they concentrated on finishing off their food.

"What does Ginny have scheduled this morning, Hermione?" Harry asked. "I need to talk to her about the game against the Slytherins."

The bushy-haired girl looked at him suspiciously - a look Ron didn't spot. "She's got double potions first."

"Thanks."

Harry carried his bag to his defence class, it was a little fuller than normal, but he hoped that no one would notice.

The class passed quickly for him since he barely paid attention. His mind was firmly on the working out the timings for getting from the Defence class, down to the potions dungeon, then getting Ginny alone without anyone seeing him.

Still, if she could do it to him, he must be able to do it to her. After all, he was the Boy Who Lived.

As the class ended, Harry turned to his two friends. "Damn it, I forgot my homework for McGonagall. I'll see you in class." He turned and ran off.

"That boy would forget his head if it wasn't attached," Ron said with a grin, wrapping an arm around his girlfriend.

"Yes," Hermione agreed, although her face had a suspicious look on it again.

Harry pulled his Invisibility Cloak out of his bag, having retrieved it from Ginny that morning. He pulled it on and ran as fast as he could to the Potions dungeon, taking a short cut from behind a statue.

He managed to arrive just as Ginny's class was exiting. He stood to one side, looking for the bright hair that signified a Weasley. When she didn't exit immediately, he crept to the door, and saw that she was placing her potion on the rack for examination later.

He looked around, and then smirked to himself. As silently as he could, he pointed his wand at the wall of the dungeon corridor, cast a Cushioning charm on it, and then waited.

Ginny exited the classroom, scowling at being held back by Snape. Harry threw off his Invisibility Cloak and grabbed Ginny by the shoulder. Before she could even squeak in surprise, he pushed her hard against the newly cushioned wall.

Her eyes flew open in surprise, before closing as Harry pressed his body hard against hers and kissed her the same way she had kissed him the first time. It was forceful, with his tongue pressing against her lips, entreating entry.

Just as she realised what was happening, and became prepared to enjoy it, he stepped back, smirked at her, and picked up his cloak. He was gone before she could blink, leaving her gaping against the wall, with her knees suddenly weak. Her body was only now telling her just how much she had enjoyed what he had been doing to her.

Ginny suddenly realised that her back wasn't hurting and touched the wall. She recognised the Cushioning charm, and slowly smiled. If that wasn't a sign that Harry had feelings for her, then she didn't know what was. Any boy who was concerned enough to make sure a girl wasn't even slightly hurt by his passion, when he was kissing her senseless, was definitely a keeper.

"Well, well, what do we have here? A weasel daydreaming? About Potty? You're pathetic. He'd never look at a tramp like you. Still, if you want to earn some cash, I'd do you."

Ginny straightened up and looked at her verbal assailant quizzically. "That was a big mistake, Malfoy," she told him calmly.

"What?" he asked, apparently a little surprised at the response.

She walked forwards and ran her fingers down his cheek slowly. "You will pay for that," the redhead promised with a little smile. Growing up with six oft-boisterous boys had taught her one or two things. She stepped forwards a little, and added her momentum to the knee that she kicked out

as hard as she could.

Ginny smiled with pleasure as Draco's face went white, then red, before he collapsed onto the floor, clutching his crotch with tears running down his face.

"That's only the first part of your payment, Draco," she purred softly. "I'm going to destroy your reputation next."

With a happy skip, Ginny bounced off to her next class, leaving the helpless boy on the floor.

From: Ginny

To: Mum

Subject: Private

Mom, it's so great. Harry kissed me! He did it outside Potions, and even cast a Cushioning charm on the wall so I wouldn't be hurt.

This is great! I'm going to ask him out soon!

Love,

Your deliriously happy daughter.

From: A happy and sad Mum

To: My little girl's growing up

Subject: Re: Private

Honey,

I'm pleased that Harry is kissing you, and that he is taking care of you. I guess it's just a shock to hear that my daughter is being kissed and enjoying it so much.

I know you think you know what you are doing, love, but please be careful because I'd hate for you to get hurt.

Arthur and I love Harry to bits, but you are our daughter and will always come first to us.

Lots of love, Mum

From: Gin-gin

To: My mum

Subject: Re[2]: Private

Muumm, I love you, and Dad. You knew this was going to happen sooner or later, and I don't know if this will reassure you, but Harry's not the first boy I have kissed, or even the second.

He is the only person who makes me feel like I'm the most important person in the world when we kiss. That boy puts his soul into it, Mum. It's like the kiss you said Dad gave you. It tingles on your lips and you can still feel it burning hours later, and it makes your knees want to go into different directions.

And Mum, I know that physically I'm not an adult, but you remember the nightmares I had after Voldemort's possession? The times you let me sleep with you at night when I was so terrified that whenever I closed my eyes, Tom would be there telling me to try and kill Harry? I'm not an average kid any more. Harry is the only person who can understand; who can make me forget it, and even accept it. And you know something? Despite him having been through things a thousand times worse, he is still more concerned about me than himself.

I'm in love, Mum.

Ginny

From: Reluctantly accepting

To: My only daughter

Subject: Re: Re[2]: Private

Ginny,

I do remember it as possibly the worst time of my life. Knowing that you were in pain and there was nothing else I could do about it.

All I'll say is that if he hurts you, he won't just have your brothers to contend with.

I'm glad he makes you happy; just remember that I'll accept grandkids from Bill, Charlie, or Percy, but not you (yet)!

Anyway, your father's written the letter and will send it to Harry tomorrow.

Mum.

From: The cuddly one

To: The hopefully sneaky one

Subject: Lunch

Harry,

Can you try and sneak out to The Three Broomsticks at lunchtime? I'll be passing by and want to see you.

Love,

Padfoot

From: I took polyjuice potion to get into the Slytherin common room

To: Cuddly my arse!

Subject: Re: Lunch

I'll be there at one.

Harry

From: Albus Dumbledore

To: 4th years, 5th years, 6th years, and 7th years

Subject: Halloween Ball

Dear Senior Students,

There will be a full costume Halloween ball this year – with prizes of House Points to the best-dressed boy and girl.

This dance will be what is called in the Muggle world, a Sadie Hawkins dance. For those of you who are not familiar with this colloquialism, a Sadie Hawkins dance is where the girls ask the boys to go with them, and not the traditional other way around.

As always, this ball is only open to 4th years and above, unless a person is directly invited by a member of those years.

As I understand the effect this sort of announcement has on the student body, I have suspended classes for the afternoon.

Albus Dumbledore,

--

Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot and Chairman of the International Confederation of Wizards

From: Ginny

To: Hermione

Subject: Dance

Hermi! You read that? You going to ask Ron out immediately, or are you going to let him suffer for a few days first? Revenge for your 4th year.

G.

From: Hermione

To: Evil, but I think I love you

Subject: Re: Dance

I was going to ask him straight away, but now that you mention it, I think I will let him stew for a day or so. No one else would ask him anyway, at least not after how he treated his last date.

I take it you're going to ask Harry?

H.

From: I don't swing that way

To: The bookworm

Subject: Re[2]: Dance

Yes, I'm going to ask Harry straight away. Where is he anyway?

Ginny

From: Parvati

To: My beloved twin

Subject: Halloween

Hey Sis,

Who are you going to ask to the dance?

Rumour has it that Ginny Weasley has finally plucked up the courage and is going to ask Harry Potter to the dance.

Love,

P.

From: Padma

To: Cho

Subject: Fwd: Halloween

Thought you might be interested in this...

Parvati Quilled:

> Rumour has it that Ginny Weasley has finally plucked up the courage, and is going to ask

> Harry Potter to the dance.

P.

From: Seeker Girl

To: Padma

Subject: Re: Fwd: Halloween

Thanks Padma, I'll have to make sure I get to him first. Any idea where he is?

Cho

From: Lucius Malfoy

To: Glory Parkinson

Subject: Halloween Ball

Glory,

I got an Mmail that Dumbledore has arranged for a Halloween Ball at the school, and that he is doing something Muggle with it. Having asked around, we feel this might be an opportunity for Pansy to prove her loyalty and get close to Potter. Draco tells me that the idiot boy is naïve in these matters, and may be open to corruption.

If she succeeds, a friend of mine would look at her job application most favourably.

Lucius

From: Mum

To: Pansy

Subject: Ball

My Darling Daughter,

I have heard that there is a Halloween ball – it's been suggested by close friends of ours that it would be a good opportunity for you to engage in activities to end certain inter-house rivalries, and perhaps show a Gryffindor friend that we are not as bad as we have been portrayed.

Success would go a long way to getting you that special present you want so badly.

Glory

From: Pansy

To: Mum

Subject: Re: Ball

Not a problem. If are talking about the same green-eyed Gryffindor, I'd be delighted to introduce him to the benefits of crossing the hall, so to speak.

The present would be a great bonus!

P.

From: Slytherin Queen

To: Marietta

Subject: Debt...

What have you heard about Potter and the Dance?

P.

--
Purity is Truth

From: Edgecombe, Marietta

To: Pansy Parkinson

Subject: Dance

Cho is going to ask Harry to the Halloween Dance as soon as she sees him.

My debt is paid.

M.

From: Pansy

To: You still owe me

Subject: Re: Dance

You still owe me. I haven't forgotten and I can still tell Cho how it was you that wrecked her relationship.

I want you to delay Cho, so that I have a chance to get to him first.

Pansy

--
Purity is Truth

From: Blaise

To: Cousin Morag

Subject: The dance

Hey, Morag, you'll never guess what I just heard...

Pansy is going to ask Harry Potter to the dance.

B :)

From: Morag

To: Hermione

Subject: You'll never believe this

Hermione, you remember I said I'll pay you back for helping me pass Transfiguration last term? Well, this is a little of it ;-)

I just heard from a reliable source that a certain Slytherin is going to ask Harry to the dance. I'm not saying who, but normally, you have to ask Malfoy to bend over before you can find her.

AND, a certain Ravenclaw is also after a return to Potter-land, if you get my drift.

Morag.

From: Susan

To: Hannah

Subject: Sadie Hawkins Dance

Hey, Hannah,

Is Harry Potter seeing anyone?

Sue

From: I didn't know you like him

To: Susan & Harry sitting in a tree

Subject: Re: Sadie Hawkins Dance

Not that I'm aware of, but why Harry?

Han.

From: I guess I do

To: Very Mature

Subject: Re[2]: Sadie Hawkins Dance

Well, he is cute, and under those baggy robes he wears, I've been reliably informed by his Quidditch team mates that he is really well built, and have you seen those eyes of his? I swear that green could light up the Great Hall with all the lights turned off.

It does sound like I have a crush, doesn't it? *sigh*

S.

From: *Quietly smirking*

To: Hopelessly devoted

Subject: Re[3]: Sadie Hawkins Dance

Yep, 100% crush, but at least he is drool-worthy. Look, you're cute, blonde, intelligent and loyal – a true Hufflepuff. And if anyone needs a 'Puff's love, it's Harry.

If you ask him first, he'll probably be so surprised, that he'll say yes, and then you can work on him.

Hannah

From: Looking surprised

To: Smug git

Subject: Re[4]: Sadie Hawkins Dance

Wow, you actually gave me some good advice ;-) I'll take it.

Where is Harry, anyway?

Sue.

From: Finch-Fletchley, Justin

To: Granger, Hermione

Subject: Pay back

Hermione,

You know you said that, as a thank you for you helping me with Potions, I should tell you any gossip about Harry?

Well, I just heard that Susan Bones is going to ask Harry to the dance – lucky guy.

Oh, Thursday's prefect meeting is being put back one hour. Can you please tell the other Gryffindor prefects?

Justin

From: You owe my big time for this

To: Lucky I heard this

M-Priority: 1-Important!

Subject: READ

Ginny, I just heard from a very reliable source that Cho Chang, Pansy Parkinson, and Susan Bones are all planning on asking Harry to the ball.

You better move quickly, or all your work will be wasted. You know Harry hates upsetting anyone, and is liable to say yes without meaning it.

Hermione

From: I am lucky

To: You're right

Subject: Re: READ

OH GOD! This is disastrous – and I even got Dad to write Harry a letter tomorrow. I need to get to him first. Hermi, you've got to help me. Please! I'll do anything!

Where is Harry?

Ginny

"So, what's it like then?"

"Take that smug look off your face, Padfoot," Harry grinned at his godfather.

"Me? I'm the epitome of Sirius-ness."

Harry groaned. "Ok, that's it. One more Sirius-Serious joke and I will prove once and for all that I am the son of a Marauder and I will prank you into next year."

"That almost sounds like a challenge."

"Those jokes are so bad that even Snape would give them up!"

"Hey," Sirius Black looked highly insulted. "They're not that bad, are they?"

"Yes!" Harry said forcefully.

"Oh," The former Marauder looked disgruntled for a moment, then gave it up and grinned. The two of them were sitting in a private room in The Three Broomsticks, enjoying a leisurely lunch together. It was rare that the two of them got to spend time together these days, so they both enjoyed it while they could.

"I'm just hoping that if there is a dance this year, she'll say yes when I ask her."

"So you are going to ask her straight away, not muck around for ages first?" Sirius asked, hiding his smile and attempting to be serious.

"Hell yes," Harry replied, his eyes flaring. "You might not have noticed, but she is drop-dead gorgeous, and has this really great body that has all these curves that fee..."

"Harry! Harry!" Sirius interrupted desperately. "Too much information there!"

"Oh." Harry suddenly realised what he had said, and blushed furiously. "Sorry, Sirius. I didn't mean to say that out loud," he admitted with a self-deprecating grin.

Sirius Black felt his heart jump a little. For a brief second, Harry's expression was a perfect mixture of James and Lily: Lily's hangdog eyes when he had done something that went a little too far, and James' reproachful look. Strangely though, instead of making him think of the two of them, it actually brought home the fact that he was dealing with their son, and that their son had had a pretty rotten life so far and didn't really have a parental figure he could talk to.

"I was hoping to let Remus do this," Sirius sighed. He walked to the private bar, and helped himself to a bottle of Fire Whiskey and two glasses.

"What's this?" Harry asked, a little confused.

"What do you know about sex and making love?" Sirius asked.

Harry blanched, before turning extremely red. "Why?" he croaked.

Sirius knocked back a glass of the whiskey. "Because I'm going to tell you the facts of life."

Harry's eyes went extremely wide, and with a shaky hand he grabbed his own glass. He swallowed it in one go, and then went into a huge coughing fit as the liquid burnt its way down his throat. He had faced Voldemort on more occasions than pretty much anyone else alive, had faced death every year since he'd turned eleven, and was more scared now than he could ever remember.

"Now, Harry, when a man and a woman love each other very much, and get involved in kissing, there are certain natural reactions..."

Harry and Sirius drank a lot of whiskey during that conversation, as they found it was the only thing that stopped either of them from dying of embarrassment.

"Damn it," Ginny cursed under her breath. "He's not in the Room of Requirement, the Astronomy Tower or the Quidditch pitch. Where can he be?"

"I don't know," Hermione replied, looking a little worried herself. "Ron checked his trunk, and both the Map and his cloak are missing. He could be

anywhere!"

"Do you think he might be avoiding me?"

Hermione shook her head. "Nope. I kinda sneaked a look at his Mmail account, and he hasn't picked up the Mmail about the dance yet."

Ginny tried hard to look shocked, but gave in and hugged her friend. "Thanks!"

"I thought you didn't swing that way," Hermione teased gently.

Ginny just laughed, before sobering. "Yeah, but where is Harry?"

"Damn it," Cho cursed under her breath. "He's not out on the Quidditch pitch, the Room of Requirement or the Astronomy Tower. Where can he be?"

"I don't know," Marietta replied, a fake look of worry on her face. "He could be anywhere."

"Do you think he might be avoiding me?"

Marietta shook her head. "He doesn't even know you are looking for him," she told her logically.

Cho smiled and hugged her friend.

"I'm glad you're my friend!"

"Damn it," Susan cursed under her breath. "He's not in the Astronomy Tower, the Quidditch pitch or the Room of Requirements. Where can he be?"

"I don't know," Hannah replied, an amused look on her face. "He could be anywhere!"

"Do you think he might be avoiding me?"

Hannah shook her head. "He hardly knows you, Sue," she replied, honestly.

Susan's face fell, and she hugged her friend tightly.

"Damn it," Pansy grumbled. "I've had to walk half way around this damn castle and I still can't find him. And bloody Draco's no help, not even when I told him it was a mission."

"You know, your Animagus form brings a whole new meaning to 'Doggy Style'" Harry smirked.

Sirius laughed and leaned back, unfortunately, he leaned too far and toppled over onto his back.

Harry burst out laughing, and fell off his own chair as well.

Sirius grinned, and looked at his watch. "We're late," he gasped, shooting to his feet, and grabbing the table for support.

"Late for what?" Harry slurred.

"Your dinner, and my appointment," Sirius replied. Although they had drunk equal amounts, the ex-convict's age and experience (not to mention height and weight) meant he was the soberer of the two of them. He carefully walked over to the private bar, and started to mix ingredients, at the same time filling the sink with ice-cold water. A minute later, he returned with two goblets full of a green, steaming, liquid.

"Drink this!"

Harry looked at it balefully. "It doesn't look very nice," he whined.

Sirius nodded, "It's not. But it will get you sober quicker than anything else on the planet."

"Oh," Harry grinned. "Bottom's up." The boy drained the goblet, and then jumped to his feet. "Aiiiii!!!!!" he whispered hoarsely, as his vocal cords tightened, preventing him from making a loud sound. He ran round and around in a circle, as steam came out of his ears, before he plunged his head into the water.

"Wow," he gasped. "I didn't think that ANYTHING was worse than Polyjuice potion!"

Sirius laughed loudly, then drank his own goblet. While he managed to avoid the girlish screams and the running in circles, he too dunked his head in the water.

"Come on," the elder wizard smirked. "I'll walk you back to school, and you can tell me why you have been drinking Polyjuice potion."

Harry grinned. "Ok."

In the forbidden forest, Firenze looked at the sky, and muttered. "Jupiter is moving into Mars. Strange cosmic forces are at work."

At the same time, Ginny and Hermione, Cho and Marietta, Susan and Hannah, and Pansy all thought of the same thing at the same time, in a rare display of cosmic coincidence.

A few minutes later the four girls, minus their friends, arrived in the same place, outside Hagrid's hut.

"What are you doing here?" Ginny hissed towards Cho.

Cho raised one perfectly sculpted eyebrow. "None of your business, Weasley."

"I hope you're not here for Potter," Pansy said bluntly as she joined the two girls. "He's mine."

For a second, Cho and Ginny's eyes met as they dealt with a common enemy. They were both thinking the same thing: 'Harry would rather date Voldemort than her!'

"Hey guys," Susan said innocently. "Seen Harry?"

She was a little surprised when all three girls turned and growled at her.

"I was just telling the losers here," Pansy rumbled. "That Potter's mine for this damn dance."

Susan raised her eyebrows, "You've asked him?"

"No," the blonde girl reluctantly admitted.

"Then he's not yours yet," the Hufflepuff grinned.

The door to Hagrid's hut opened and Albus Dumbledore, Headmaster, stepped out. "Is there a problem?" he asked, his eyes twinkling.

"Have you seen Harry, sir?" Ginny blurted out.

Dumbledore paused, as he felt the eyes of all four girls turn to him. He suddenly realised what this was about, and it took over a hundred years of willpower for his smile not to change into a full-blown smirk.

"I believe," he said, knowing full well what he was letting Harry in for, "That Harry is currently sitting at the Gryffindor Table, in the Great Hall, about to eat dinner."

As one, the girls turned and sprinted away from him.

The Headmaster laughed to himself, and then with a 'pop' he moved himself to the antechamber, using the same method that the House Elves used to move around the castle. He really didn't want to miss the end of this show.

Pansy, seeing that she was being left behind, pulled out her wand and shouted "*Impedimenta* !" at her three opponents.

Ginny growled as she felt herself slowing to a stop. She growled harder as Pansy smirked as she regally strolled past. Although it took her an age, she managed to pull her own wand. "Finite Incantatem." Her movements back to normal; she looked up, and shouted, "Locomotor Mortis!" at the Slytherin.

The leg lock curse worked perfectly, causing Pansy to fall to the floor. Ginny smirked for a second, and started to run again towards the main entrance of the school.

Cho and Susan had managed to free themselves, and took off after the girl. Together, they shouted, "Petrificus Totalus!" at the red-haired witch. Luckily, Ginny's training from the D.A. kicked in, and she managed to dodge one of the curses, and only get a slight hit from the other. It wasn't enough to freeze her, but enough to slow her down.

Pansy picked herself up off the floor, and took off again with Cho and Susan following metres behind her. Ginny cancelled the spell, and then groaned as she saw the three of them entering the school. She quickly cast the trip jinx on them. The three girls stumbled together and slid across the floor in a tangle of limbs. Ginny didn't bother to smirk as she hurdled over them, crashing into the door that opened into the Great Hall.

Her wild entrance caused most eyes to look at her. She slammed the doors shut and cast "*Colloportus*" on them – sealing them tight.

Her eyes were bright as she looked around the hall, searching for Harry. A thump behind her announced that the other girls were on their feet and had tried to open the door. She spotted Dumbledore sitting at the head table; he had motioned for the other teachers to remain still for now. It didn't even cross her mind that it should have been impossible for him to be there.

Harry was sitting in his usual place, watching with a surprised expression. Ginny ran down the Hall, heading straight for him. He was sat on the opposite side of the table from her, next to Ron. Hermione was opposite Ron, with Ginny's usual place next to her left empty. She didn't slow down as she reached the table.

Behind her, she head three voices shout, "*Alohomora* !" The doors swung open with force, almost breaking and falling off their hinges. As one, the three girls raised their wands again.

"*Avis* !" Susan shouted, causing a flock of birds to appear in Ginny's path, trying to distract her.

"*Accio* !" Cho cried, at the same time pointing her wand at Ginny.

Pansy swore, then with a flick of her wand, cast a Bat Bogey Hex just as the other two girls cast their spells.

Ginny took one more step and placed her foot on the bench where she normally sat, and dived across the table. The Summoning Charm missed her and caught the birds Susan had created, pulling them at high speed towards the three girls; they impacted, covering them all with feathers. The Bat Bogey Hex missed Ginny by a whisker, and flew on unimpeded through the great hall, before it impacted on the next target: Professor Severus Snape.

Snape stood and his nose suddenly started to run as large amounts of snot poured out. The nasal waste seemed to grow wings before it started to attack the Slytherin head of house. He batted at his face and screamed, "Get them off me!" before diving under the table in a futile attempt to escape. The enchanted bogies simply followed him everywhere.

Harry's surprised turned to shock as he realised there was an incoming redhead arriving at full speed. Ginny impacted against his chest pushing him out of his seat and onto the floor. "Ginny?" he croaked, as everyone swivelled their heads at once, wanting to see their screeching professor, while at the same time wanting to see what was going on with Ginny and Harry.

To Ron's disbelief, Ginny kissed Harry as hard as she could, and deliberately writhed against him. Harry gasped against her mouth, his hands shooting up to hold her close. Ginny broke the kiss and leaned back. "Will you go to the dance with me?" she asked breathlessly.

"YES!" Harry almost shouted immediately. He had no idea where he was at the moment, just that a girl who a second ago had been giving him some entirely new sensations had just asked him to a dance. He had no clue what dance, and really didn't care. The idea of vertical writhing in the shape of a dance was a surprisingly good one.

From the doorway, came three groans.

"Finite Incantatem" Dumbledore eventually said at last, rescuing his Potions professor.

"Cho Chang!" Professor Flitwick shouted, getting to his feet.

"Susan Bones!" Professor Sprout exclaimed.

"Pansy Parkinson!" Snape roared.

"Ginny Weasley!" Professor McGonagall bawled.

And as one, they shouted, "My office. Now!"

Ginny grinned and climbed off Harry, giving him a saucy wink, completely unconcerned about any punishment now she had the boy she wanted.

Ron looked down at Harry, his face going through a gamut of emotions. "What was that?"

"Well," Harry replied slowly, wishing that Ginny had cast a Cushioning charm on the hard Hall floor, "I'd say that I'm now dating your sister." The reluctance to confess was obvious on his face, but he really couldn't think of a decent enough lie – not when he was having blood flow issues.

The emotion that Ron's face finally settled on was a mix of shock, anger, and fear.

From: Padfoot the sad

To: Moony

Subject: Superseded

This is a bad day in Marauder history.

We've been superseded.

P.

--

Forlorn woof

From: Confused

To: Does that make you a grim Grim?

Subject: Re: Superseded

What do you mean? I didn't even know you knew what superseded meant.

R.

From: Bad jokes are my dept.

To: Howler

Subject: Re: Re: Superseded.

Superseded: to force out of use as inferior. You're not the only one who knows how to read.

Did you know that my beloved godson once took Polyjuice potion to find something out in the Slytherin common room?

Do you remember how hard we tried to get in there, and he did it in his 2nd year!

Padfoot

From: Your friend

To: You're right, they are your department

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Superseded

Padfoot old boy, I wasn't even sure you could read.

Harry took Polyjuice potion? I must say that I am impressed!

But don't worry, you still have the record for most embarrassing detention. Remember that time you had a few too many butterbeers celebrating a Quidditch victory? When McGonagall came in to break us up, you were in your Animagus form and ended up humping her leg!

Moony – still laughing after all these years

From: Betrayed

To: Betrayer

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Superseded

YOU PROMISED TO NEVER MENTION THAT. WE TOOK AN OATH!

P.

From: Still sniggering

To: Poor Doggy

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Superseded

No, you took an Oath, Prongs and I refused. There was no way in hell we were going to let that one go. Now, what will I get if I promise not to tell Harry that story?

Moony – could do with a bottle of twelve-year-old fire whiskey

From: *smirking*

To: The blackmailer

Subject: Re: Blackmail

No, I don't think I'll be getting you that. I did you a HUGE favour today.

I gave Harry the TALK!

Sirius

From: Blinking Wildly

To: Paddy

Subject: Re: Re: Blackmail

You did what!?

Do I need to go and see Harry to make sure he is ok?

Remus

From: What am I, Irish?

To: Remy

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Blackmail

I suddenly realised when I was having lunch with Harry that he is very serious about Ginny. I don't think he quite realises how serious he is, but the classic symptoms are there. Anyway, he drifted into this monologue with far too many details for a poor old godfather, and I realised that he needed to know now!

So, I shared a bottle of fire whiskey with him, and gave him the low down. I know we agreed that you could do it, but I think I did a pretty good job. I didn't joke about it till after we had got past the serious stuff.

Basically, I gave him a crash course in mechanics, then in advanced technique.

S.

From: Slightly Suspicious

To: The Godfather

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Blackmail

Again, I'm impressed.

But, what do you mean by advanced technique?

R.

From: I like that title

To: You'd be suspicious of your own mother

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Blackmail

Well, I kinda gave him the benefit of my experience. You know, what a girl likes, what a girl doesn't like, where the best places to stroke are, the best locations in Hogwarts, how to use the Marauders Map in 'Amorous Mode'. Basically, the combined details of everything we talked about till James got married.

Padfoot – I did good, right?

From: Holding his head in his hands

To: Oh, Sirius

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Blackmail

Sirius...one of the main points of the Talk is to persuade the youngster NOT to immediately dive into having sex. Not to make him into some sort of God.

You're supposed to emphasis the emotional aspects as much as the physical parts, so that Harry doesn't immediately use those techniques.

Please, Please, Please tell me that you discussed contraceptives.

Remus

From: Whoops

To: The learned one

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Blackmail

Yes, I did tell him about all the contraceptive spells – because no one wants their partner to get pregnant, and girls are always more willing if that aspect is taken care of.

Still, emphasising the emotional aspects sounds like something a parent would do. It was my duty as a godfather to make sure that Harry knew what he was doing, how to do it, what to do to make it memorable, and how to make sure that the only repercussions involve demands for repeat performances.

Padfoot

--
Why do dogs bury bones in the ground? Because you can't bury them in trees!

This Means War 3 - Poor Draco

From: Minerva

To: Head of Houses

Subject: This evening's event

I have spoken firmly with Ms Weasley concerning her actions in disrupting tonight's dinner. She is most apologetic, and has acquiesced to receiving a weeks worth of detention with our caretaker.

From a disciplinary point of view, I felt the incident was not worth the removal of house points because members of all four houses were involved.

From a personal point of view, might I add how proud I am that a fifth year student managed to beat the combined forces of two sixth year and one seventh year student. Proof once more that bravery and courage can overcome most obstacles.

Minerva

From: S Snape

To: The heads of the lesser houses

Subject: Re: This evening's event

I have given Pansy two weeks detention. One week for her participation and one week for losing to a */Weasley/* of all people.

I find it horrific to think that they were fighting over Potter. If this doesn't swell that boy's head to astronomical proportions I'll eat my cauldron.

And Minnie, it's not nice to gloat.

Severus

--

Advocating the end of silly wand waving for fifteen years

From: Lesser houses indeed!

To: The stuck up Slytherin and my other two colleagues

Subject: Re[2]: This evening's event

Severus, one day you are going to have to remove that plant from up your \$^%.

I've talked to Susan, and to be honest, I felt so sorry for her I let her off with no punishment. The poor girl has a bit of a crush on Mr Potter. I was so pleased to see a Hufflepuff putting herself forward like that, I felt there was no need for anything additional. Her *Avis* spell was extremely well performed. Not as well as the Bat Bogey hex of Ms Parkinson though.

I can't remember the last time I enjoyed a meal so much.

Oh, and I agree Minnie, definitely not a points issue. You might want to warn Ms Weasley that if she does manage to lose Harry, there are several girls waiting eagerly in the wings.

Pommie

From: The charming gnome

To: Minne, Sewie, and Pommie

Subject: Re[3]: This evening's event

What fun!

There was some wonderful charm work on display; I must get Ms Weasley to demonstrate that Locking charm in class one day. Fantastic display of quick thinking, and definitely the sort of thing we will need when fighting He-who-must-not-be-named.

It was definitely not a points issue.

I had a word or two with Ms Chang, and she will be helping me in detention for the next week. I can't have my senior Ravenclaw prefect engaged in a cross-school fight – and losing.

Does anyone know a spell to recreate what happened before they burst through the door? Rumour has it that there was a running battle between the four of them that I for one would love to see.

Severus, my good fellow, you are going to have to lighten up on Harry. Have you thought about the future at all?

Filius

From: Don't call me Sewie

To: The irritating gnome

Cc: Those other two

Subject: Re[4]: This evening's event

What do you mean by "Have you thought of the future at all?"

And call him Voldemort; it always irritates me when people give him euphemistic names. It's not as if he can intercept these Mmails, they're on a private M.A.N.

And Pommie, your fondness for plants is NOT shared by everyone at this school, and please believe me when I say that I do not have anything, plant or otherwise, shoved up my %&^.

Severus

--

Advocating the end of silly wand waving for fifteen years

From: I'm NOT obsessed

To: The grumpy one

Cc: Minnie & the Gnome

Subject: Re[5]: This evening's event

Well you certainly act like it. Perhaps you're just blocked up; have you been eating enough fibre recently?

I'm sure Poppy can help you out – or give you one, what ever you'd prefer.

Pommie – what's a M.A.N.?

From: The gnome-meister

To: The short sighted Slytherin

Subject: Re[6]: This evening's events

Severus, you've been riding Harry for his entire time here, and, understandably, he thinks of you as someone just below Voldemort (Happy?).

Have you considered what's going to happen when he wins and becomes Minister of Magic in a few years' time?

I hear there's a great school in Siberia that always looking for new teachers. I'd pack warm clothing.

Filius

From: Not just a potions master

To: The technophobic plant lover

Cc: Minnie and the Gnome

Subject: Re[7]: This evening's events

Yes, I have been eating my fibre, thank you very much. I'd appreciate it if you could keep your smutty innuendos to yourself.

And if you'd pull your head out of a plant pot for a few minutes, you'd know that M.A.N is a Magical Area Network. When you create your Mmail with an internal Hogwarts destination, it stays in the building, and as such is completely secure. It's only when you send it to an external address that it goes onto the WizardNet, and that can be intercepted if someone wastes enough time doing it.

If you want something really insecure, send something through the WizardNet/MuggleNet gateway. I know for a fact that the Ministry, the Prophet, and the Death Eaters monitor all the traffic through there.

Severus

--

Advocating the end of silly wand waving for fifteen years

From: Going paler than normal

To: The charming professor

Cc: Plant girl and Cat girl

Subject: Potter as Minister

Do you really think that a: Potter will beat Voldemort? And b: he'll end up as Minister of Magic?

Severus

--

Advocating the end of silly wand waving for fifteen years

From: Is that an insult?

To: Dungeon Lurker

Cc: The small one and the plant lover

Subject: Re: Potter as Minister

Will Potter beat Voldemort?

I certainly hope so. He's our only hope really, but can you think of anyone else you'd want in his position? You all know how close we came to having Neville as the chosen one. I know he's in my house, but the very idea is enough to make me consider changing into my cat shape and finding a nice Muggle to live with.

Can Potter be Minister?

Two days ago I would have said unlikely, until I had this talk with Ms Weasley. That is one extremely ambitious girl, who I believe has decided that if she has anything to do with it Harry will end up as Minister. She has enough ambition for both of them and probably more.

I agree with Filius, Sev; you need to get over the fact that James could be an arrogant arse at times (yes, I loved the boy, but even I could see it) and get to know Harry properly, or I can see you putting in a bulk order for thermal robes. He might not be the sort to be that petty, but Ms Weasley is.

Minnie

From: A charming personality makes up for a lack of size

To: Has had his head in his cauldron for years

Cc: Pretty pussy & plant potter

Subject: Re[2]: Potter as Minister

I agree completely with what Minnie said. If someone pushes him in the right direction, there's nothing he can't do. You should see some of the charms he pulls off in my classroom; they make ME jealous, and I've been teaching for thirty years. He's inherited all of his mother's talents, and a lot more.

To change the subject slightly, were any of you watching Mr Weasley's face after Ms Weasley's rather convincing invitation to the dance? He was both horrified and terrified. Rumour has reached me that her six brothers have decided that their younger sister is not old enough to date yet, and have frightened off both her previous boyfriends. I do wonder if they are going to take that route with Mr Potter.

Filius.

From: Taking his head out of the cauldron

To: The charming professor Flitwick

Cc: Minerva and Ponomo

Subject: Re[3]: Potter as Minister

Sigh Perhaps you are right; it's becoming tiresome to keep up this animosity after all these years anyway.

Still, your comment on Mr Weasley has reminded me of something... I've just had a great idea; I'll put it in another Mmail.

Severus

--
Advocating the end of silly wand waving for fifteen years

From: Severus Snape

To: All Staff @ Hogwarts

Subject: The upcoming war

No, not the one with Voldemort - the interesting one.

After a discussion between me, Minnie, Pommy, and Fillie, it has become obvious that last night's distraction could be the start of something a lot bigger.

The six Weasley boys are against their sister dating anyone till she is 24. I happened to stumble across the twins having a quiet word with Dean Thomas – I had hoped they'd never set foot back in Hogwarts again, but that's not the point – they explained their position, and threatened the boy with some rather dire punishments involving parts of his anatomy and a permanent shrinking charm.

With Ms Weasley's rather public declaration of interest in Potter, I feel that, as teachers, we need to step into this immediately.

So, I'm offering:

4-1 odds on the Weasley boys winning

2-1 on Potter winning

The rules are simple – The Weasleys win if Potter and Ms Weasley break up. Potter wins if they are still together at the end of the school year.

All bets are void in the case of Voldemort killing the boy – I don't think we'd care either way if that happens.

Severus

--
Advocating the end of silly wand waving for fifteen years

From: Prophecy Girl

To: All staff

Subject: Re: The upcoming war

Severus, I will place 20 galleons on the Weasley boys, I have foreseen their victory.

Sybil.

--
Cross my palm with silver and I'll tell you your future

From: Poppy

To: All Staff

Subject: Re: The upcoming war

I'll put 20 on Harry. Any boy who's spent as much time in the hospital wing as he has, and survived, should have no problem getting the girl he wants.

P.

From: Deputy Headmistress McGonagall

To: All staff

Subject: Re: The upcoming war

I'm truly disgusted that the upstanding denizens of Hogwarts faculty would denigrate themselves to such a level that they would bet on a student's love life.

That said...20 on Harry ;)

Minnie

--
Puurrrr

From: Hoochie Momma

To: All staff

Subject: Re: The upcoming war

My money's on the Weasleys. Why? Well, apart from Charlie being almost as good as Harry is in the air (and as I always say, you can tell the worth of a wizard by how he flies), they have the twins on their side. 20 on the Weasleys

H.

"Hey Harry," Ginny said with a tired smile, as she plopped herself down unceremoniously on his lap.

"Hey Gin," Harry replied. "Will you go out with me, properly?"

Ginny twisted slightly to look at his face. "I thought I asked you out earlier?"

"No, you asked me to the dance. I'm asking you out as a boyfriend/girlfriend type thing."

She gave him her brightest smile, touched by his willingness to make sure that they had a formal relationship.

"I kept you some dinner." He pointed to a tray next to her; a warming charm was giving off a faint golden glow.

"Awww, thank you," she kissed him on the cheek as briefly as she could before reaching for the tray. Her exercise running across the Hogwarts grounds and casting several spells, followed by the endless lecture from McGonagall, had left her famished. She noted that he'd managed to get all of her favourites and felt that a week's detention was definitely a cheap price to pay for a thoughtful new boyfriend.

"So, what was all that fuss at dinner about?"

"Well," Ginny mumbled, in between bites. "The four of us were looking for you all afternoon. Where were you, anyway?"

"I'll tell you later. Continue your story."

"We all met up at Hagrid's hut, where Dumbledore told us you were in the Great Hall, so we had a bit of a fight to get to you first."

"Why?" Harry looked a little confused.

"We all wanted to ask you to the dance; as it's a Sadie Hawkins, who ever she is, the girl asks the boy."

"Yeah, I've read my mail now. But why would you need to fight them to get to me?"

"So I got there first," Ginny said, as if it should be obvious.

A sudden frown appeared on Harry's face. "Do you think I would have said yes to them if they had asked first?"

Ginny, with her head down, as she was concentrating on eating, missed the look. "Well, yeah. It doesn't matter now, I won."

With a move that would later frustrate the heck out of Ginny, as she tried to work out exactly how he moved from under her without her even noticing, Harry stood in front of her. "Ginny, I believe that respect is an important part of a relationship. I would have turned down anyone else who asked me out, because I've started to have some strong feelings for you. Do you really think so little of me that I would kiss you like I have been, then accept a date with someone else? I'd hoped that you knew me a little better than that. I'm going to get some sleep, we'll talk tomorrow."

Harry turned on his heel, leaving a shocked girl behind him. A girl who banged her head repeatedly against the back of the chair a few seconds after he was out of sight.

"That didn't go well," Hermione, who had been sat silently watching them, said softly.

"No, not really," Ginny agreed.

"I guess we both kind of underestimated him," Hermione offered.

"Yep," Ginny agreed. "You know, after all my thoughts about how he can defeat Voldemort, and how he can do anything, I still fell into same trap that everyone did and thought of him as plain Harry."

Hermione nodded, "Me too." It was an unusual feeling for the intelligent girl to realise she had been a bit stupid.

"I'm banking on him to stand up to my brothers, and then at the first sign of trouble, presumed he couldn't handle himself. Bugger!"

Hermione laughed softly, she couldn't help it. The expression on Ginny's face had set her off.

"Any idea on how I should handle this? If you have quite finished with your sniggering?"

Hermione managed to control her laughter. "Actually, yes, I have. Apologise directly; he'll respect that. Anything else will mean you haven't listened to him."

Ginny nodded, and then smiled. "Ok, now that's out of the way. I need the help of 'Hermione's Spy Network'."

"What?"

"Your study group, silly. I know you have friends in every house that owe you big time. I'm going to need them to help destroy Malfoy's reputation."

"Why?"

"Master of monosyllabic questions today, aren't you?" Ginny smirked at her friend. "Because he called me a whore and offered some cash so he could sleep with me."

Hermione's jaw dropped open. "That greasy git!"

"Yeah, I kneed him in the crotch, but he's getting out of hand."

"Good!" Hermione said approvingly. "What's your plan?"

Ginny's expression changed, turning to a combination of mischievousness deviousness that would have made her twin brother both proud, and relieved it wasn't aimed at them. "Destroy his reputation and make him a laughingstock."

A hundred memories of insults from Draco ran through Hermione's mind, so she pulled her chair nearer Ginny and leant close. "How are you going to do that?"

Anyone nearby would have wondered at the cause of the hysterical laughter that sprang from Hermione's mouth. Fortunately, everyone else was in bed.

From: Ron

To: My older brothers

Subject: CODE 1 EMERGENCY

It's happened. What the hell are we going to do now?

Ron.

From: Bill

To: My younger brothers

Subject: Re: CODE 1 EMERGENCY

Ron, are you absolutely sure it's a Code 1?

Bill.

From: Ron

To: The Weasley boys

Subject: Re[2]: CODE 1 EMERGENCY

Yes, I'm bloody well sure. This afternoon our little sister pounced on Potter, snogged him in front of the entire school, and asked him to the dance.

Then, I happened to be using the extendable ears for a bit earlier today, and Potter definitely asked our little sister out on a date.

Ron

From: The twins

To: Ronniekins

Cc: Older brothers

Subject: Re: Re[2]: CODE 1 EMERGENCY

Damn it, Ron. We knew this would happen! He's been the most dangerous guy from the start. She had a huge crush on him, and that was BEFORE he saved her life. Ron, it was your job to ensure that he only thinks of her as a sister. What happened?

Fred & George

--

Weasley's Wizard Wheezes – coming soon to Diagon Alley.

From: Ron (-niekins)

To: The terrible twosome

Cc: Other siblings

Subject: Re[4]: CODE 1 EMERGENCY

I bloody tried, all right. I encouraged him to look at her like I did, to protect her like I did, and to vet her boyfriends like I did. I had him convinced as well; I pointed him in Cho's direction as obviously as I could, even though I can't stand her. I even had a plan to try to get him to date Lavender.

I just didn't think about our sister snogging him in public. I'm not bloody psychic or omnipresent.

OH MERLIN!

I just remembered that when Ginny told me she knew we'd stopped her relationship with Dean, she swore that she would let her next boyfriend "Find out what is under her robes!"

Ron – getting worried.

From: Percival C. Weasley

To: Boys, Weasley.

Subject: Ginny

Gentlemen, throwing around blame is not going to help here, although Ron, you and I will be having a talk about dereliction of duty.

I believe that the first course of action must be to procure a Unicorn to test Ginny, just to make sure.

P.

--

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From: Charlie

To: The boys

Subject: Re: Unicorn

Guys, while I agree with the principle of getting a Unicorn, if I remember my Care of Magical Creatures lessons, they will only come out for female virgins. While this is what we want to check, I see no way of actually getting hold of one ourselves.

C.

--

Draconis dominium

From: Bill

To: The others

Subject: Re: Re: Unicorn

Well, don't look at me; I'm dating a half-Veela.

B.

From: Forge

To: Youngest male relative

Cc: Everyone else

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Unicorn

Don't look at us either; we live with Katie and Angelina. Neither of them would be any help. Guess it comes down to the baby of the group. Ronniekins honey, get Hermi to help.

Fred & George

--

Weasley's Wizard Wheezes – coming soon to Diagon Alley.

From: Don't call me Ronniekins

To: Bog off the lot of you

Subject: Re[4]: Unicorn

Not that it's any of your business, at all, but Hermione and I are both past the legal age of consent. We can't help either.

As entertaining as it is for me to see that all of my brothers are having a healthy sex life, checking whether or not Ginny is still untouched is not a priority at the moment. Harry would never rush into that – remember he's honourable?

So, how are we going to persuade him that it's not a good idea for him to continue dating Ginny?

Ron.

From: Bill

To: You little devil

Cc: Other brothers

Subject: Plan against Harry

Our little Ron's all grown up. We should really send you some Firewhiskey to celebrate this momentous occasion.

Ok, so people, I'm guessing that a simple word won't actually be enough. What ideas have we got? Something to do with public nudity is always a good first warning shot.

Bill

From: Gred

To: Brother's mine

Subject: The Super Weasley Bros to the rescue

Attachment: Harry_Plan.pmt

Guys,

Find attached our plan. As long as Ron follows the instructions, Harry'll get a warning like he won't believe.

Ron, you'll have to sneak out tonight to receive our owl.

Fred & George

--

Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes – coming soon to Diagon Alley.

From: Fred

To: George

Subject: Do you think we've done the right thing?

George,

I think we have a bit of a conflict of interest going on here. I mean, we like Harry as it is, and he is our major investor. We do kinda owe him big time, and he did save Ginny's life...

Thoughts?

Fred

From: Fred

To: Twinly goodness

Subject: Re: Do you think we've done the right thing?

I know what you mean. Let's see how this prank goes. If he stays with Ginny, then we can legitimately say that he's passed the Fred and George test and can date her without us interfering. Then we could possibly meet with him for dinner and kinda apologise.

Normally, we'd be right with our brothers, but this is Harry, and like you said, we do like and trust him.

George.

"Help?" Ginny asked, as she sat down on the edge of Hermione's bed.

"Morning, Gin," Hermione yawned. "What do you need help with?"

"I need help with my apology to Harry."

"Huh? It's still a little early, Gin."

Ginny smiled. "I want to look cute, young, and innocent."

"And you've come to me because?"

Ginny shrugged, "You're a girl."

"So are you," Hermione sighed. "Lav?"

"What?" Lavender asked, poking her head out of the curtains that surrounded her bed.

"You know you said you owed me for letting you borrow my essay?"

"Yeah?" she asked sleepily.

"Ginny needs some makeup help; she's making an apology and wants the appropriate look."

Lavender seemed to wake up with a start. She bounced out of her own bed, and dived onto Parvati's. "Parv, wake up, we've got an emergency make-up job."

Parvati woke instantly. "Cool. What's needed?"

"Apology look for Ginny, she's dating Harry now."

Ginny wondered how the hell the girl knew that.

Parvati climbed out of her bed, and looked at the younger girl. "Right. You, sit down there! Hermione, go to her room and have a look through her clothes. Anything pale is good; white is better. If it's a little small that would be perfect. Bring back what you find; we can always Transfigure it if needed. Lav, get your makeup kit out. This is going to be fun."

Hermione watched Parvati with an almost open-mouthed stare. She had never seen the flighty girl like this; she was as intimidating as an army sergeant.

"Come on, Hermione, move," Parvati encouraged her.

Shaking her head, the Prefect went to do what as she was told.

Five minutes later, Ginny was looking at herself in the mirror. Her hair had been straightened a little, and was pulled back into a loose ponytail, with a couple of strands curling cutely around her face. Her brown eyes, her most prominent feature, had been subtly emphasised, making them look larger than normal, and she had the faintest hint of colour on her lips. The idea of the lipstick, she was informed by Lavender, was to give the subconscious impression of arousal, to get Harry thinking in the right direction, and not about the apology.

The idea of looking young and innocent had been thrown out of the tower window. Looking innocent was fine, Lavender told her firmly, but the last thing she wanted was Harry to start thinking like one of her brothers.

Hermione had found an old summer dress, which was a size too small. A little magical enhancement, with Parvati's careful guidance, had made the dress a little longer, so that it was decent lengthwise. Chest wise, she wasn't so sure. With a frankness that the younger girl found disturbing, Lavender had simply grabbed her boobs and pushed them together and up. Parvati used a binding spell to hold them in place for a second, while they took measurements, and then cast a spell on her bra. The result was a cleavage that the small girl had never expected.

"The good thing about this," Lavender explained calmly, "is that there's no padding involved, so that if you get in a situation where Harry is exploring, all he finds is pure Ginny, no embarrassing moments."

"So?" Parvati asked when they had finished.

Ginny turned and hugged them both, one at a time. "Thank you."

"Any time, Ginny," they both said as one.

"We enjoyed this immensely," Parvati continued. "So whenever you want our help, let us know. We heard what your brothers have been doing, and we think it sucks, so we're happy to help."

"Now," Lavender smiled. "Remember what we told you. Go and see Harry. We want to see your makeup nicely mussed when you've finished."

Ginny laughed and blushed at the same time.

Hermione peered out the door. "Harry's waiting for you downstairs," she whispered to the girl

"Oh," Parvati said suddenly. "Make sure that you pause as soon as he makes eye contact, give him a chance to see what is approaching him."

Ginny took a deep breath, gathered her courage, and slowly walked down the stairs.

Harry was sitting in one of the seats, brooding a little. He'd been a little harsh last night, in that he hadn't really given Ginny a chance and been a bit hasty.

He looked up at the door to the girl's dorm, and his mouth dropped open.

Ginny walked through the door, pausing for a brief second so that he could get a good look at her clothes.

Harry's gaze started at her feet, and slowly moved up her legs. The short white dress was showing a lot more of them than Harry had ever seen before, and he liked what he saw. As his eyes moved up, he couldn't help notice how the material hugged her hips. He gulped audibly as his eyes moved higher, and he found himself staring directly at her breasts. Without thinking about it, he licked his lips hungrily.

Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed Ron pulling out his wand, then his friend fall to the floor as spells from Parvati and Lavender hit him.

Harry eventually tore his eyes away from Ginny's chest, suddenly glad he was sitting down and wearing loose robes, and moved his gaze up to her eyes.

"Hi," Ginny greeted him softly, as she paused in front of him.

"You're gorgeous," Harry whispered.

Ginny smiled softly, tilting her head, baring her neck in sub-conscious vulnerable manner.

"Harry, I wanted to say I'm sorry for not trusting you to say no to the other girls."

Harry shook himself out of his stupor. "Ginny, I'm falling for you, hard," he confessed. "It did hurt, but I didn't need to storm off like I did. So I apologise as well."

Ginny smiled warmly and moved closer.

Neither of them noticed that Ron was desperately trying to free himself from the spells, or that Hermione quietly cursed him, freezing him once more.

Harry moved to his feet, showing the same suddenness he had the night before. One second he was sitting down, the next he was up, with no apparent movement in between.

He moved nearer his girlfriend, and lightly brushed one of the strands of hair behind her ear. "Can I kiss you now, properly? Not a surprise kiss, or a pounce kiss, or a stolen kiss, but a proper one, between a boyfriend and a girlfriend?"

Dean watched the two of them with a bittersweet expression on his face. It suddenly hit home just what he had given up, and he regretted it. A few seconds later, his expression turned into a slight smile, it was so obvious that Ginny had never felt the sort of love for him that she obviously felt for Harry. He might have had her for a few weeks, but Harry was going to get her for life.

He still liked Ginny, and definitely liked Harry, so he gave them his blessing. His eyes flickered over to Ron, who he still held responsible for his break-up. He saw that he was slowly recovering from the latest spell, so pulled his wand, and cursed him again. The git wasn't going to break up this moment.

Ginny nodded, tilting her head back and parting her lips a little.

Harry's hand curled around the back of her head, softly playing with the hair at the base of her neck. He held her still as he moved down and gently touched his lips to hers.

Ginny moved her hands up, wrapping them around his neck, and lifted herself against him.

Lips met lips and as the two of them kissed each other without hesitation, without doubt, without the need to think about where they were, or about having to break the kiss and vanish.

Harry slid his arms down, holding the slim form of his girlfriend tightly against him, as his tongue softly pressed against her lips. She opened her mouth, responding to his entreaty.

They both felt the same thing - this was where they belonged. As they kissed without pressure for the first time, both decided that they would do this for the rest of their lives.

They slowly broke the kiss. Harry placed his forehead against hers, and smiled softly, looking deep in her eyes. There was no need for words.

As one, they turned and walked out to breakfast, Ginny shooting a huge thank you smile, over her shoulder, at Hermione, Lavender, and Parvati.

Hermione turned to the two girls, "Thanks."

Lavender smiled. "We still owe you. We did that for Ginny and Harry, not for you. We were talking about this last week. Harry desperately needs a

girlfriend, someone to look after him, keep his feet on the ground, and give him a reason to fight. Anyone would crack under the pressure he is under. I'd hate to be charged with saving the world."

Hermione gaped at her and Parvati laughed softly. "Surprised to hear maturity from us? I don't blame you, but we're not totally obsessed with boys, make up, and clothes. We know what is going on in the world as well. We've both thought about dating Harry after all, he is incredibly cute but we wouldn't be any good for him. He needs someone strong and brave who will stand with him no matter what. Ginny is perfect for him."

Lavender nodded. "Harry's going to need all the help he can get from his friends. If something we're good at can be of service, we'll be there every time." She giggled suddenly. "Now that we know it's Ginny, we can start preparing her outfit for the next ball. We're going to make her the most beautiful girl there, not that that will be a major challenge."

Parvati smiled, as another thought hit her. "Have either of you even seen that much emotion on his face before?"

Ron was left on the floor, in a quandary. He wanted to update his brothers on what had happened, but didn't want to confess that everyone in Gryffindor seemed to be against him.

From: Hermione

To: Mmail Group: Study

Subject: Favour

Guys,

Draco Malfoy has gone a step to far in his latest insults, and Ginny's decided to do something about it. I'm helping her, and said that I would ask for your help as well.

Basically, we're going to destroy his reputation. The plan is below, encrypted to prevent the wrong people from reading it. You'll remember it from that Muggle study session we had.

Hermione

Ginny's Plan –

Ng fbzr fgntr bire gur arkg srj jrrxf, va gur terng unyy, Tvaal vf tbvat gb fgngr pyrneyl gung Qenpb vf tnl. V'z gura tbvat gb onpx ure hc, nf vs vg'f gur zbfq boivbhf guvat va gur jbeyq, naq gung rirelbar xarj vg. V gura jnag rirelbar ryfr gb ntterr. Gur vqrm vf gb znxr vg frz gb rirelbar yvxr rirelbar xarj gung Qenpb vf tnl, ncneg sebz gurz. Guvf jnl, vg fubhyq orpbzr na npprcgrq snpg dhvpxyl.

From: Roger

To: Hermione

Cc: Study group

Subject: Re: Favour

Hermi,

I think that I speak on everyone's behalf when I say that we'll do this, and do it happily. Not as a favour to you, but to get our own back at the Slytherin slimeball.

I'll see if I can get Terry to help out as well; he might be able to add some valuable realism to the idea.

Tell Ginny that she's a genius!

Roger

From: Your loving Godson

To: Padfoot the stupendous

Subject: Lessons

Sirius, I was thinking this morning – I know that's strange, but it was either that or sleep in History of Magic. I think it's time I learned to Apparate. I really don't want to be in a situation like at the end of the Triwizard Tournament, and I think it would give me an advantage next time Tom and I have one our Tête-à-têtes.

Of course, I know I'm not supposed to learn till next year, which is why I'm asking you, Mr 'I became an illegal Animagus', as you understand that

sometimes the rules shouldn't be followed.

Harry

From: Sirius

To: Remus

Subject: Harry

Moony, old chum, what does Tête-à-tête mean?

Just had an Mmail from Harry, asking me to teach him how to Apparate. The letter was perfect, tugged on my heart strings, gave some solid reasoning and directed me away from whatever the real reason he wants to learn is. I'm so proud of him.

What do you think?

Padfoot

--
woof woof

From: The learned Moony

To: I thought you could read

Subject: Re: Harry

It's French, basically means head to head.

As for Harry's suggestion, it's actually not a bad idea. I'd advise a word with Dumbledore before hand, but let's face it if we say no, he would only go and teach himself anyway.

R.

From: Sirius Black

To: Headmaster, Hogwarts

Subject: My godson

Albus,

I received a curious Mmail from Harry this afternoon, requesting that I teach him to Apparate. I talked it over with Remus, and we agreed that it would probably be a good idea to teach him early, so that he's not stuck in a situation like at the end of the Tri-wizard tournament.

Do you have any objections?

Sirius

From: Albus Dumbledore

To: Sirius T Black

Subject: Re: My godson

Sirius,

Wonderful idea actually. You have my permission to teach him; I'll make sure the Ministry has no idea what is going on.

I'm glad to see that Harry is thinking ahead.

--
Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot and Chairman of the International Confederation of Wizards

From: Your wonderful Godfather

To: The lucky kid

Subject: Re: Lessons

It's your lucky day. I've cleared it with Dumbledore, and we can start whenever you want.

S.

--

woof woof

From: A happy godson

To: Wonderful godfather

Subject: Re[2]: Lessons

Padfoot, that's wonderful. I'll see if I can arrange for a couple of hours a week where we can meet in private. I don't want anyone knowing about this till I'm ready.

Oh, I've got plenty of money, haven't I?

Harry

From: A suspicious godfather

To: Harry James Potter

Subject: Re: Re[2]: Lessons

What are you up to?

P.

--

woof woof

From: Completely innocent

To: Sirius and Suspicious

Subject: Re[4]: Lessons

Me? Nothing...at all. Well, it's just that there's a ball coming up, and I'm taking Ginny. I'd like to be able to dance with her properly, so was thinking about arranging for another couple of hours a week where I could pay a dance instructor to come and give me lessons.

It's the sort of thing that a normal person would be able to ask their Mum...but...

Harry.

From: I love that boy

To: Rabid werewolf

Subject: Him again

Just got another Mmail from Harry, asking if he has any money. I asked him why, and it turns out he wants to pay for dancing lessons, so that he can treat Ginny properly at the next ball.

Could you please organise a dance teacher for him – two to three hours a week at Hogwarts, I don't care what it costs, just charge it to my Gringotts account.

Sirius

--

woof woof

From: I've had all my shots

To: You're the one that scares people during the day

Subject: Re: Him again

He is pretty damn loveable, isn't he? This is the sort of thing that Lily would have loved doing. I'll see what I can do; it shouldn't be a major problem. How is he going to arrange for the free time, and do it privately?

Moony

From: I'm scary?

To: I've seen you naked, now that's scary!

Subject: Re: Re: Him again

Yeah, he said he'd have loved to ask his mum about this. No idea how he's going to find the time, but he's the son of one Marauder, the godson of another, and an extremely close friend of the third. He'll find a way.

Padfoot

--
woof woof

From: Harry Potter

To: Professor McGonagall

Subject: Unusual request

Professor,

This may seem a little strange, but I need a way of legitimately being out of the company of Ron, Hermione, and Ginny for around two hours a time, two days a week. I was wondering if you could give me a detention?

Harry

From: Deputy Headmistress McGonagall

To: Potter, Harry J

Subject: Re: Unusual request.

Mr Potter,

I'm afraid that you are going to have to tell me what is going on before I can acquiesce to such a vague request.

M.

From: Begging nicely

To: My wonderful head of house

Subject: Re[2] Unusual request

Professor,

I need it for two reasons. I've arranged for Padfoot to start to teach me to Apparate. It's been cleared with Professor Dumbledore, and that would take up one of the sessions. The other is that I need dance lessons for this year's ball; I really don't want to let Ginny down.

Harry

From: Minnie

To: Albus

Subject: Harry

Albus,

Just had the strangest request from a student ever, he actually wants detention. Harry informed me that he has received permission to learn to Apparate early – a decision I whole-heartedly agree with – and that he needs some private time to learn to dance for this year's ball.

I must say, that Harry has a unique skill of being able to tug on my heartstrings, more so than anyone else. Every time I see that hair and those eyes I just want to mother him to death.

M.

From: Albus

To: Minnie

Subject: Re: Harry

I don't think that detention is a good idea. People would ask why – and knowing Harry and his godfather, if you told them that, they'd come up with something, and I rather like my school intact. I'll tell people that Harry is having supplementary Occlumency lessons with some external teachers.

Yes, Harry does look like the best of James and Lily mixed up, and without James' less attractive personality traits. There's nothing wrong with giving him a bit of mothering, Min; he needs it more than anyone else.

Albie

From: Your head of house

To: Don't beg, it's beneath you

Subject: Re[3] Unusual request

Harry,

I've talked to Professor Dumbledore, and he decided it would be better if people thought you were getting supplementary Occlumency lessons two times a week. Come to my office tomorrow and we'll arrange suitable times.

M.

Ron sneaked out of the Gryffindor common room at 2am. He was wearing Harry's cloak and had the Marauder's Map firmly in his hand.

He made his way to the Owlery, carefully avoiding the school caretaker. Once there, the owl from his brothers arrived bang on time with the package he needed.

He crept back down to his dorm room and sat on his bed with the curtains pulled tight. Fred and George were nothing if not thorough; everything was provided.

He pulled out the first vial, a powder called "Alarm Clock Eliminator" guaranteed to ensure that your victim slept for exactly thirty minutes past their alarm clock going off.

The second vial was "Subtle Stink Bombs," designed to ensure the victim would take a shower as soon as possible, but not actually smell like a prank – perfect for getting people out of the way for a few minutes.

Ron crept over to Harry's bed and carefully poured both vials onto the boy.

Returning to his own bed, Ron went to sleep, full of excitement for the next day.

"Harry, Harry, wake up, you're late."

Harry opened his eyes blearily, before looking at his watch. "Damn it," he swore under his breath, "I'm supposed to be meeting Ginny for breakfast."

He swung his legs over the edge of the bed, and reached for his shirt. As he breathed in, he realised he really needed a shower. "Go to breakfast, Ron, I need a quick shower first." In his tiredness, he forgot that Ron was firmly against him and Ginny being together.

As soon as Harry entered the shower, Ron started to move. He pulled out the "Port Door Paste," and carefully placed it around the doorway from the bathroom to their dorm room. He touched his wand to the command strip, and commanded it to port its victim to the Great Hall, and the

message it was to deliver.

With that done, Ron sprinted down to breakfast, determined not to miss the show.

Ginny looked up as Ron sat down, a little out of breath. "Where's Harry?" she asked.

"Having a shower," Ron said innocently.

"What have you done?" Ginny demanded.

"Nothing," Ron replied with a slight smirk.

There was a sudden crack of what sounded like thunder, and a huge voice said, "This is your only warning. Stop your relationship now!" Everyone looked around, as Harry suddenly appeared in the Great Hall wearing only a towel wrapped around his waist.

Some of the students started to snicker, the quicker ones realising what was happening.

Ron was delighted. This was better than he had hoped for, because Harry often got dressed in the shower room. His friend would be mortified!

Unfortunately for Ron, things quickly got a lot worse. When public nudity had been suggested, the image that had flown through Ron's mind was of Harry naked. The only problem was that his image was two years out of date. Two years of puberty, hard duelling, and Quidditch had taken its toll on Harry's body, leaving him nothing to be ashamed of.

Harry glared directly at the Gryffindor table and placed his fists against his waist, looking extremely annoyed. He didn't realise that his pose emphasised a lot of the extremely healthy muscles on his torso.

He hadn't expected those prats to actually prank him like this. Well, if they thought he was going to dump Ginny because of this, they obviously didn't have a clue who they were dealing with.

"I hope you realise that this means war!" he ground out through his teeth, before turning and stalking out of the hall, head held high. He paid no attention to the murmurs of appreciation he was receiving from most of the females there, who hadn't realised exactly what was under his ill-fitting robes.

Ginny, on the other hand, did notice the murmurs. She got to her feet, and hissed loudly, "Back off. This is one witch who does not share!"

Most of the witches went quiet, determined to talk about what had just happened out of her earshot.

Draco Malfoy got to his feet, as though he was going to deliver a stinging remark, everyone should be able to see him make it. Ginny caught the movement out of the corner of her eye and sent a quick prayer of thanks to whatever deity was looking over her. This could not be better. "No, Draco," she said loudly, much louder than her first threat to the other witches in Hogwarts. "I won't share him with a guy either."

"Wait a second," Hermione exclaimed, her voice calibrated to reach every corner of the Hall. "Draco's gay?"

"Of course he is," Roger Davies called, from the Ravenclaw table.

"You didn't know?" Hannah Abbot, from the Hufflepuff table, sounded surprised. "I thought that everyone knew."

"Yeah," Justin Finch-Fletchley agreed. "Everyone knows that Draco's as bent as a 3-Galleon coin."

"A pretty good kisser, as well," Terry Boot, one of the openly gay students, announced with a saucy smile.

"I knew when I looked at his hair. No straight man pays that much attention to his hair," Dean joined in. As he was not a member of the study group, Ginny knew he had no idea this was a set-up. "And that explains why he is always following Harry around!"

Draco was completely frozen in place; he had a 'deer in the headlights look'. "I'm, I'm not gay," he stuttered.

"Draco," Ginny smiled at him, her voice warm and caring. "It's okay; no one here is going to think any less of you because you're gay. It takes a lot of courage to come out of the closet like you have."

"Yeah," Hermione put in. "I'm impressed that a pure-blood can go against his family's wishes with such courage, Draco. Bravo." She started to clap.

Ginny joined in a second later, the rest of the Gryffindor table a second after that. Within ten seconds the rest of the school was on their feet, applauding Draco's decision to come out of the closet so openly.

Professor Snape was the only teacher who knew exactly what was going on. He'd overheard the altercation outside his dungeon, and Ginny's threat to destroy the young Malfoy's reputation. The girl had taken her chance magnificently, in a way a true Slytherin would be proud of. It made him think though, as he clapped along with the rest of the school. It looked like Filius was correct. If you combined Potter's ability with someone who could think like a Slytherin, you would have a very powerful force. In that second, Snape switched sides. He caught Ginny's eye and gave her a quick wink.

"Twenty points to Slytherin for Draco finally openly admitting his sexuality." He knew that his words would make it seem like he had known all along that Draco was gay. It would serve the little oink right. The oily brat thought he could play in the big leagues, did he? Well, this was Snape's revenge for Draco spying on him for the last six years.

Ginny looked shocked for a second, till understanding flittered across her face. She offered a faint bow of thanks to the Slytherin professor, then turned and followed her boyfriend out.

Draco was incredibly red, and had absolutely no way of denying it now. He didn't know what to do. Crabbe and Goyle looked at him, and then both turned and walked away as quickly as possible, leaving him without his body guards. Pansy Parkinson was looking at him with contempt. "Well, that explains why you are such a crap kisser," she stated loudly, threw her hair back and marched out of the Hall.

"But..." Draco called after her, only he was unable to find the words to continue.

All around the great hall, the same conversation took place a hundred times.

"Did you know Draco was gay?"

"Of course, didn't you?"

The blond boy was no longer Malfoy, a figure to be feared. He was now just Draco, a brave boy open about his sexuality.

This Means War 4 - What Is That Word?

From: Harry

To: The Marauders

Subject: WAR!

Gentlemen, I have received an official declaration of war. It seems that certain Weasley twits thought that pranking me would embarrass me enough to make me dump Ginny. They obviously have NO idea who they are dealing with, or the sort of resources I can call on.

They will be pranked back. Padfoot, Moony, I know that I can count on your help when I need it.

So you know, and don't hear it from anyone else: Ron used Portkey Paste, a sleeping potion and subtle stink bombs to make me oversleep first then, get in the shower. As I came out of the shower, I was transported to the Great Hall wearing only a towel.

I'll write more later; I need to get some breakfast.

Harry

From: Padfoot

To: Moony

Subject: WOOHOO

Moony ol' boy, we're back. This is fantastic. We're going directly up against the Weasley Twins, our successors. It will be so good to see Prongs Junior in action.

This is the best news I've had in ages.

An ecstatic Padfoot

--
woof woof woof woof

From: A smiling werewolf

To: Lassie

Subject: Re: WOOHOO

The prank that the Weasleys pulled off is pretty good. We'd have been proud of sending Snape to the Hall in a towel. Do we have any clue if Harry can prank back?

M.

From: I'm not female?

To: The confused werewolf

Subject: Re: Re: WOOHOO

As I've said before - He's the son of one Marauder, the godson of another, and a friend of the third. Pranks are in Harry's blood. We already know he can be a devious little git, and that there's nothing he won't do if he thinks he's in the right.

The Weasleys have no idea what they've done. It's obvious that Harry is starting to care a lot about Ginny. I wouldn't be surprised if he's starting to realise that he can have a future with her, and maybe one day have his own rug-rats. I bet that in his mind, their trying to break Ginny and Him up

him is similar to his being forced to stay with those damn Muggles all the time. The only difference is that he can do something about it this time.

Add that to the stubbornness we know that Harry has (and thank God he's over his moody teenage phase), and the power he holds, and you're looking at one wizard who will make the six regret they day they tried to interfere.

And, as Harry pointed out, if he needs it, he has the last two remaining Marauders who could probably think up a prank or two.

Sirius

From: The literate Moony

To: You never took Muggle studies

Subject: Re: Re: Re: WOOHOO

I will admit that Harry's got the best bloodline possible when it comes to pranks. I think you missed something though. If you remember, Lily hardly ever pranked, but when she did, it was memorable. Combine Lily's flair for the dramatic with James' ability to pull off pranks, and what have you got?

And yes, he's much more pleasant this year. Still got the weight of the world on his shoulders, but at least he's handling it better.

Moony

From: A lassie is a Muggle word for a girl...

To: The book-a-holic

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: WOOHOO

Combine the two together and you have the makings of a prank the school won't easily forget.

I've not been this excited in years; I can't wait to see what our boy comes up with.

Padfoot (who has done some Muggle research)

--
Bouncing like Tigger

From: Hermione

To: Study Group, All

Subject: Breakfast

Guys,

Just wanted to say a well done! Everyone did their part perfectly, despite the ad-libbed start.

I had a quick chat with Ginny – at times I think that girl could be a Slytherin – and she's asked that we make sure that EVERYONE is very nice to Draco today. We want people to be understanding and supportive of his supposed sexuality. Basically, this means standing up for him if you see anyone teasing him for being gay.

If you see him acting himself, make statements like, "It's ok, Draco, you don't need to act like that anymore, everyone knows." Be a little patronising, and the bigger the audience, the better. What ever you do, don't be afraid of him anymore.

If he does make any serious threats, just let either Harry, Ginny or me know, and we will take care of it.

Hermione

From: Hannah Abbot

To: Hermi & the gang

Subject: Re: Breakfast

Hermi,

This morning was the most fun that I've had since starting Hogwarts. His expression was so funny, and when Terry said he was a good kisser, it

took everything for me not to collapse in hysterical laughter.

Oh, oh, and when Snape helped out...why did he help out? What's Ginny got on him? I SAW him wink at her before he did it. He knew she was making it up!

Anyway, I agree that this morning was a complete success. When we've followed Gin's new plan, he'll be harmless for the rest of his time at school.

Han

From: Orla Quirke

To: The girls

Subject: Harry

DID YOU SEE THOSE MUSCLES?

Oh, Merlin, he's dreamy. I heard there were rumours of a Harry Potter fan club. How can I join?

O.

From: Laura Madley

To: The girls

Subject: Re: Harry

Well, from what I can tell, the founder of the fan club is the one who was rather distressed by the idea of us looking at him.

I see no reason why we can't form a new one!

Anyone interested, we'll meet in the library at seven tonight! Spread the word!

Laura

A fully dressed Harry stalked back into the Great Hall, determined to get some breakfast. Ron and Hermione had already left, and other classmates took one look at his face, and decided that discretion was the better part of valour and got out of his way in a hurry.

"Thought I'd return the favour," Ginny said softly. Next to her was a plate with a warming charm on it.

"Thanks, honey," Harry smiled at her.

Ginny's eyes went wide as she seemed to realise that was the first time he'd given her an affectionate nickname. A second later, she rewarded him with her brightest smile.

As Harry ate, an owl swooped down and offered its leg to Harry. While absently munching a sausage, he opened the parchment and blinked. "It's from your dad," he commented.

"Really?" Ginny asked, a small smirk appearing on her face. "I wonder what it says."

Harry,

Ginny has asked me to write you this letter. While I am doing that, the content is not what she expects. I have charmed this so that only you can read it, and I think it would be better for both our sakes if you were to destroy this as soon as you are finished, so as not to get me in trouble with the smaller of the two important women in my life.

This is a very difficult letter for a father ever to have to write, and I would have preferred being able to say this in person, but as you know more than anyone it's very rare that we get what we want. I ask that you excuse me if I ramble on a bit.

I am not surprised that you are now dating Ginny. In one way or another you have been a major part of her life since she was old enough to hear the story of the Boy-Who-Lived. I'm sure that this is no surprise to you, especially after the embarrassing crush she had on you for so long. As her father I am privy to a little more information than most people, and I can say that she has never stopped loving you. Michael and Dean were diversions while she waited for the right time to approach you.

Ginny told Molly and me that she was planning on waiting till she was 16, then using her, erm, wiles to get you over the brainwashing Ron has been putting you through, and at the same time, achieving a degree of independence from her siblings.

The boys mean well, but have a totally unrealistic attitude towards her. As her father, I can appreciate the sentiment behind the idea of locking her away from any male for many years. But, as her father, I would MUCH rather have a happy, vivacious, loving daughter, not some timid frail thing scared of her own shadow and hiding behind others.

This desire for what's best for Ginny is why I am writing this letter. My daughter's original plan for emancipation from the tyranny of her over-protective brothers (her words, not mine) included a letter from me, absolving you of any guilt if you were to teach my boys a lesson. I give you that absolution freely. I know that you are neither cruel nor hurtful, and that you can teach my boys a lesson in humility without doing any permanent damage. I only ask for photographic evidence.

Harry, Molly and I think of you as family: we have done from the start, and will continue to do so. We couldn't be happier that you are now seeing Ginny properly, for the wonderful young lady that she is. I am probably biased, but I can't think of a better young witch for you to become close to. Or a better wizard for her.

As such, I am going to ask something of you that I almost hoped I would never have to ask anyone, or at least not for many years.

I ask that you keep Ginny safe, make her feel loved, stand up for her, and do everything that it takes to make her happy.

I still remember, with despair, the feeling when she was missing, and the jubilation that Molly and I felt when you rescued her, and the bravery that you showed. It took Ginny a long time to get over the events, to get over being possessed by Voldemort. We helped her all we could, and we are incredibly proud of the results.

I think you already know that she is not your average witch. She has many strengths, and one big weakness - if you want to call it that: you. You hold in your hands something more precious and fragile than anything else on the planet: My daughter's love. If you break it, I guarantee that you will never have anything like it again in your life and that you will regret it for as long as you live. I don't mean that as a threat. You won't need any of us to make you feel bad, not when you realise what you have lost.

Please look after my daughter, Harry.

Arthur Weasley"

Harry looked extremely thoughtful as he touched his wand to the paper, burning it into ashes.

"Well?" Ginny asked.

"Your father has said I'm allowed to prank your brothers," Harry replied.

"Are you going to?"

"Yes," Harry said firmly. "There is no way in hell I am dumping you."

Ginny smiled and shifted a little so that her legs were over his lap, and leaned up to kiss him. "Good," she whispered, as he placed his arms tightly around her. "I need to tell you about Malfoy," she added, suddenly grinning as she remembered.

"What about him?"

From: Irma Pince

To: all staff @ Hogwarts

Subject: Bet

Having seen today's prank by the Weasleys, my money's on them.

Irma.

From: Professor Vector

To: all staff @ Hogwarts

Subject: Re: Bet

I agree with our esteemed librarian. 20 on the Weasleys for me as well.

Severus Snape was sitting at his desk, marking Potions essays from his 3rd year students. It was one of the chores of teaching that he hated the most. Asking any young person to write an essay was almost masochistic. The grammar and punctuation were nearly always appalling, and the factual content gave him nightmares. One of the boys had mixed a few ingredients from a different potion, and the result would have been enough to destroy half of Hogwarts.

As he scowled at the latest semi-illegible missive, several of his Slytherin students entered silently. The first he knew of their presence was when several of them cast a Silencing spell on the door. He looked up wildly to see Blaise Zabini sitting directly opposite him. The others, a mixture of pupils from every year, arranged themselves near her, facing him across the desk. He placed the essay down and steepled his fingers.

"Can I help you?" he asked dryly.

"I'm not sure where to start," the blonde said, matching his tone perfectly.

"The beginning?" Snape suggested.

Blaise smiled faintly. "Is the Sorting Hat ever wrong?"

Snape looked a little surprised at the question. "Not to my knowledge. Why?"

The girl took a deep breath. "Then how in the hell did three Slytherins end up in Gryffindor?"

"What!?"

"There are three Slytherins in Gryffindor at the moment. I want to know how."

"I only know of one," Snape admitted. He was always a lot more open with his own pupils. "Ms Weasley."

Blaise nodded. "Let's take her first. Every single person has massively underestimated her the entire time she has been at Hogwarts. I consider myself a good judge of character, and even I dismissed her. Then this morning, she managed to do more in two minutes than the rest of us have accomplished in the time we've been here. She neutralised Malfoy so completely that he has lost his influence and power in the House. If that sort of revenge isn't a Slytherin's, then I don't know what is."

"How did you know she arranged this morning?"

"That actually takes me on to the second Slytherin. Do you have any idea how galling it is to find out that we only have the second best spy network in place?"

Snape spluttered in disbelief. "Not possible."

"Oh, I'm afraid it is, sir. The second Slytherin is Hermione Granger. She has a large group of people that owe her for homework help. She's asked little of them in return, just to keep an eye on anything interesting and let her know what is happening. She knows more about the rest of the school than I do, and it doesn't even cost her anything. She's also proved that we are wrong about the pureblood issue."

"How?" Snape was getting very interested now. He hadn't had any idea about Granger, but now that he thought about it, it made a lot of sense.

Blaise reached into her pocket and pulled out a parchment. "I copied this from an Mmail she sent to one of the group."

"It looks like garbage."

"Try a decryption spell, sir."

Snape nodded and pulled out his wand. He tapped the parchment. Nothing happened. He tried again, still nothing.

"Seven of us spent around five hours each trying to work out what it meant. None of our spells would work. You know why?" She didn't wait for an answer to her rhetorical question. "Because it's not magic. It's a code that any Muggle could work out. From what we could tell, it's so basic it's not even considered code by Muggles. We wasted 35 hours of the best minds in Slytherin house trying some of the most advanced spells in the library." Blaise was sounding extremely annoyed. "We wasted it on something so bloody simple that a second-year half-blood who was wandering by told us the answer. Here!" She shoved another parchment into his hands. "This is the translation. There are 26 letters in the alphabet. All she did was change each letter to one thirteen places up. A became N, and N became A. B became O and O became B."

The Potions professor looked at the translation. "At some stage over the next few weeks, in the great hall, Ginny is going to state clearly that Draco is gay. I'm then going to back her up, as if it's the most obvious thing in the world, and that everyone knew it. I then want everyone else to agree. The idea is to make it seem to everyone like everyone knew that Draco is gay, apart from them. This way, it should become an accepted fact quickly."

"You knew this was happening?"

"We worked it out yesterday," Blaise said.

"And you didn't think to warn anyone?"

Blaise smirked at her head of house. "Look who's talking. You're the one who put the final seal on it. Besides, as we said, she neutralised Draco. It looks like Crabbe and Goyle are going to hang around Parkinson now, and we can handle her with our hands tied behind our backs. Once you take away the Malfoy influence on our House, you find that most of the people have no wish to support that Dark Tosser: they were just following blindly, too scared of Malfoy to do anything else."

"Dark Tosser?" the potions professor asked, not having heard Voldemort referred to like that before.

"Oh, it's something Harry calls him in the D.A.. He figured if some of us couldn't say Voldemort, that would do."

Snape smiled faintly, laughing at the look he imagined on Voldemort's face if he ever heard that. "You said three people?"

Blaise nodded slowly. "I'm not quite sure how you'll take the last one."

"Potter," Snape sighed. "It has to be Potter."

"How did you know, sir?"

"There's no one else in Gryffindor it could be. I'd like to hear your reasoning."

"Did you know that Harry has a private army, all with total loyalty to him alone?"

"You mean the D.A.? I thought that those initials stood for Dumbledore's Army?"

"Most of the members call it the Defence Association. Sure, Harry might have called it Dumbledore's Army in public a few times, but in the lessons

there is no doubt exactly who we are fighting for."

"We?" Snape looked a little surprised.

"Yes, we. Harry opened it up this year to anybody who wanted to join. A few of us were curious, so we joined in secret, expecting to be thrown out. Weasley was not happy to see us, but Harry welcomed us immediately. The two had a bit of an argument over it, but in the end Harry put his foot down and told Weasley that we were as welcome as every other person in the school. Ginny and Hermione welcomed us as well. Do you have any idea what it's like to see someone you've been told to treat as an enemy stand up for you for no real reason? It was eye opening. The boy has a way of looking at you, when he does it directly, that makes you feel like he is looking into your soul. After a few weeks, we invited every Slytherin we trusted to join.

"You've just seen the results of what he has been teaching us. We managed to sneak in on you, isolate you, and if we'd wanted to, we could have taken you out without you even knowing about it."

Snape tilted his head, "You seem very sure of that."

"I am."

Snape neither acknowledged nor denied the point. "So, while this has been informative, you're here for a reason. What is it?"

"We want you to stop being an," the word she used was extremely descriptive and to the point, "to Harry."

Snape scowled at the description. "Does he know you are here?"

"Of course not. He'd have forbidden it if he knew."

"Then why?" Snape was completely calm. It was interesting that this was the second group to tell him he'd been wrong in a few days. He was curious about their motives.

"Harry has to fight Voldemort. We think he is the only one who would be able to defeat him. When you see him duel in the D.A., you realise just how good he is. He's light years ahead of the rest of us. He has this ability to move suddenly that's almost freaky, and before you know it, you're staring down the end of your own wand, peering into those piercing green eyes.

"As Harry is our only chance of living the sort of life we want to lead, we decided to see what we could do to make his life a little easier. The last thing we need is him doing something stupid because he's pissed off at the world. Also, having Potter think of us favourably when he ends up as either Minister of Magic or Hogwarts' Headmaster will always be useful.

"When you sealed Malfoy's fate this morning, it was the first time you actually stood up to him. We figured it would be a good time to drop in on you."

Snape smiled sourly. "Indeed." He looked at his watch. "I suggest you all get to your classes. I will think about what you have said."

Blaise nodded and stood; the other Slytherins followed her out of the room.

"Bugger," Snape said to himself. "That damn boy's corrupted half of my house. I don't know what's worse: admitting that Minerva and Filius were right, or admitting that Harry's not his father. Now how the hell am I going to stop him sending me to Siberia?"

From: Pansy

To: Mum

Subject: Draco Malfoy

Mum, did you know that bloody Draco's gay? And no, I don't mean happy. The little git's a full star-fish eating fudge-packer. There is no way in hell I'm marrying him now, and I don't care what the family says about it.

Crabbe and Goyle refuse to go near him; I think they fear for their virtue. First sensible decision they've made.

Even Snape knew he was gay, and gave him house points when Draco admitted it in front of the whole school in the Great Hall.

On another note, it seems that Weasley and Potter have had another falling out, they are no longer talking.

Love, Pansy.

From: Glory

To: Lucius

Subject: Your son.

Lucius,

I must say how disappointed I am that you failed to mention your son's peculiar leanings. I had thought that a family like the Malfoys would be more open about it. Why, I hear that it's almost accepted these days.

Still, you have my commiserations.

Glory.

From: The right hand man

To: A follower

Subject: Re: Your son.

What exactly do you mean? Don't make me angry; your position isn't as secure as you might think.

Lucius

From: *smirk*

To: You think my position isn't secure?

Tut, tut, tut, Lucius, I'm afraid you've made me angry. You will have to pay for that.

Glory.

From: Glory Parkinson

To: Lucius Malfoy

Cc: Lord Voldemort

Subject: Draco Malfoy

Lucius, I was extremely surprised to hear from my daughter that young Malfoy is an open homosexual. Apparently, he stood up in the Great Hall and announced it to the entire school. I'm sure you must be extremely proud that your son has such moral courage. I'm afraid that I am going to have to call off their engagement, as I'm sure you understand.

My Lord, Pansy did pass on some news that you might find interesting. It seems that Weasley and Potter have had another falling out, and that they are no longer talking.

Glory Parkinson

From: The Dark Lord

To: The boy's father

Cc: Glory Parkinson

Lucius, I am extremely disappointed in you. It raises several doubts in my mind that you could raise such an abomination. You will report to me immediately, where we will... discuss... this matter in great depth.

Glory. While I was not pleased to hear about your daughter's abject failure, this information is useful, and it has not reached me through other sources; I will forgive her failure this once. Please inform her that it is not to happen again, or I will be forced to have a discussion with her as well.

V.

--
Victory or Death

From: Lord Voldemort

To: Harry Potter

Cc: Snivelling worm

Subject: Invitation

Potter, it has come to my attention that once again your friends have let you down.

Join me. I promise you more power than you can dream of, and more people to serve you than you could ever want.

Be part of my family, my right hand.

Voldemort.

--
Victory or Death

Harry looked at the Mmail in disbelief. He thought of forwarding it to Dumbledore, and then decided not to; a vague plan was forming in his mind.

Voldemort had just given him Pettigrew's Mmail address.

He walked across to Hermione and Ginny, who were talking near the fire. "Ginny, can I have a word?"

"Of course." The girl smiled an apology at Hermione as they walked off together.

Hermione frowned as she realised she had lost part of her Defence essay. "Ron," she called over to the table where he was engaged in a chess match with Seamus. "Do you still have a copy of that Defence essay you borrowed?"

"Sure," Ron replied absently. "It's in my Mmail box. Go, and have a look."

"Thanks."

Harry pulled Ginny into one of the larger closets and cast Silencing and Locking charms on the door.

Ginny looked pleased, she hadn't expected him to be so forward, but was going to enjoy it, and immediately started undoing her robes.

Harry turned around, just as Ginny shrugged her robes off. "What are you doing?" he croaked.

Ginny paused. "I can't feel anything through those heavy robes, and if we're going to have a snog session that involves silencing and locking charms, I definitely want to be able to feel everything." Harry blushed bright red. "Erm, I didn't pull you in here for that, not that it's a bad idea, I just wanted to talk, but now I'm thinking of exactly what I would be able to feel, and can hardly remember why I wanted you in here in the first place, as it doesn't seem important but I know it was and oh God you're beautiful." He took several deep breaths after his speech, trying to get his breath back.

Ginny blinked a few times as she tried to decipher the stream of consciousness she had just received. She absently played with the bottom of her blouse, half aware that the material was being pulled tight across her chest. "So, what did you want?" she asked, when she finally decided not to be mad at him for not jumping her.

Harry's gaze was attached firmly to her chest, and conscious thought was apparently on vacation.

"Harry?" she prompted, trying to keep from giggling.

"Voldemort," he gasped.

"Well, that's a mood killer,' Ginny thought to herself. She stopped teasing him instantly. "What about him?"

Harry visibly shook himself. "I just received an Mmail from him, asking me to join now that Ron and I aren't talking. He offered me power and servants."

Ginny laughed loudly. "He expects you to join for that?"

Harry nodded.

"So, what are you going to do?"

"Do you think it's possible to do some magic on an Mmail attachment?"

Ginny thought for a second. She knew that it was impossible; anyone who had been brought up in the Wizarding world knew that. Mmail was first developed back in the 70's, closely copying the Muggle equivalent, but with some added security. The system was based around illusions, not actual artefacts, and as such, there was nothing there to cast a spell on. "I think that if anyone could, it would be you," she said sincerely.

"You'll help?"

"Of course," Ginny smiled happily.

Harry turned, pulling out his wand to take down the charms.

"Uh hum," Ginny coughed.

Harry turned back to face her.

"In case you haven't noticed, Mr Potter, we are alone in a heavily sealed room, and I've just taken my robes off. Doesn't that give you any sort of ideas?"

Harry gulped, and then smiled. He moved forwards and lifted the small girl onto the edge of a table. He leant down and started to kiss her passionately, a kiss that Ginny was more than happy to receive and share.

From: Hermione

To: The Prat

Subject: Unicorn

RONALD WEASLEY I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU TOLD YOUR BROTHERS THAT!

If I were you, I would not come near me for some time, or I might say something YOU will regret!

H

From: One annoyed girl

To: The happy one

Subject: Your brothers

Gin,

Screw neutrality, I'm on your side. What's Harry's plan and how can I help?

Hermione

From: Happy? You haven't got a clue

To: The annoyed one

Subject: Re: Your brothers

Welcome to the team. We have a slightly bigger problem that we need your help with first.

What's the prat done now?

Gin

From: Still annoyed, but curious

To: Why such a good mood?

Subject: Re[2]: Your brothers

Let's just say that our relationship had proceeded nicely along regular paths, and that GIT told the OTHER GITs.

Bigger problem?

H.

From: Harry & Ginny in a cupboard K-I-S-S-I-N-G

To: This will distract you

Subject: Re[3]: Your brothers

Yeah. Can you come down to the library ASAP? But you're going to hear something that is impossible. It's vital that you trust me to know what I'm doing. So please DON'T ever mention that it can't be done.

So Ron couldn't keep his big mouth shut? Not much new there, I'm afraid. Still, I'm happy. Having the cleverest witch in Hogwarts on our side can't hurt.

Ginny

From: Albus Dumbledore

To: Severus Snape

Subject: Conversations

Severus,

It has come to my attention that you have had a couple of fascinating conversations over the past few days. Have you come to any conclusions?

If you have, I feel that a certain potion you postulated the creation of, would make an admirable peace offering.

Albus

--

Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot and Chairman of the International Confederation of Wizards

From: Snape

To: Interfering old man

Subject: Re: Conversations

I came very close to stating that we only had the third best spy network in the school. Yours is much better than anyone else's.

Yes, certain facts have been pointed out to me, and unless I want a rebellion from a group of students that Potter has trained to fight, I am going to have to change.

Your idea is a good one, I'll start work immediately.

Severus

--

Advocating the end of silly wand waving for fifteen years

From: Irma Pince

To: Headmaster, Hogwarts

Subject: Meeting

Albus,

I feel that I should inform you that there was chaos in the library this evening. From what I could tell, every single female student below the sixth year turned up, as well as a small contingent of boys. They were muttering about forming some form of club, but I couldn't tell what.

I kicked them all out, and I have no idea where they went.

Irma.

"So, what's going on?" Hermione asked as she entered the library. Harry and Ginny were sitting next to each other at one of the desks, a pile of books she would have been proud of next to them.

"Hey," Harry smiled at his friend. "Glad you are going to help."

A quick look at Ginny confirmed that her friend hadn't told Harry why she was helping. She was thankful for the discretion

"Voldemort Mmailed me earlier, asking me to join the Death Eaters as he knows that Ron and I are currently having a slight disagreement over the dating habits of the drop-dead-gorgeous girl sitting next to me.

"He carbon-copied the Mmail to Pettigrew, so we're working on how to create a Portkey that I'll enchant to an Mmail attachment."

Hermione nodded slowly; internally her mind was screaming that everyone knew that sending a spell through Mmail didn't work. It was only Ginny's earlier warning that stopped her from saying anything. "So you want me to help you with the Portkey research?"

"Yep," Harry grinned. "We figured if anyone could pull off the impossible in a couple of hours, it would be you."

"Flattery will get you everywhere, Harry." Hermione smiled and looked through the pile of books. She sighed softly to herself and picked half up, returning them to the shelves.

Harry and Ginny smiled at each other. Hermione in research mode was like a force of nature: nothing could stand in her path as she searched for what she wanted.

In the end, it only took her two hours to find the information needed. It had included a trip to the Restricted Section, but Hermione knew her way around the protective charms.

"Ok," Harry said nervously. "I hate Portkeys, but, let's test it." He followed the spell exactly, focusing on the destination point – the other end of the library, and touched his wand to an old bookmark of Hermione's.

"Wish me luck," he mumbled, as he reached out and grabbed the book mark. Instantly he disappeared, and Hermione waited nervously. She heard a pop, then a whoop of joy, and Harry came running back over to her. He picked Hermione up out of her chair and spun her around a few times, before hugging her as hard as he could.

Hermione smiled, as she realised the changes that had happened in her best friend over the past few days. He wasn't the old Harry or the sulking teenage Harry of last year: this was a more grown-up Harry, and she really liked it.

She watched as Harry released her, and stalked towards Ginny.

The red-haired girl pretended to be scared. "You're not going to hurt me, are you sir?" she asked in a little girl's voice.

Harry smirked, "I'm going to help myself to those ruby lips."

"Oh no," Ginny said, fanning herself dramatically. She pretended to swoon in horror, conveniently landing on the edge of the table, where she could be kissed with ease.

"Ahh, caught you, my saucy wench," Harry said, seriously overacting the evil in his voice.

"Please sir, not a kiss, anything but that."

Hermione was trying very hard not to break into hysterical laughter. She timed her moment carefully, waiting till Harry's lips were a centimetre away from Ginny's. "We still need to find a way to attach the Portkey to the Mmail, and check it can handle distances," she reminded them.

The look that Ginny shot her as Harry pulled away would have put the Basilisk to shame in her first year. Hermione smiled innocently.

Harry dropped a much lighter kiss on his girlfriend's lips. "She's right, you know."

"Doesn't mean I have to like it," Ginny growled.

"Any idea how we go about doing this?" Harry asked.

"Sure," Ginny replied confidently. "Create an Mmail."

Harry nodded, scribbled a quick note on the parchment, and picked his wand up off the table, the movement and incantation were simple, but had become so second nature to him that he hardly bothered to wave his wand, and he didn't say the words.

An illusion of a piece of parchment appeared in front of him.

Ginny and Hermione exchanged another long look, as for the first time Hermione started to realise what Harry could do. Technically, what he had just done was impossible. Every other student and teacher had to say the correct words and do the correct wand movement. The fact that Harry just did it like that was astounding.

"Now, create an attachment for it," Ginny continued, her voice going soft.

Harry nodded and absently Summoned a piece of parchment from the desk. A flick of his wand later and the parchment seemed to shimmer, before an exact replica appeared, attached in the corner to his original illusion.

"Do the Portkey spell on the attachment, like you did before, but put the destination as your bed. You need sleep, as creating Portkeys takes a lot out of you. Hermione and I will clear up here."

Harry nodded and yawned. He concentrated hard on the spell, and his bed in the Gryffindor common room.

Hermione bit her lips, forcing herself not to shout out that there was nothing there – you couldn't attach a spell to something that simply didn't exist.

Harry released the spell, and then sent the message.

There was a brief moment's silence, as the three of them waited. They were almost holding their breath.

A small illusion of a parchment appeared by Harry's right hand. It simply read, "Harry Potter has one new Mmail."

Almost reluctantly, Harry tapped his wand to the small parchment. It grew rapidly, till it was floating in front of him.

From: Harry

To: Me

Attachment: test.pmt

Subject: Test

Test test test test test test test test.

Harry

Harry touched his wand to the attachment, giving it the open command. Without warning, he vanished.

Hermione unfroze and grabbed her friend's wrist, dragging her out of the library.

"Where are we going?" Ginny asked.

"Dumbledore's office," Hermione replied, not loosening her grip for a second.

"Why?" The smaller girl was struggling to keep up now.

"We're here," Hermione announced, in lieu of answering. "Harry Emergency," she said as a password. "Dumbledore set this up for us after last year, so that if there was a problem we could reach him immediately."

The gargoyle moved back, allowing them entrance to the moving stairs.

"Come in," Dumbledore said as they reached the top, before they could knock.

Dumbledore was having a meeting with his four Heads of House. "What's the emergency with Harry, Ms Granger?"

When she'd started Hogwarts, Hermione's greatest fear would have been getting in trouble, and being forced to talk in front of the most important teachers in the school.

Six years of being Harry Potter's best friend had eliminated that fear, and she felt that she could call three of the heads friends. At one stage or another she had dealt with each of the four on a one-to-one basis, normally to find the way to help Harry out of his latest predicament. "I don't suppose I could have a drink?" she asked, looking longingly at what appeared to be Firewhisky on the desk.

Before McGonagall could refuse, Snape moved and poured her a glass, handing it to her with an expression that almost looked like a smile.

Hermione took it as Ginny stared at her in shock. The bushy haired girl downed it in one go, and sighed with pleasure as smoke came out of her ears.

Dumbledore waved his wand casually, creating two chairs for his guests. He didn't seem to be concerned about the interrupted meeting. He was likely more concerned about what would cause Hermione to barge in and then drink alcohol like there was no tomorrow.

"Ok," Hermione said as she sat down, a stern glance telling Ginny to sit as well. "I have just seen a student break half the rules of magic."

She held up her hand, with four fingers up. "One," she said as she folded her first finger down. "He created a Portkey on his first try.

"Two, the Portkey worked, moving him around in Hogwarts, despite the fact that only Professor Dumbledore can make Portkeys here, due to the strong wards in and around Hogwarts." Hermione suddenly shot the Headmaster an accusing look. "You wouldn't know anything about the Portkey Paste the Twins have developed, would you?"

"Me?" Dumbledore asked, his eyes twinkling wildly. "Not a thing. As Hogwarts' Headmaster I would never get involved in anything like that."

Snape snorted eloquently. "Please continue, Ms Granger."

Hermione nodded. "Three, he created an Mmail and attachment without bothering to say the proper words or even the right bloody movement."

All the girl had left now was her pinkie finger. "Fourth, he then created an attachment, something which DOESN'T EVEN EXIST, and attached a bloody Portkey spell to it."

Severus was the first person to move. He was nearest the bottle of Firewhisky. He grabbed it and poured it into five shot glasses. As one, the teachers, Dumbledore included, grabbed the drink and swallowed it.

"I take it we're talking about Mr Potter," Professor Dumbledore said slowly.

"Thank you for the obvious," Snape smirked. "And here I was thinking there was another pupil in the school that could pull that sort of thing off, with the help of Hermione and Ginny."

"Severus," Dumbledore said reproachfully, his manner faintly screaming, 'not in front of the children.'

"Sorry," Snape said, acknowledging the point.

"I brought Ginny along as she knows what is going on."

"Ms Weasley?" Professor Dumbledore asked with a warm smile.

Ginny stared at her potions professor thoughtfully. It was obvious she was trying to come to a decision about him. "Can I ask a question, off the record, Professor Snape?" she inquired.

Snape nodded.

"Are you going to stop being an," the word she used was exactly the same as the word Blaise had used earlier, "to Harry?"

Severus tried very hard to ignore the sniggers that came from his fellow teachers.

"Yes," he sighed, a slightly irritated look on his.

"Ok," Ginny smiled at him.

She took a deep breath, and started to talk. "I first noticed something strange a few months ago. Sometimes, when duelling in the D.A., Harry would move faster than anyone could see. It's not Apparating, because we know that no one can do that in Hogwarts, and there's no sound. It's so sudden. One minute you're facing him, the next he has your wand and you're staring up into an expressionless pair of green eyes.

"Then, a few days ago, I kinda said something a little silly while sitting on his lap. He managed to move from under me to in front of me, before I could even notice he was gone. He did it again the next morning, under happier circumstances.

"I was confused about it, trying to work out how he could do that. It wasn't till this afternoon that I put it all together. Harry asked if he could attach a spell to an attachment. Every one knows you can't do that, apart from Harry."

Hermione's eye suddenly shot open as she stared at her friend. "Well done, Gin," she said with admiration evident in her voice. "It's hard to believe, but I've seen the proof."

Filius Flitwick, head of the studious house, was the first to speak. "I don't suppose you could explain it for those of us with mere genius level IQ's?" he requested with a teasing smile.

Ginny and Hermione both blushed at once, and faced the five teachers once more. "Sorry," Ginny smiled at them nervously. "Basically, I realised that Harry doesn't know what is impossible. No one has ever told him that you can't just move through space and appear anywhere you want, so he just does it. The same thing with the attachment Portkey: he didn't know it couldn't be done, and we didn't tell him, so he just did it."

Flitwick nodded approvingly, "An excellent grasp of psychology, Ms Weasley, take twenty points for Gryffindor. We should take this up in class," he addressed the other teachers. "It's most ingenious."

The other professors had taken a little longer to understand what Ginny had meant, but now realised that the girl was simply saying that Harry could do anything he believed in.

"Thank you for bringing this to us, Ms Granger," Dumbledore said thoughtfully. "I'm going to ask that you keep acting as you have been, and don't tell Harry that he can't do anything. I'm going to arrange a few things so that we can see what Mr Potter's limits are."

Hermione nodded, and stood, recognising the dismissal for what it was. With Ginny firmly in tow once more, they headed to their common room and bed.

There was a silence with the five teachers, till McGonagall broke it. "Tahiti, I think," she said with a small smile.

"Tahiti?" Ponomia Sprout asked, confused.

"Yes, Tahiti," McGonagall confirmed. "I shall go there for a holiday this summer."

Filius looked at her curiously. "A holiday, with Voldemort still out and about?"

McGonagall smiled, "Oh, him? He hasn't got a bloody chance. We've won. He just doesn't know it yet."

"Huh?" Snape asked, before his jaw opened in shock.

Minerva McGonagall, Deputy Headmistress of Hogwarts, Head of Gryffindor House, respected member of the Order of the Phoenix, was currently standing on the headmaster's desk, doing a jig of pure delight.

"I told you, Sewie," she crowed, as she continued to shake her austere booty. "Put a strong woman behind the most powerful magician in the

world, and you have a strong force. Put two amazing women behind him, and nothing will be able to stop him. When Harry gets around to it, there will be no more Voldemort. He's dead; he just doesn't know it yet."

With a huge smile, she slowly climbed off the table and sat back down, completely unembarrassed.

"What I want to know," the tiny Flitwick said, "is how did three Ravenclaws end up in Gryffindor?"

"What do you mean?" Albus asked, noting how Severus' eyes were alight with interest.

"Ms Granger is obvious; she gets better marks than all of my students. Ms Weasley has been demonstrating her intelligence for several years now. And of course, Mr Potter, when he isn't hiding behind his veil of wanting to be normal, is the best magical student I have ever taught. I'm a little embarrassed that I didn't reach Ginny's conclusion some time ago."

"That's strange," Sprout said with a slight smile. "I was going to say the same about them being Hufflepuffs. The three of them have shown unwavering loyalty and caring. Hermione helps anyone who needs it with homework. Ginny has never turned her back on anyone with a problem, and Harry has welcomed all comers to his D.A. group, Slytherin included."

Dumbledore smiled at them, his eyes twinkling. "I had a very long chat with Alistair about this very subject."

"Who's Alistair?" Snape asked.

"The Sorting Hat," the headmaster explained briefly. "We often have long chats, frightfully intelligent fellow he is. He told me that the three of them were very difficult to place. He came within an inch of placing Harry and Ginny in Slytherin, and Hermione in Ravenclaw. They are all in Gryffindor because they asked to be placed there, a decision that, at times, I think they have all regretted slightly. Alistair said that he agreed to place them in Gryffindor because it was the best fit for them."

"What about Ron Weasley?" McGonagall asked.

"Mr Weasley is a classic Gryffindor, with all their virtues and faults," Dumbledore sighed. "He has been the foil needed for the others to blossom, but sadly, little of their influence has rubbed off on him. I had hoped that, in time, he would be less impetuous and more thoughtful. That he would be more accepting of others. I'm afraid that he is still living in a world where Gryffindors are good and Slytherins are evil."

Dumbledore suddenly smiled. "Still, I do wonder if the outcome of his attempts to interfere with Mr Potter and Ms Weasleys relationship will have some affect on him. Severus, I believe you are running a book on the outcome?"

"I am," Snape smiled.

"In that case, I will place 20 galleons on Mr Potter as well."

"Just one more thing," Sprout said. "Why does Harry want to know how to create Portkeys, and attach them to a Mmail?"

Worried looks were her only response.

From: Severus Snape

To: Potter

Subject: My office

Potter, please come to my office before breakfast.

S.

--

Advocating the end of silly wand waving for fifteen years

From: The Boy Who Lived

To: The Potions professor

Subject: Re: My Office

I will be there, sir.

Harry.

From: Ron

To: Brothers

Subject: The worst day

Guys,

The prank went perfectly. I followed the instructions to the letter, and Harry arrived in the Great Hall wearing only his towel.

However, things went dramatically wrong after that. It seems that when we considered public nudity, we all had the same image of Harry in mind – the skinny, lost little boy of a few years ago.

Unfortunately, Harry is no longer that boy, and if I have to hear one more word from any of the witches around here about just how good Harry looks in a towel, I shall be sick.

Not only did the prank fail to embarrass him, it also failed to put him off my sister. He is rather upset at us. In fact, he gave an open declaration of war – something I'm sure our sister is extremely happy about.

Ron.

From: Bill

To: Little bro

Cc: Other bro's

Subject: Re: The worst day

Not to worry, I'm sure we can come up with something a little better than that anyway. Any ideas?

Bill

From: The dastardly duo

To: Five redheads

Subject: Re: Re: The worst day

Actually guys, we kinda like Harry. He wasn't scared off by a prank that would have had most men running away with their tails between their legs.

Let's face facts. Ron scared Michael off with hardly even a threat. Dean, we scared off with a small threat about his manhood.

Harry? We didn't even start with a warning, we went straight to the pranks, and pulled off one perfectly. He's passed the Fred and George test.

Gred

--

Weasley's Wizard Wheezes – coming soon to Diagon Alley.

From: Percival Weasley

To: Brothers, All.

Subject: Re: Re: Re: The worst day

Fred, George,

We agreed that we would stand together in this. This is nothing personal against Harry.

Ron, you did at least follow the instructions, so no blame is to be apportioned to you. The priority now is the next idea to persuade Harry to move on.

Percy.

--

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From: Ron

To: The guys

Subject: It gets worse

1. I just heard from a reliable source that Potter and our innocent sister were seen coming out of a closet.
 2. Hermione found the comment I made about the Unicorn, and I think she is going to help Potter in getting some sort of revenge on us.
- Ron – getting a little depressed

From: Dragon Guy

To: Non-Dragon Guys

Subject: Re: It gets worse

Ok, I can agree that point 1 is serious, and we will HAVE to make sure our next warning to Harry is successful. 2 seems to be a problem of yours, little bro.

C.

--
Draconis dominium

From: The strategist

To: The tactically naive

Subject: Re[2]: It gets worse

Might I remind you that my girlfriend is THE smartest witch, probably ever? And that Potter is extremely powerful? And that our sister is no slouch either?

I wouldn't put it past her to notify your significant others.

Ron

From: Bill

To: The younger redheads

Subject: Re: Re[2]: It gets worse

Ok, that could cause an issue. If you think Mum is scary, you've never seen an angry half-Veela.

We'll have to cross that bridge when we come to it.

What are we going to do about Harry?

B.

From: Harry Potter

To: The Six Idiots

Cc: My love and her parents

Subject: Our relationship

Gentlemen - and I use that term as loosely as is possible.

It has come to my attention that you do not approve of my relationship with Ginny. It seems that you felt the need to transport me to the Great Hall, dressed only in a towel, as some form of threat.

Big mistake.

If you had come to me with logical reasons why I should not date your beautiful sister, I might have at least listened to you. Instead, you chose to prank me.

Huge mistake.

I feel that, for some reason, you have no idea exactly who you are dealing with. I could talk about how I have faced Voldemort one on one more times than the lot of you put together, and survived every time.

But I won't.

Instead, I feel that you need a small history lesson.

Around twenty years ago, there was a group of four men, and later, one woman, who became legendary at Hogwarts. Three of them were Animagus, the other a werewolf. They were all Gryffindors. They were known as Prongs, Padfoot, Moony, and Wormtail.

Now, not a lot of people know this, but Wormtail was a traitor, so we won't talk about him any more.

Shall we take Moony first? He was a werewolf. His friends became Animagi so that they could spend the nights with him on full moons. After he left school, he fought in the first war against Voldemort and ended up teaching Defence at Hogwarts. He is a full member of the Order of the Phoenix. It was his research and skill that enabled the creation of the Marauders Map. He is also an extremely close friend of mine, one of the few adult people I trust and love more than life. His name? Remus Lupin.

Now, let's move on to Padfoot. The legendary Padfoot. His form was that of a giant Grim. He was the brains behind the biggest pranks the Marauders ever pulled off, not least the time they painted the Slytherin Common Room fluorescent pink, and gave Snape a permanent hair perm. After leaving school, he was falsely accused of murder and sentenced to Azkaban without a trial. Many years later, he escaped, and has been fighting Voldemort and the Death Eaters ever since. He is also my godfather, and another adult I trust and love. His name? Sirius Black

Finally, we'll move on to Prongs. The leader of the Marauders. The glue that held them together. The person who both guided and directed the others, taking them on more adventures than any other group of people in history (myself not included). His ingenuity and loyalty mean that he is remembered with fondness even after all these years. After school, he married his true love, and had one child. He was later murdered, with his wife, by the Dark Tosser. He was also my father, James Potter.

So, you see, you've decided to start a prank war with someone who even Voldemort is scared of. Someone who is the son of the greatest prankster ever. Someone who loves, and is loved by, the last two remaining Marauders.

Now, as fair warning, I will be pranking you back; however, I have to deal with Pettigrew first and clear my godfather's name. This should only take a day or so, and has been taking up a lot of my attention. Hermione and Ginny have been invaluable. You gits have no idea what you have gotten yourself into.

I'm falling in love with Ginny, and nothing you do or say will be able to stop me.

Harry

From: Ginny

To: My love

Subject: Mmail to my brothers

Harry, that was brilliant. You're brilliant. I'm so proud you told them you were falling in love with me.

I love you, always.

Ginny.

From: Fred and George

To: Brothers

Subject: Oh s&%^

BUGGER! Ron, did you know about this?

George and Fred

--

Weasley's Wizard Wheezes – coming soon to Diagon Alley.

From: Ron

To: Brothers

Subject: Re: Oh s&%^

Well, yeah, of course. Why? It doesn't change anything.

Ron

From: The twins

To: Idiotic younger brother

Cc: Other brothers

Subject: Re: Re: Oh s&%^

IT DOESN'T CHANGE ANYTHING???? Are you bloody insane? These are the Marauders we're talking about. They make our pranks look AMATEURISH.

We say again, we like Harry. If we give a quick apology, we can call this thing off, and everyone can be happy.

Fred and George

--

Weasley's Wizard Wheezes – coming soon to Diagon Alley.

From: Charlie

To: Brothers

Subject: Ok, don't panic

Look, so he's the son of one Marauder, the godson of the other, and friends with the third. So he deals with He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named on a regular basis, and is currently about to grab Pettigrew.

So what?

It doesn't matter. We are the Weasley boys. We have never been beaten and we never will be.

Charlie

--

Draconis dominium

From: Percival Weasley

To: Brothers

Subject: Re: Ok, don't panic.

I totally agree. There is nothing they can do, we will be triumphant.

P.

--

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Well, that wasn't quite what I expected. I needed to get some plot in there; I'm currently moving the characters into place for the finale of this piece.

Coming soon:

Snape's potion

Poor Peter

Voldemort's not amused

The daily prophet reports

Harry pranks back

For those interested, the first ever email was sent by Ray Tomlinson over the Arpanet in 71, because he thought it was a neat idea :-). American wizards developed Mmail in '72, after seeing the Muggle equivalent. The idea of attachments didn't come until a few years later.

Special Present to everyone...

"Welcome, second years. My name is Professor Jeconais, and I will be teaching you about Technomagic. Now, does anyone know what Technomagic is?"

An enthusiastic girl's hand shot towards the ceiling at an incredible velocity.

"Yes, Ms...?"

"Granger, sir. Hermione."

"Ok, Ms Granger, what is Technomagic?"

"It's the combination of Muggle technological ideas with magical practice."

"Excellent," the professor said, "take five points for Gryffindor. Now, can you tell me what the advantages are, when you compare Technology and Technomagic?"

No one put their hands up – some of the students looked disgusted at the idea that they were doing anything even remotely related to Muggles.

"Take out your parchment and quills," the professor said. When everyone was ready, he continued. "Muggle technology is reliant on devices, such as computers to work. In its simplest form, computers are machines that take instructions and do the same thing over and over again, with 100% reliability. However, the problems come with the instructions. They are created by humans, and often have tiny mistakes in them.

"Technomagic overcomes these problems by having a magical layer that interprets the commands you give and checks that they are perfect.

"Like Muggle technologies, all you need to know is the high-level creation spells: the low-level Technomagic takes care of the rest. The Muggle equivalent is typing text into a word processor. You don't need to understand the interactions between the keyboard, the computer, and the monitor to see the results.

"We do offer advanced courses in Technomagic for those who would like to understand how the WizardNet works.

"Today, we are going to study Mmail. Can anyone tell me what Mmail is?"

Again, the same girl's hand shot up. The professor looked around, hoping for a different volunteer.

"Mr Malfoy?" he asked.

Malfoy got to his feet, a sneer attached to his face. "Mmail is similar to Owl post, only instant. You create a message, give it a recipient, and send it. The WizardNet does the rest."

Professor Jeconais nodded, "Take five points for Slytherin. When you create an Mmail, what you see is an illusionary representation of your message. There is nothing physical there.

"Every wizard has a unique Mmail address, that is theirs and theirs alone. There is no central registry of these Mmails, for privacy's sake. Be careful who you give your Mmail account address to, because it is extremely difficult to get a new one.

"As you are now students of Hogwarts, you are now eligible to have your own address." He paused as a ripple of excitement swept through the students. "The procedure is simple: You ask the WizardNet for identification, it scans your magical signature, memorises it, and then stores it. The identification it gives back is a little complicated, but you will soon learn to use aliases. As always with magic, it's the thought behind the spell that counts as much as the actual spell."

"Now, I want you to pull out your wands. The first incantation is simply '*Aedifico Ego*'. You will feel a small tingling sensation as the WizardNet does its stuff. The identification is your name, followed by the exclamation marks, then a random identification number, and your country of origin."

The second years looked at each other, before saying the words. They all felt a rushing sensation, and then heard a voice giving them their address. Hermione heard, "Wizard Net Identification request accepted. New identity stored: Hermione.Granger!434121624.UK"

"The next stage is to create a Mmail box for yourselves. While all Mmail is delivered directly to you, no matter where you are, you will want to store them in one place, so that you can either re-read it or reply at a later date."

He walked among them, giving each student a piece of parchment. "This is enchanted parchment. Every time you are sent a Mmail, the subject will appear here. Simply tapping it with your wands will show the message behind it. To activate the box, simply write your Mmail address at the top."

As the students wrote their address, the parchment flickered, and then the address vanished, leaving only their names.

"Excellent," Professor Jeconais smiled. "Now that you all have Mmail boxes, it's time to send yourself a test message. "Sending a Mmail is a little more complicated, to stop people sending them by accident. The first step is to create the message. Simply write what you want on normal parchment, using the following format.

"The first line is the sender. So, you write '**From:** ' leave a space, then a personal identification of yourself. It doesn't matter what you write, because the WizardNet automatically adds your address underneath this when you send it.

"The second line is the Recipient. You write '**To:** '. It's important that you get this right, or the Mmail will either bounce or go to the wrong person. As you write it, the address will vanish again, allowing you to put a personalised alias on top.

"The third line is the subject line, '**Subject:** '. There are a few other optional lines that we will cover in the next class. Those are the three key lines.

"Before we continue, I feel that I should have a quick word about Wettiquette – WizardNet etiquette. There are a couple of simple rules to follow. Writing everything in CAPITALS is considered the equivalent of shouting, and is frowned upon.

"Secondly, when you reply, add Re and a colon to the front of the subject, so people are aware of which Mmail message you are replying to. Yes, Ms Granger?"

"What does Re: mean, sir?"

"Re is Latin for 'about', although most people these days think it stands for either REgarding or REply.

"Now, when you get into a long Mmail conversation, you can end up having a long stream of Re:'s, and personally, I really don't like seeing that. So, when you are writing your own, count the number of Re:s, add one, and put it in square brackets next to the Re: If I see any Mmail from a Hogwarts student with multiple Re:'s, I will remove house points.

"As you now have a test message, you need to create the Mmail. The incantation is '*Aedifico Nuntius*'. At the same time, you need to move your wand in a rectangular shape, like this."

The professor illuminated the tip of his wand, so that they could see the movements. He dragged it across, down, back, and up, before crossing it diagonally. "The shape is that of an envelope. The spell also tells the WizardNet to prepare for a new message. Next, you touch your wand to your parchment, and the spell duplicates the parchment in front of you."

The student followed the directions, and a few seconds later, illusions hovered in front of them.

"This is the last chance you have to cancel it before you send it. Once you have sent your Mmail, there is no way of stopping it. If you're happy, touch your wand to the corner above the **From:** and say, '*Dimitto*'. This will send the message through the MagicNet.

"As soon as the Mmail has been sent, two things will happen, and you will see the beauty of the MagicNet. You will receive a small notification on your wand hand of a new Mmail, which you can read without a spell, simply by touching your wand to it. At the same time, the Mmail will be stored in your Mmail box."

The students watched with glee as their message vanished, and then a small illusion appeared by their wrists, informing them of their success.

The professor looked at his watch. "Ok, kids, I want a foot of parchment on the usage of Mmails for the start of the next lesson. We'll be covering attachments and priorities."

Harry, Ron, and Hermione walked out of the lesson together.

"What did you think of Professor Jeconais?" Harry asked.

"I liked him," Hermione said with a happy smile.

"You would," Ron grumbled, reaching for a chocolate frog. "He seemed nice enough, bit of a geek though."

This Means War 5 - A Day In The Life Of A Prankster

From: Albus Dumbledore

To: Sirius Black

Subject: Apparating

Sirius,

I will be arranging for Harry to have the time for his first lesson today. I suggest that you start in the Shrieking Shack. I'm sure you're familiar with it.

This is, of course, in the utmost secrecy. I will be telling Harry's friends that he is taking supplemental Occlumency lessons, and that you are providing an escort for him.

It is imperative that you encourage Harry as much as possible in these lessons, and do NOT place any limitations on him. It is starting to become obvious here at Hogwarts that he can do anything he sets his mind to, and placing limitations can impede this. I'm sure that I don't need to remind you how important it is that he gets any edge over Voldemort he can.

Sincerely,

Albus

--

Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot and Chairman of the International Confederation of Wizards

From: It's too early

To: Early riser

Subject: Cabbages and Kings

Mornin', Moony Ol' Boy

Just had a curious Mmail from Dumbledore...

> It is imperative that you encourage Harry as much as possible in these lessons, and do NOT place any limitations on him. It is starting to become obvious here at Hogwarts that he can do anything he sets his mind to, and placing limitations can impede this.

Any idea what this means?

A tired S.

--

woof yawn

From: Early? Dawn broke hours ago

To: The Lazy Dog

Subject: Re: Since when have you read Carroll?

To put it in dog language: Woof woof woof bark woof bark.

R.

From: Not amused!

To: Failed comic

Subject: Re: Re: Since you insisted on talking about the looking glass

Ha ha bloody ha!

Now give me the English version.

Sirius – and that explains so much

From: Extremely amused

To: The grumpy one

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Oh!

Ok, I thought it was funny...

As a guess, I'd say that it boils down to something in his third year. I was teaching the Patronus charm, and we know how hard that is. It seems that the information that a third year can't produce a totally corporeal Patronus didn't get to Harry.

Logic, and I know that's a dirty word to you, would then dictate that the Professors at Hogwarts have come to the conclusion that Harry can do ANYTHING he thinks he can.

So, all you should have to do is show Harry how to Apparate, then see what rules he can break, and you should enjoy that.

And what do you mean by “and that explains so much”?

Moony

From: Not grumpy *pout*

To: Giggling to yourself is a sign of dementia

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: *smirk*

“Woof woof woof bark woof bark” is basically the biggest insult in dog language. It means that instead of eating sheep, you &*(\$ them.

S,

--
woof woof

From: Blinking wildly

To: Sirius

Subject: Dog language

Are you serious?

Remus

From: I'm the dog Animagus

To: The werewolf

Subject: Re: Dog language

No, I'm Sirius!

S.

From: Groaning wolf

To: Scooby

Subject: Re: Re: Dog language

DAMN IT. IF YOU EVER MAKE ONE MORE SIRIUS/SERIOUS JOKE AGAIN, I WILL PRANK YOU INTO NEXT YEAR

Remus.

From: Likes Scooby snacks

To: Shaggy

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Dog language

No need to shout, Remus old boy. And are my jokes that bad? Because Harry said the same thing.

Sirius

From: Grateful for more blackmail material

To: A comedian without humour is a joke

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Dog language

YES!

From: Harry James Potter

To: Amelia Bones

Cc: Kingsley Shacklebolt

Subject: Obscure question

Madam Bones,

Hypothetically speaking, if a Death Eater was to suddenly appear in the Ministry of Magic, how long would it take to give him Veritaserum and put him on trial?

Sincerely,

Harry

From: Amelia Bones (Head of Magical Law)

To: The Boy-Who-Lived

Cc: Amazingly Blind Auror

Subject: Re: Obscure question

Harry,

To answer your question directly: we could do it immediately. Should we be expecting a Death Eater to suddenly appear?

The only problem I could foresee is interference from certain key Ministry personnel.

Amelia.

From: Kingsley

To: Amelia

Subject: Harry

So, do you think he has something up his sleeve?

K

From: Ami

To: Shack-man

Subject: Re: Harry

I certainly hope so! He's not the sort to ask a hypothetical question to sate his curiosity. I'm really curious now.

A.

From: Harry

To: The chief justice

Cc: Head Auror

Subject: Re[2]: Obscure question

So, it would help if Fudge was unavailable? I can probably organise that although it would help if Tonks was assigned as the Minister's personal guard today.

On a completely unrelated side note, I would definitely not think about placing some Aurors in Mr Shacklebolt's office. I probably wouldn't reserve Court Number One today either. Oh, and I'm sure that a Daily Prophet reporter won't be turning up.

Harry.

From: Kingsley Shacklebolt

To: Harry Potter

Cc: Amelia, Tonks

Subject: Re: Today

Harry,

I have no idea what you have up that sleeve of yours, but first of all, you can call me Kingsley. Anyone who's duelled with the Dark Lord has earned that right.

For some reason, I've arranged for a meeting with four Aurors to discuss personnel requirements. This meeting should take all day.

Court Number One has been closed for cleaning although that should be finished about two minutes before the Court could be needed.

Tonks, you're on guard duty today. The Minister may be making a trip, and we need to keep an eye on him.

K.S.

From: The Boy Who Lived

To: Rita Skeeter

Subject: Scoop

Ms Skeeter,

I propose a continuation to our truce. I need something done; you need to be in my good books.

If I were you, I'd spend the day catching up on your paperwork at the Ministry, perhaps hanging around Court Number One, despite it being closed for cleaning.

If something was to happen, and the results were to be reported by you in a fair and open manner, then I would perhaps be inclined to give you another exclusive interview.

Harry – who has friends at the Ministry who would love to know your secret.

From: The Prophet's Top Reporter

To: The boy who grew up

Subject: Re: Scoop

Well, well, well, it looks like the innocent boy has finally started to grow up. Using the carrot and stick approach is a sure sign of maturity.

I'll play along for today.

Rita.

Harry groaned as he looked at his watch. Last night's Portkey creating had taken a lot out of him, and he needed to do it again.

He dressed quickly, and jogged down to the Potions dungeons.

"Come in, Potter," Snape called, as Harry knocked on the door

Harry walked in, looking around curiously. His professor was sitting behind his desk. The desk was completely clear, except for one bottle of green liquid standing in the absolute centre.

The dour professor had an expression on his face, which took the boy a few seconds to realise was nervousness.

"Here," Snape said abruptly. "Drink this."

Harry picked up the potion, and looked directly into the professor's eyes, searching. Snape took a deep breath as for the very first time he experienced the sensation he had only been told about. He felt like those burning green eyes were delving into his soul, examining, judging him.

He really hoped that he passed, because the idea of Siberia was not a pleasant one.

Harry nodded slowly, and uncorked the bottle. "Cheers," he grinned as he raised the bottle in a salute to the Potions Master, then drained it and winced; Snape knew that the taste was truly awful, worse than Wolfsbane.

It took a few seconds for the effects of the potion to hit, but when it did, Harry fell to his knees clutching his head in absolute pure agony. He struggled to keep his scream in as he curled into a tight ball.

It took a full sixty seconds for the potion to complete its work.

Snape waited patiently, deeply impressed that the boy hadn't cried out, knowing just how painful the potion's effects would be. He was more than a little sad as well, as he watched the boy writhe on the floor. No one should be so experienced with pain that they could withstand agony like that without crying out.

"My vision - it's gone," Harry whispered, his voice straining to rise into panic.

Snape sighed audibly. The boy was still a typical Gryffindor. "Take your glasses off."

Harry did, and blinked. He looked around, and then blinked again.

He could see.

Perfectly.

"I can see," he whispered to himself, amazement and wonder now colouring his tone.

"One of my finest works," Snape told him smugly. "It completely destroyed your optical nerves, cornea, and the rest of your eyes. It then created new ones, only without the imperfections of the original."

"Why?" Harry eventually asked, fixing his gaze on his Potions Professor once more.

Severus Snape visibly paled, as he became the first recipient of Harry's stare without the protection of a thin layer of glass. The boy's eyes reminded him a little of Dumbledore, only without the benefit of years of experience in hiding emotions and curtailing power. They were raw and untouched, driven by something Snape wasn't sure he even wanted to know.

He wanted to lie, to say something that wouldn't make him look like exactly what Blaise and Ginny had called him.

"Because I don't want you to send me to Siberia when you become Minister of Magic."

Harry tilted his head, searching the professor for something. He wasn't sure what, he just had a feeling that there was something deep inside the Potions Master, and he wanted to see it.

Severus struggled to keep a straight face, as the gaze bore into him mercilessly, deeper than he had ever let anyone.

"Don't worry sir," Harry smiled, his eyes shifting back to normal, as if nothing had happened. "I wouldn't send you to Siberia." He paused, enjoying the miniscule look of relief that flitted across Snape's face. "I'm more partial to Alaska."

Snape blinked. He tried as hard as he could, but he couldn't hide the twitch of humour that flashed across his face. Harry grinned impishly at him,

before his face dropped into a formal expression. "Thank you," he said simply.

Snape inclined his head, acknowledging the expression of gratitude.

"I don't think I'm quite ready for people to know about this," the boy said, a thoughtful expression on his face as he considered the myriad situations he was currently involved in.

"Hiding a talent, Potter? How very Slytherin of you."

"Coming from you, that's definitely a compliment," Harry mused.

Snape snorted, acknowledging the point. "Touch your wand to your glasses and say 'Lassgay Learcay.'"

Harry did what he was told, then smiled as the lenses turned completely clear. With another thank you, he then hurried off for breakfast.

From: Severus

To: Dumbledore and the other Heads

Subject: It works

First of all, I gave Harry the eye-repair potion this morning, and it worked perfectly. However, he has asked that it be kept secret for now, so I would appreciate it if no one told anyone.

Secondly, and as galling as it is to admit, it appears that Ms Weasley was correct. Harry wanted to change his glasses into clear lenses, so I told him to use 'Lassgay Learcay', which he did with complete success.

Sev.

--

Advocating the end of silly wand waving for fifteen years

From: Min

To: Albus, Sev, Pommie, Filli

Subject: Re: It Works

Oh, Severus! The Wizengamot would have your wand if they realised you were teaching children spells in Pig Latin.

Still, good to know it works; I'll have to think up something for my lesson today.

M.

From: Filius

To: Senior Staff

Subject: Re[2]: It Works

Very interesting. Good work, Sev.

If you want a challenge, Min, teach him to be an Animagus. You already know that his father was one, and that sort of things tends to be hereditary.

F.

From: Dumbledore, Albus

To: Head of Houses

Subject: Re[3]: It Works

Capital idea, Filius.

Minerva, I'll be telling Harry his new schedule at breakfast, so we can do it publicly - it will allay all suspicions from his friends

I'll give you the same advice I gave Snuffles this morning: it's important that you encourage Harry and not place any limitations on him.

I'm beginning to suspect that the root of Harry's power is his magic itself. The boy seems to have a much closer relationship to magic than most of us; it's almost at a personal level. I suggest you look at his aura when he is casting a spell; it's a most entrancing sight.

Albus

--

Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot and Chairman of the International Confederation of Wizards

From: Minerva

To: Albus

Subject: Animagus

Are you insane? It takes months to learn to become an Animagus, even Harry knows that.

M.

From: A sane mind is a boring one

To: Manic moggy

Subject: Re: Animagus

I assure you that I am in complete control of my faculty (pun intended) although, I have often wondered, if you were going mad, would you know?

As for the time, the Marauders taught themselves. Harry will have the benefit of the experience of the best Transfiguration teacher at school, and the most natural Animagus.

Albie

From: The cute kitty

To: Flatterer

Subject: Re[2]: Animagus

Albus, if you were going mad, NO ONE would be able to tell.

As for the time, I can see your point, and as you know flattery will get you everywhere.

I'll do my best to hide my natural scepticism.

Min

--

Purr purr

Harry sat at the Gryffindor table, enjoying a lazy breakfast with Hermione and Ginny. His red-haired girlfriend was next to him, and his best friend opposite.

He looked over his shoulder, and to his delight noticed that Crabbe and Goyle were both sitting alone, near to Blaise and a few other D.A. members.

"I'll be right back," Harry announced, as he dropped a kiss on Ginny's hair. "I need to arrange something."

He walked over to the Slytherin table, pleased that there weren't many people in the Great Hall to watch him.

"Hi Blaise," he said loudly.

"Err, hi?" the girl responded, more than a little surprised to see him on this side of the Hall.

Harry winked at her, his back to the two Slytherin behemoths.

"There's going to be a new D.A. meeting today." His voice was calculated to carry to them. "I certainly hope that no one tells Fudge about it - as he tried to have it banned last year."

Blaise saw the briefest flicker of intelligence appear in the eyes of the two boys, who were now watching them, in what they probably thought was a

surreptitious manner.

"Ok, Harry," Blaise replied. "I'll not tell anyone about it. We'll keep it a secret."

"Thanks," Harry grinned impishly. "I'll see you later."

He turned abruptly, and stifled a laugh as the two boys jumped backwards, and tried to appear innocent. Their expressions were curiously reminiscent of a couple of elephants that had just got themselves caught in the mud.

He walked back over to Ginny and Hermione and smiled happily. "Have you got a spare piece of parchment by any chance?" he asked.

Ginny handed him one from her bag, then watched over his shoulder as he scrawled out an Mmail.

"It's past time you told us what your plan is," Hermione stated firmly as she watched him begin writing.

Harry turned his head, and noticed that his girlfriend was nodding her agreement with Hermione, so decided it would be a wise move to tell them.

"It's simple, really. To start with, I Mmailed Amelia Bones and Kingsley Shacklebolt to warn them that a Death Eater might be joining them later today. They said that wouldn't be a problem, as long as Fudge was out of the way, so I told them I'd take care of it, as long as Tonks was on guard duty today.

"I've just now told Crabbe and Goyle that I would hate it if Fudge found out about the D.A., so they'll try and be clever and tell Fudge anonymously, so they can get credit with their fathers for foiling one of my plans. I'm just going to send Tonks an Mmail, getting her to tell me when Fudge is on his way here to close down the D.A.

"Once I get that Mmail, and I'm certain that Fudge will be out of the way, away from the Ministry, I'll send a Portkey attachment to Pettigrew."

Harry was writing out the Mmail to Tonks, so he didn't notice the stunned expressions that crossed the two girl's faces.

"Harry," Professor Dumbledore called as he approached the three. He was extremely curious to know what was causing the expressions on the two girls' faces, but knew better than to ask what was causing it.

"I've arranged for you to have some supplementary Occlumency lessons with a master of the art," he announced to the trio. "Unfortunately, she desires total anonymity, so your lessons will be held in Hogsmeade. You will have three two-hour sessions a week."

"Three, sir?" Harry asked, surprised. He had only been expecting two: one for his dance lessons and one for his Apparating.

"Yes," Dumbledore's eyes twinkled merrily. "If you'll come with me, we'll go and see Professor McGonagall to arrange your schedule."

"Yes, sir," Harry agreed. He sent the Mmail quickly, kissed his girlfriend lightly, and followed the ancient headmaster out of the Great Hall.

"Simple?" Ginny muttered under her breath.

"And they call me the genius?" Hermione muttered at the same time.

The two girls looked up, and grinned at each other.

"You know," Hermione said quietly. "This little war with your brothers is incredibly good for Harry. It's giving him all sorts of confidence in himself, and his ability to handle different situations. Do you have any idea what his prank is going to be?"

Ginny smiled happily. "I didn't think this would have such a positive effect on him," she admitted. "I'm really pleased though."

"Harry's prank?" Hermione prompted, as Ginny started to lose focus.

Ginny shook herself, and grinned. "I've not got a clue. All I know for sure is that it's big, and he's going to do all six of them at once. Oh, and he was talking to Professor Flitwick earlier about a charm to make a Muggle stereo..."

"Stereo," Hermione corrected absently.

"Yeah, stereo, work in Hogwarts."

From: Harry Potter

To: Lavender and Parvati

Subject: Costumes

Lav, Parv,

If I can get hold of several costumes, would you be able to adjust them to the sizes I give you?

I'll pay you for your time, obviously.

Cheers,

Harry.

From: Lav

To: Harry

Cc: Parv

Subject: Re: Costumes

Harry, we'd be delighted to help. I'm guessing that this has something to do with your rumoured upcoming prank. If that's the case, we'll do it for free.

We're both expert seamstresses: we want to try to rival Madam Malkin when we finish school. The fact that we can help you would be really great public relations later, not to mention being a lot of fun, too.

L.

From: Anonymouse

To: Minster Fudge's Public Address

Subject: Information

Dear Sir,

We ave come into the knowlidge that Harry Potter is still running the D.A. club.

We think you should know.

From: Cornelius Oswald Fudge

To: Secretary

Cc: Bodyguard

Subject: Visit

It has come to my notice that an illegal club is still operating at Hogwarts. I will be visiting Hogwarts at midday to demand an explanation from the Headmaster. Please have a Portkey available for instant transport; I'm a busy man.

Fudge

--

Vote Fudge in the upcoming elections. A vote for Fudge is a vote for Stability and Prosperity.

From: Tonks

To: The boy with something up his sleeve

Subject: Fudge

Harry, Fudge is going to turn up at midday to demand an explanation about your little club. What are you planning?

T.

From: Totally innocent

To: My favourite metamorphmagus

Subject: Re: Fudge

Me? Nothing at all. I have no idea why Fudge would suddenly demand to come to Hogwarts.

On another note, how are you and Charlie doing these days?

Harry.

From: Harry Potter

To: Professor Dumbledore, Professor Snape, Professor Flitwick, Professor McGonagall, and Professor Sprout

Cc: Gin-gin, Hermi, Snuffles, Moony

Subject: Diner's Association

I'd like to invite you all to lunch, in the Room of Requirement, today at noon. We will be having an extra special guest, Minister Fudge, who has somehow got it into his head that the D.A. is still active.

It seems obvious to me that he didn't get the memo that the D.A. was the Diner's Association - a group set up to allow students and teachers to talk in an informal manner and discuss what is currently happening in the school.

I feel it would be a good show of school spirit if he were to be invited to join us.

Harry.

From: Severus

To: The four professors

Subject: Re: Diner's Association

Ok, I'm not going offer odds on the idea that Fudge's visit has something to do with last night's Portkey revelations. I'm going to be there just to see what the young Slytherin has up his sleeve.

S.

--

Advocating the end of silly wand waving for fifteen years

From: Minnie

To: Thief

Cc: The three professors

Subject: Re[2]: Diner's Association

I will admit to being somewhat curious myself. He is definitely up to something. I suspect that Ms Weasley knows what it is; she was in a daze throughout her entire first period.

And Severus, might I remind you that Harry, whatever his actions, is still in Gryffindor. As such, he's mine.

Minnie

--

warning hiss

From: Albus

To: Severus and Minerva

Cc: Ponoma and Filius

Subject: Re[3]: Diner's Association

Minerva, I believe that you are correct when you say that Ms Weasley knows what is happening. I believe that Harry told her at breakfast, along with Ms Granger.

And I am sure that Severus wasn't trying to steal Harry, he was just pointing out that he has been letting his inner Slytherin show a bit more recently.

I am eagerly looking forward to lunch with Minister Fudge. I'm sure it will be most illuminating. For everyone present.

Albus

--

Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot and Chairman of the International Confederation of Wizards

From: Tonks

To: Harry

Subject: On our way

Harry, we're leaving now.

Oh, and Charlie and I are getting close. Why?

N.

From: Harry James Potter

To: Lord Voldemort

Subject: Joining

My Lord,

I've sent an Mmail detailing my skills to your worm.

I hope to hear from you soon.

Harry

From: Voldemort

To: Worm

Subject: Harry

Worm! Potter has sent you a letter. Read it and send me the contents immediately. The fool is joining our forces. As soon as he arrives, we will kill him.

L.V.

--

Victory or Death

Harry smiled as Sirius, in his Padfoot form, and Remus walked into the Room of Requirement. Sirius transformed to his normal self upon seeing Harry. Harry walked over and hugged them both. "I'm so glad you could come."

"We're glad to be here," Remus smiled. "Why, exactly, did you invite us?"

Harry smiled innocently. "I just wanted to see my favourite godfather and teacher."

Any response was forestalled by the arrival of Ginny and Hermione.

"Hey," Ginny smiled, dropping a kiss on her boyfriend's cheek.

"Woooo," Sirius smirked. "I'll bet that's not all she kisses," he teased, hoping to make her blush. He remembered how she would blush when she was younger, and felt the opportunity was too good to miss.

Harry took a quick step forwards, placing himself between Ginny and Sirius. "I really wish you hadn't done that," the boy said, shaking his head softly. "You'll be regretting it shortly."

"What?" Sirius demanded.

"Let me tell you what my wonderful girlfriend did to Draco Malfoy," Harry said as he manoeuvred his godfather away from Ginny.

Fudge stormed through the doors of Hogwarts, in a manner he was convinced was majestic. Tonks and two other Aurors followed behind him,

hiding their smiles.

"Minister Fudge," Professor McGonagall called, faking surprise at seeing him. "What can Hogwarts do for you?"

"I'm here to see Dumbledore," he growled, trying to be as intimidating as possible.

The austere professor raised one eyebrow, distinctly unimpressed. "If you'll follow me, he is currently having a meeting with the D.A."

"The D.A.?" Fudge cried, scurrying after the tall professor.

McGonagall hid a smirk, and walked a little faster, causing the Minister to have to half trot to keep up with her.

"He's not only aware of it, but is encouraging it? I'll have his resignation over this."

Professor Dumbledore had charmed the entrance to the Room of Requirement to act like a normal door for a small period of time. McGonagall opened the door and entered the room. It was set up like a Victorian dining room. A long mahogany table was surrounded by chairs, all of which were currently filled with the senior staff of Hogwarts, and Harry, Ginny, and Hermione.

"Minister Fudge," Harry said delightedly, as he stood. "What a pleasant surprise. Will you be joining us for our D.A. meeting?"

"What?" Fudge blustered.

"The D.A.," Harry continued. "The Diner's Association. Professor Dumbledore felt it would be beneficial if members of each house could have dinner with the Professors to talk about the school. We're allowed one guest, normally, so I invited Professor Lupin. We're so lucky that you decided to come on our day. Won't you please join us?"

Fudge gaped at him, his mouth open and closing as he tried to come to terms with the idea that there was no such thing as the Defence Association, and that he had been tricked.

"Yes, Cornelius," Dumbledore said, getting to his feet. "Please join us." He waved his wand, creating several more chairs for the new guests.

The lunch was a success, with intelligent and frank discussion around the table. The professors individually made a mental note to try this again in the future, for real.

"Excuse me," Harry suddenly announced, looking embarrassed. He pulled out his wand and checked his Mmail. He smiled at the contents.

"Tell me, Minister. What do you think of Sirius Black?"

Sirius was currently in his Animagus dog form, being fed scraps from Hermione's plate. Ginny was studiously ignoring his pleas for scraps from her as well.

"Disgusting criminal. Such a disgrace to the wizarding world."

Sirius sat up, and growled threateningly.

Fudge looked down at the dog that suddenly appeared and smiled internally. Here was a chance to assert his authority and remind everyone here exactly who was in charge. "That mutt has no collar, or any magical restraints," he stated portentously.

Sirius snarled again, his hatred for the man who had imprisoned him overriding any good sense. He lunged forwards, only to be grabbed by Harry, restraining him.

Snape rolled his eyes; he could see that this wasn't going to end well.

"I'll have to demand that such a dangerous mutt be put down instantly," Fudge said, his face glistening with fear. The dog's resemblance to a Grim was not lost on him.

"You," he pointed to one of the Aurors next to Tonks, "take this mutt to the Department of Magical Animals instantly."

Harry froze, and looked to Dumbledore, who appeared stumped. Technically, Fudge was correct. Sirius' animal form was neither licensed nor restrained, and as such, with his size and the fact he was in Hogwarts, it meant that the animal was in some way magical and therefore could be dangerous.

"No!" Ginny cried, as she lunged forwards. She dropped to her knees next to the surprised dog and buried her face in the dog's neck. "Not my Snuffles."

The red-haired girl looked up at the Minister of Magic, her eyes bright with unshed tears. "You can't kill him, Mister, you can't. He's just a little overprotective of my boyfriend and me. He's a good dog, really. He's just being a bad doggy now."

The witch looked down again, and smacked his nose firmly. "Bad Snuffles, bad doggy!"

Sirius whined, partly because he had to act the part, and partly because the girl hadn't held back when she'd smacked him.

Remus Lupin coughed, trying desperately to hide the hysterical laughter welling up inside him. Harry had told Sirius this would happen, and now the Animagus was paying for it.

The five teachers were each, with varying degrees of success, trying to hide their laughter, too. McGonagall was probably enjoying the scene the most, seeing as she still remembered that time when Sirius had had a few too many butterbeers.

With her condemnation over, Ginny lightly scratched Sirius' haunch.

Sirius' animal took complete control over him, and he wagged his tail eagerly, then bent over and licked himself, before he realised what he was doing. If it was possible for a dog to blush, he would have.

Ginny looked back at the Minister, and made her voice a little higher than normal, while adopting a wide-eyed look.

"Please don't hurt my little cuddly, snugly, Snuffle-poo. I meant to get him a license, I really did, but I couldn't afford it. I found him as a puppy, in Hogsmeade, when I was feeling really homesick. I was so alone, and he just came over to me and licked my face. He was so cute and nice, and such an innocent little puppy, not even house broken yet. I tried to train him, but he's obviously a simple dog because it took AGES to teach him not to go potty where he shouldn't, and not to keep chewing on my shoes. But I love him! He's always comforted me when I cried, and I feed him scraps from the table, and his tongue tickles, and he rarely has fleas, but sometimes he does have gas, and they really smell, and he's my bestest friend. Please don't hurt him, Mister, please."

Fudge concentrated for a moment, slightly distracted by trying to work out how the girl had said all of that without pausing for a breath. Harry was now bright red, as he tried desperately to control himself. The urge to laugh was so bad it was almost painful. Hermione was banging her head against the table, trying as hard as she could to hold her laughter in. Snape, in a moment of brilliant common sense, cast a Silencing spell on the teachers and Remus. Behind the Minister, Tonks' hair was rapidly cycling in colours as she tried to control her laughter.

"I've been saving up my pocket money for ages, Mister," Ginny continued, absently stroking Sirius' stomach now, causing him to roll onto his back with his paws in the air. "I'm going to get him licensed. I was gonna ask Uncle Remus to do it for me, cause I'm in school and all. I couldn't decide if I should get him neutered or not."

Sirius whimpered pathetically, under the spell of her fingers and not willing to move.

Snape froze dead still, as revenge for all of Sirius' pranks was done before his eyes. He called on the skills he had garnered from facing Voldemort not to collapse in paroxysms of laughter. To help control himself, he silently chanted over and over again, under his breath, "She should have been in Slytherin... She should have been in Slytherin."

The whimper was too much for Remus. He suddenly found he had to tie his shoelace, bent over, and once out of sight, he collapsed into a ball and gave in to the hysterical laughter.

"I thought about putting him out to stud for a bit. He's such a big dog, with such good lines that I'm sure someone would want him. That way he could pay for himself. What do you think, sir?"

Fudge found that he couldn't look away from the girl, whose eyes seemed to be glowing.

"Err," he started, "I think that the safest thing..."

"Oh," Ginny interrupted, "You're right; they were teaching us in school the other day that there is no such thing as safe sex. They'll have to come off."

Filius Flitwick slid off his chair, and joined Remus on the floor. He took a second to admire Snape's spell, as it made them completely silent, while allowing them to hear what was going on, before letting his laughter consume him.

Pomona Sprout bent over the table allowing her hair to hide her face, as she rocked back and forth, tears pouring down her cheeks.

Severus Snape was now incredibly still, completely locked in place.

Minerva McGonagall drew from all the experience of dealing with the original Marauders and the Weasley twins, and appeared as if nothing was happening. Only the continuous twitching of her lips betrayed her deep emotions.

Albus Dumbledore was the same as always, except perhaps for the twinkling in his eyes, which was at record levels.

Tonks had given up now, and was hugging her knees with her back against the wall in the same position of the other Auror members, who had been carefully chosen, as they knew the truth about Sirius Black.

"But," Ginny continued, reaching for her wand. "I can't afford to get it done, so I've been studying." She transfigured a couple of the knives on the table into a pair of shears, with glowing red tips.

"Look, it cauterises as well as cuts," she announced proudly, showing it to the Minister of Magic.

Fudge took one look and automatically grabbed his crotch, reassuring himself that he was still intact.

Sirius, feeling the heat from the blades, tried to squirm away, but was held firmly in place by Ginny, who displayed surprising strength.

"I'll have to be careful though, otherwise I might cut more than his testicles."

Sirius fainted, the idea was more than he could handle.

Look,” Ginny said. “He’s gone to sleep, I can do it now. Won’t you help me, Mister?”

Fudge gulped, and then shook his head wildly. “No. No, that’s quite all right, Ms Weasley. I’ve just remembered that I am due back at my office, immediately. Get him licensed and we’ll hear no more of this, I promise.”

The Minister took one last look at the prone dog and ran out of the door, not wanting to see what the girl was about to do. The Aurors, who took a necessary second to compose themselves, followed him and shot incredibly grateful glances at Ginny for the privilege of watching the entertainment.

Sirius awoke, and looked relieved as Ginny transfigured the shears back to knives.

“I’m sorry,” Ginny said, her face showing remorse, “but Fudge insisted that I finish the job.”

Sirius’ eyes went as wide as possible for a dog, and then, despite the fortitude he had gained from his years in Azkaban, he fainted again.

Dumbledore slumped into the nearest chair, and for the first time in many, many years, collapsed into hysterical laughter. The look on the dog Sirius’ face as Ginny lied to him would live in his memory until he died.

The Animagus recovered again, to see the rest of the room in hysterical laughter. He transformed back to himself, and grabbed for his crotch to check. It was only then he realised that he had been pranked.

He made a move towards the girl, but found himself unable to move, as did the rest of the room as Harry decided he should get to Ginny first. It wasn’t a conscious decision on his part to use magic; he just wanted to make sure he got there before anyone else.

He moved and picked the small girl off the floor, swinging her around.

“That was amazing,” he told her, his eyes intense. “You were brilliant.”

He took a deep breath, trying to control himself. He raised one hand, and lightly cupped her cheek, so he could look into her eyes.

“I love you, Ginny Weasley,” he told her for the first time, as earnestly as possible.

Ginny lost herself in his eyes. She flushed at his praise, and then looked amazed at his declaration. The others found that they could move again as Harry was currently distracted. “Do you mean that, Harry, really?”

“With all my heart,” he whispered simply.

Ginny reached up and kissed him as gently as she could, letting all her feelings for this raven-haired boy to come out.

Remus, back on his feet, looked at the two with admiration and a bit of jealousy. First, James Potter had managed to get Lily Evans to fall for him, and she was one of the best witches in the world, as far as he was concerned. And now Harry had this wonderful girl, who was so very different from Lily, but the same in her obvious love. He envied the Potter’s luck at finding their life mates so early in life.

Harry kept their kiss as brief as possible, aware of their audience.

“Ms Weasley,” Snape said first, “take 20 points for Gryffindor for your Slytherin-like quick thinking.”

“And take 20 more for your excellent Transfiguration,” McGonagall added, determined not to be outdone by Snape. These children were still her students, after all.

Harry moved so that Ginny’s back was against his chest, wrapped his arm securely around the her waist, deciding he had no wish at all to break contact at the moment, something Ginny was more than happy to abide with. The teachers, Hermione, and Remus were all in various states of dishevelment from laughing so much. Sirius looked like he wasn’t sure if he should be grateful or annoyed, as he realised just how successfully Ginny had pranked him.

“I’m sure you are all wondering why Fudge was here,” Harry said, deciding it was time to come clean.

Dumbledore, back under control, nodded. The other teachers sat back down.

Harry didn’t move, he was enjoying this cuddling. He was about to explain, when the sign of an incoming Mmail appeared. He touched his wand to it, and grinned.

“How about I answer your questions after you read the Mmail you’re about to get,” he told the gathered people.

They looked a little confused, as the Mmail sign appeared before all of them.

From: The Daily Prophet

To: Mailing List Subscribers - Early Edition

Subject: Sirius Black Innocent!

/_Sirius Black Innocent!_/

Peter Pettigrew Alive!

Special Report: Rita Skeeter

In astonishing news from the Ministry of Magic, Peter Pettigrew is alive! He was turned over to the Department of Magical Law Enforcement yesterday and administered Veritaserum immediately. Mr. Pettigrew was captured by none other than the Boy-Who-Lived, Harry J. Potter. Mr. Potter released a statement saying that his parents, James and Lily Potter could now rest in peace after the capture of their Secret Keeper, who released their whereabouts to He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named fifteen years ago.

This information came as a shocking discovery to the community, as it has long been believed that Sirius Black was the Potters' Secret Keeper, and had betrayed them. The Potters, Black, Pettigrew, and Remus J. Lupin had all been friends at Hogwarts and remained so after their graduation from school. According to sources around the family, Black, 37, was the original choice for Secret Keeper, but had convinced the Potters to choose Pettigrew, as he would not be as obvious a choice.

In Court Room One at the Ministry of Magic, Madam Amelia Bones held an emergency court session to convict Peter Pettigrew of being an accessory to the murder of James and Lily Potter, as well as the murders of twelve Muggles. He was sentenced immediately to the Dementors' Kiss at Azkaban Prison. Aurors transported him directly for his sentence to be carried out.

Madam Bones said to Mr Pettigrew in his sentencing, "You are a disgusting individual, who has helped ruin countless lives. You are personally responsible for crimes that would cripple the normal person with overwhelming guilt. I find you guilty of all charges, and sentence you to receive the Dementors' Kiss immediately."

Bones continued, "As for Sirius Black, I find him innocent of all charges, and is hereby free to continue his life as normal, with no stain on his character or record. Restitution for the years of wrongful imprisonment will be decided at a later date."

On November 1, 1981, the day after the Potters' murder by He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, Sirius T. Black was accused of murdering Peter Pettigrew and twelve Muggles on a busy London street. The chilling DMLE report taken from Aurors on the scene depicted Mr. Black as a cold-blooded murderer who had killed not one, but actually three, of his best friends. Dedalus Diggle's personal account of the scene was that Black was found laughing when the Aurors appeared to take him away.

Black was given no trial at the time of his arrest and was sentenced to Azkaban Prison immediately. He spent twelve years as an inmate of Azkaban. Black escaped in 1993. A massive manhunt had been underway with both the magical and muggle governments. He was never found.

Auror Kingsley Shacklebolt spoke to this reporter as soon as court was out of session.

"Pettigrew's capture was orchestrated purely by Harry, and without his help, this travesty of justice would have continued for many years," Shacklebolt stated, as prime Auror responsible for ongoing efforts to find Sirius Black. "I have at no point believed that Sirius was guilty. I have known Mr. Black since we were at Hogwarts together on the Gryffindor Quidditch team. My main interest in Sirius' case was to find him, only to prove his innocence."

An anonymous source inside the Ministry states that Mr Black is part of a secret organization that is fighting against You-Know-Who. Such interesting information, considering most of us have believed that Black is a Death Eater. At press time, I was unable to interview the newly pardoned wizard.

Rita Skeeter.

There was a stunned silence inside the Room of Requirement, as everyone finished reading at different times.

"You did it!" Ginny squealed, twisting herself around so that she could kiss him. "You did it!" she bounced wildly with joy, knowing just how much it meant to him, and to Sirius.

Sirius Black stared at the illusory representation of the Mmail pronouncing his freedom. He couldn't believe it.

Remus lightly placed his hand on his friend's shoulder, and smiled at him. "Congratulations, Sirius."

"Remus, why don't you take him to my office," Dumbledore said. "I have some firewhiskey in the desk; Sirius looks like he could use a drink. The password is 'Harry Emergency'.

The werewolf nodded and guided the unresisting Animagus out the door.

"You sent Pettigrew one of your Portkey Attachments?" Dumbledore asked Harry. The headmaster was watching Harry with an amused expression.

"Yes, sir," Harry replied. "Hermione and Ginny were the ones that came up with the spell and how to attach it to the Mmail."

Hermione smiled slightly. Her eyes were now back to normal, having recovered from the tears of laughter. It was so like Harry to immediately give all the praise to everyone else, as if his contribution had been negligible. She wished that Ron was here enjoying it as well, but knew why he

wasn't. As much as she loved him, she definitely needed him to get rid of some of his attitudes. She could not agree to spend the rest of her life with someone who was both hypocritical and closed-minded. He had many wonderful qualities that she adored, but his refusal to see the world in anything but Gryffindor red, while fine when she was younger, was now standing in their way.

"How did you get Pettigrew's Mmail address?" Snape was the first to ask.

"Voldemort gave it to me, with an invitation to join him."

"And you got Fudge here, so that Ms Bones could deal with him without interference?"

"Pretty much," Harry agreed. "I figured that with the way the Ministry works, if we could get him tried and sentenced before anyone could use their influence, it would be a lot better for everyone involved. The only person who could have stopped it was Fudge, and he was helpfully out of the way."

"Well," Dumbledore was smiling with pride. "I feel that congratulations are in order, although we must now be on guard, as Voldemort won't take this lying down. "

From: Hermione Granger

To: Fleur Delacour, Penelope Clearwater, Nymphadora Tonks, Katie Bell, Angelina Johnson

Cc: Ginny Weasley

Subject: S.P.O.T.

Ladies,

I feel that I should bring to your attention the behaviour of the overbearing prats we all seem to be in love with. I have tried to find a cure for this, but it seems that one doesn't exist. ;-)

It seems that the Weasley boys, not content with destroying two of Ginny's relationships, have decided to try and ruin a third - regardless of the fact that Ginny is completely in love with her new boyfriend, one Harry Potter.

So far, they have caused Harry to appear in the Great Hall, clad in only a towel, as a warning to make him leave her.

Now, it does seem that Harry is handling it very well so far, but that's not the point. If your boys are anything like Ron, this behaviour is hypocritical in the extreme.

So, I would like to propose the creation of the Society for Protection from Overbearing Twits.

I suspect that we will need all the help we can give each other.

I have started to get hints of the prank that Harry is planning in revenge on the Twits, and I believe that we will be able to get front row seats if we offer our help to him.

Hermione

From: Fleur Delacour

To: S.P.O.T. Members

Attachment: Veela Bible.pmt

Subject: Re: S.P.O.T.

Ladies,

I completely agree with Hermione. I had no idea that Bill was participating in such underhanded behaviour.

I have decided that until his attitude changes, he has lost certain privileges.

I have no problem with helping Harry; he's such a charming boy.

Attached is the Veela Bible, as a gift to my new sisters. I feel that you will enjoy its contents when this is all over.

F.

From: Penelope

To: S.P.O.T. Members

Subject: Re: Re: S.P.O.T.

Count me in. I had thought that Percy had had enough of being a prat last year, when he wouldn't believe Harry. This is going too far.

I agree with Fleur. Percy is cut off as well.

P.C.

From: Tonks

To: Fellow S.P.O.T. members

Subject: Re: Re: Re: S.P.O.T

I'm in as well. While I'm falling for Charlie, I do feel like he could do with being taken down a peg or two.

Mind you, I'm not sure that Harry really needs any help dealing with them.

Have you seen what he did today? He freed his godfather and captured Voldemort's right-hand man in a single action. Still, when he pranks back, it should be good, so if it will get us seats, I'm all for it.

Tonks.

From: Katie and Angelina

To: Everyone in S.P.O.T.

Subject: Us too

Yep, we'll join in. Fred and George are about to experience a dry spell. Good idea, Hermione, although we really need to talk about titles at some stage.

K&A

"Thank you," Sirius said firmly, as he embraced Harry in a huge hug. Several shots of fire whiskey, and a walk through Hogsmeade as himself, had convinced him that it was true. That he was finally free.

Harry grinned happily.

The two of them were walking towards the Shrieking Shack for Harry's first Apparating lesson, as it was just outside the anti-Apparating wards of Hogwarts.

"Ok, Harry." Sirius adopted a serious, professor-like demeanour, which lasted approximately five seconds before Harry pushed him over.

Sirius transformed into his dog shape as he fell, and then bounded onto Harry, knocking the boy over. He eagerly licked his face, drooling as much as possible.

"Eww," Harry yelled. "Down boy, or I'll tell Gin!"

Sirius bounced off him and turned back, shooting a foul look at his godson. "Hiding behind her skirts?"

"Sure," Harry agreed, and then grinned impishly. "I get a great view of her arse from there."

Sirius laughed loudly. "You seem to have fallen for a fire cracker."

Harry nodded, "I know. She's amazing."

"Anyway, back to Apparating. I'm supposed to give you a load of theory about how this works, but you know me. I couldn't follow a rule if I was drawing a straight line."

Harry laughed and nodded.

"What I want you to do is pretty simple. All you're going to do is imagine, as vividly as you can a destination, which in our case is that corner. Then open your mind, and push yourself there. The travelling feels like the opposite of a Portkey. Whereas that grabs you by the stomach and pulls you, this is your magic pushing you, so it feels like a huge mattress is pressed against your back."

Sirius moved next to Harry.

"Watch me first." A fraction of a second later, Sirius was standing the other side of the room, having turned around.

“See, it’s easy.”

Harry nodded and breathed deeply, suddenly very nervous.

“Don’t worry about it,” Sirius called from across the room. “Fred and George can do it, so it can’t be that hard, can it?”

Harry laughed and nodded. He concentrated on the corner and tried to open his mind.

“That’s it,” Sirius’ voice floated across the room. “Now push yourself there.”

Harry tried. He could feel his magic growing behind him, eagerly trying to help, but he couldn’t seem to release it.

Sirius gave him another second, and then decided to help. As silently as he could, he Apparated behind Harry, and shouted, “Boo!”

Harry jumped, and twisted. “SIRIUS!” he yelled. “What the hell was that?”

Sirius looked smug. “Have you seen where you are?”

Harry looked around, and realised he was in the other corner.

“I did it?” he asked, uncertainly.

“Yep,” Sirius had a look of almost fatherly pride on his face. “Now, see if you can come back over here, without me having to scare you.”

Harry nodded, and did as he was told. He arrived next to Sirius with a loud pop.

“Excellent,” his godfather said. “Now, I want you to do it again, but this time, try and keep the noise down. I know the twins make a lot of noise, but they do it for effect. You’re going to want to be able to move as silently as possible. The displaced air causes the noise as you reappear. If you try and appear a bit slower, you should be able to do it.”

Harry nodded, and concentrated once more. It seemed a lot easier now that his magic knew what to do. The sensation was much better than using a Portkey. He felt like he was in control. He disappeared, and reappeared behind Sirius as slowly as possible.

With a grin, he shouted, “Boo!”

Sirius jumped, and glared at Harry, who looked back innocently.

“Ok,” Sirius growled. “As you seem to have this short range thing down, how about Apparating to Little Whinging?”

“Sure,” Harry agreed eagerly. “The park?”

“Yep,” Sirius said, as he vanished, leaving Harry to do it by himself.

The green eyed boy grinned and vanished as well.

Instead of immediately appearing, he paused in the ether to have a look around. It was exceedingly grey. He could see strips of light flash past him, and presumed that they were other wizards Apparating.

In the distance, he could see what looked like a wall, and moved towards it.

He was there instantly, distance having no meaning in the void. He took a close look at the wall, curious as to what it was. What he had thought was solid, was actually a fast moving swirling demi-sphere of magic. It seemed to cover a huge area.

As he watched, he could see small holes twinkle in the shield, as if it was made up of multiple layers of magic, all revolving around a central point at varying speeds.

Harry knew what he was about to do was incredibly foolish, but he couldn’t help himself. He watched the patterns formed by the shield, and then pushed himself towards the space where a hole was about to appear. He timed it perfectly, and was through the shield.

A millisecond later, he appeared in Professor Dumbledore’s office.

Dumbledore was sitting in his big chair, his feet on desk. He was not wearing shoes, but was wearing socks that would have made Dobby proud. In his hand was a report from one of his Order members.

Albus suddenly felt someone in his room, and jumped to his feet, his wand out and pointing at the intruder. As far as he was concerned, no one should have been able to just be there.

“Harry,” he said, as he sat back down again. “It’s not very nice to scare an old man like that. Shouldn’t you be with Sirius?”

Harry blushed. “Sorry, sir. I was Apparating with Padfoot, but stopped to have a look at the void. I saw this huge shield, so I had a closer look. I was curious, so when I saw a pattern in the holes that appeared, I shot through them. But I thought it was supposed to be impossible for you to Apparate in Hogwarts?”

Dumbledore fixed his pale blue eyes on the boy and looked thoughtful. “Not impossible, Harry,” he said eventually. “It’s just beyond the ability of

most wizards. Why don't you go back to Sirius, we'll talk about this later."

Harry nodded and vanished, finding it easier to anticipate the holes in the shield this time.

From: Albus Dumbledore

To: Aberforth Dumbledore

Subject: Wards

Aberforth, how are you, old boy?

I was wondering if you might do me a quick favour, and have a look at the wards surrounding Hogwarts. I've just had someone tell me there are holes in them.

Albus

From: Little Brother

To: Big Brother

Subject: Re: Wards

Albus,

I'm fine; people still leave me alone thinking that I am quite mad. Of course, the goats helped with that.

Have you tried Gummi Bears? They're a Muggle confectionary I tried for the first time the other day. Most enjoyable.

I had a look at the Wards, and I must say that they are still our finest work to date.

Impenetrable, and I couldn't find a thing wrong with them. I'm afraid that who ever told you there were holes in it must be as mad as I am reputed to be.

Abe

From: Dumbledore, Snr

To: Dumbledore, Jnr

Subject: Re[2]: Wards

I did try Gummi Bears a few years ago, and they were indeed, most enjoyable. Not as good as my Lemon Drops, of course.

I do wish you weren't quite so determined to appear mad. Or that you wouldn't do it in such a strange manner. Look at me, everyone thinks I'm quite mad, and I'm still respected.

As for the wards, I just had a student Apparate through them. He said that he paused to have a look at the Void, saw the wards, found a hole in them, and went through it.

Albus

From: I can hardly be called Jnr, I'm over 150

To: The Ancient one

Subject: Re: Re[2]: Wards

You were always the one who wanted respect, Albus; I just wanted a quiet life, a little barkeeping on the side, and helping you out when ever you ask. You know how I feel about the Wizarding world. If the Ministry had one bit of sense, none of this nasty Voldemort business would be happening.

Now, as for this student of yours... Need I point out how ridiculous that sounds? I was quite ready to declare you completely insane and commit you to St Mungo's. But, on the off chance you were right, I decided to try an experiment: I Apparated without a destination in mind.

It turns out that your student is quite correct, and that Void is a very good name for it. I would suggest that you try it sometime. Anyway, I had a look at our Wards, and sure enough, there are tiny holes in it. I suspect it is the nature of magic itself. I tried to get through one of them, but couldn't.

I also had a look at the Ministry of Magic, and found that they have some rather shoddy work over there. Not as good as ours at all. Their holes are much bigger, and I managed to get through them with some effort.

I truly wouldn't worry about it, Albus. I'd say that there are only ten or fifteen wizards on the planet capable of entering the Void, and only three (your student not included - and I mean You, Me and Voldemort) who would be capable of piercing the wards at the Ministry, and none capable of entering Hogwarts.

While I would say that a good half of the wizards capable of entering the Void are on the Dark Side, I think that none of them would even think of doing it. I hadn't.

Oh, and please congratulate Mr Potter for me. In fact, why don't you and he come to tea one night? I'd be fascinated by what else he could do.

A very curious Abe.

From: I'm only a year older than you

To: The spring chicken

Subject: Re[4]: Wards

Thank you, Abe. I appreciate your time on this. I'd be delighted to bring Mr Potter along. Congratulations on an extremely accurate guess by the way.

We have recently noted that, partly due to Harry's upbringing, he has no idea that there are some things you just can't do. He managed to capture Peter Pettigrew earlier using a Portkey Mmail attachment. It is most stimulating to teach him, as he is a constant surprise.

Shall we say Friday @ 6pm? I think I will get Mr Potter to Apparate us both to your house.

Albie

"So what took you so long?" Sirius asked.

"Oh, I stopped to have a look around on the way here," Harry replied cheerfully.

"How are you feeling?"

"Fine," Harry grinned.

"Ok, have you ever read *Quidditch Through the Ages*?"

Harry looked surprised at the apparent non sequitur. "I've glanced through it a few times."

"Ok," Sirius nodded. That was the only book that he could think of that Harry might have read that mentioned a limitation about international Apparating. "What I want you to do is called dual-Apparating. You're going to Apparate us both to Isla Español."

"Where's that?" Harry asked.

"You don't need to know," Sirius grinned. "Come on; are you up for the challenge?"

Harry reached out and grabbed Sirius' hand, and they vanished together, reappearing on a sandy beach.

"Wow," Sirius looked really impressed. "Great work, kid. Most wizards can't even travel internationally, never mind with someone else in tow. How do you feel now?"

"Tired," Harry admitted with a yawn. "Where are we?"

Sirius smiled a little, and led Harry down the beach, to a small cave. Inside it was the remains of a fire, and a lot of dead bird carcasses.

Harry's eyes went wide, as he turned and looked at his Godfather. "This is where you were?"

Sirius nodded quietly, an unusually serious expression on his face.

"You never told me what happened, in any detail," Harry prompted. He used his wand to create a fire and two comfortable chairs.

Sirius smiled and sat down. He looked out at the beach, marvelling once more at the 25-metre-tall spray.

"When Bellatrix sent me into the veil, I panicked, and attempted to Apparate away. It saved my life. The veil is a gateway to, well, somewhere unpleasant. I think I Apparated halfway through the transport. It was incredibly difficult, and I remember using everything I had. I ended up here, no idea how. I was so tired, I turned into Snuffles and fell asleep.

"When I awoke, it was dark. I tried to turn back, but couldn't. I had no magic left in me, at all. I was really worried, because the idea of spending my

life as a dog, on an island in the middle of nowhere, isn't that pleasant. And of course, I was worried out of my mind about a certain godson."

Sirius idly conjured up a couple of drinks, passing one silently to Harry.

"I was here about two months before I started to feel my magic building back up. I was extremely relieved when I realised that. I lived on the Mockingbirds and Lava Lizards that are the native animals around here, which wasn't the most inspired diet, but it kept me alive."

Sirius got to his feet and started to pace, the memories affecting him. "It was another month before I could turn back to being a human. I'd explored the island as a dog, but was worried about approaching people looking like I did - my terrorist look isn't that popular with Muggles."

"SIRIUS!" A voice suddenly shouted, interrupting them. A golden-skinned woman, wearing what looked like a light poncho and a vivid pink skirt, was storming towards them. Although Harry couldn't understand the language she was speaking, it seemed pretty obvious that she was swearing.

Harry looked at his godfather, who was shuffling his feet and looking embarrassed. The lady, who was barefoot, finally reached them, and without hesitation swung her right fist back and delivered a devastating right hook to the ex-convict's chin.

Sirius dropped to the floor like a punch-drunk boxer.

The woman, still incensed, kicked sand over him, still shouting in the strange language. Harry idly contemplated helping his godfather out, but decided that whatever Sirius had done, he probably deserved what was happening.

Finally, the woman dropped to her knees and kissed the fallen wizard hard, leaving him dazed.

"You godson?" she asked Harry, in broken English.

"Yes," Harry said, nodding at the same time.

"Sirius love you very much. Him talk about nothing else. Him also promise keep in touch with Juanita. Him lying pig."

Harry laughed, "You knew Sirius when he was here?"

"Sí, Sirius stay my place, make beast with two backs lots."

Sirius was now blushing furiously; he quickly cast a translation spell on the two of them, allowing them to speak Spanish.

"I'm sorry, Juanita," he started to apologise. "I meant to call you, I did."

"You bloody wizards," was the polite translation of the lady's words.

Sirius froze. "You know about wizards?"

Juanita rolled her eyes. "You appear from nowhere, with no identification, no means of support, saying that you have been around for several months. At the same time, the huge dog that was hunting the local wildlife disappears, and only appears when you are not around. You got excited when you saw an owl for the first time, and you managed to get off the island when someone sent you a dirty sock. I may just be a simple peasant girl, but I am not stupid, Sirius Black!"

"So, Sirius wasn't alone the entire time he was here then?" Harry asked.

"Suddenly he speaks Spanish like a native? Wizard!"

Harry nodded and took off his glasses; at least he knew where he was now. He remembered doing a school project on the Galápagos Islands before he went to Hogwarts.

He stared into the woman's eyes, examining her deeply.

Juanita gasped, before the Boy-Who-Lived turned his gaze onto his godfather.

Harry could feel Sirius' confidence, he'd had staring contest with his godfather before. He smirked to himself, Padfoot had no idea how much easier this was without his glasses in the way.

He smiled at the women in front of him. "Is there anything you want from your home?"

"My jewellery," Juanita replied, almost in a daze.

"*Accio Juanita's Jewellery,*" Harry called, concentrating hard, waving his wand.

"What are you doing, Harry?" Sirius asked, suddenly very nervous.

Harry smirked at him, but didn't answer.

The jewellery arrived a minute later. Harry stood from the chair, grabbed Juanita's, and Sirius' hands, and transported them to the Black residence in Grimmauld Place.

"Where am I?" Juanita sounded a little scared.

“England,” Harry replied. “Sirius loves you. He couldn’t come back to you, like he wanted, because he was still a wanted criminal for a crime he didn’t commit. He thought it would be better if you forgot about him than for you to live a life on the run. He was found innocent this afternoon, and the first thing he did was come back to be near you.”

The last line was a slight exaggeration, but Harry felt he could get away with it.

“Sirius, Juanita is in love with you, Merlin only knows why, and she never forgot you, or moved on. She has no family back home, and already knows a lot more than she has said about the Wizarding world.

“You can both tell me how you met later. I’m out of here!”

With those words, Harry Apparated back to Hogwarts.

“You love me?” Juanita looked at Sirius.

The wizard nodded slowly. “Have since I met you,” he said simply.

“Why didn’t you come back for me?” The unshed tears in her eyes hurt him more than anything else.

“I was on the run, living as a dog half the time. That’s no life for you. You deserve the best.”

“Don’t I deserve to make that decision for myself? I’ve lived as a peasant in Ecuador all my life, it’s hardly as if it could have been worse than that!”

Sirius moved over to her. “I’m sorry,” he whispered.

She placed her head on his shoulder. “I can see why you love him.”

The Animagus moved his arms around her, loving the feel of her in his arms again. “Harry’s pretty amazing,” he admitted. “He was the one who freed me.”

Juanita moved her head back, and then slowly kissed him.

Harry arrived back in Dumbledore’s office, completely exhausted. He immediately fell asleep on the professor’s couch. He was so deeply asleep that he didn’t hear the headmaster return, try to wake him, before settling at his desk to do some paperwork.

“Harry?” Dumbledore called.

Harry opened his eyes wearily. “Sorry, professor.”

“You need to eat,” the pale blue eyes were looking concerned at him.

“Did I ever apologise for destroying your office?” Harry asked tiredly.

“Yes,” Dumbledore smiled at him. “The minute you forgave the mistakes an old man made.”

“You’re not,” Harry started automatically, and then grinned impishly. “Well, actually, you are pretty old.”

Dumbledore laughed.

“Anyway, I’m sorry I did it, all the same.”

“I know, Harry, I know. Do you feel up to walking to the Great Hall?”

“Not really, no,” Harry admitted with a huge yawn.

“Well, we’ll eat here then.”

Harry smiled gratefully. “Actually, I think I need to tell a few people what happened this afternoon.”

“Who?” The headmaster asked.

Harry thought for a second, and decided to add Professor Snape to his mental list, he’d need him for the second stage of his plan against the Weasley boys, and besides that, the professor had offered him an olive branch that morning. “Ginny, Hermione, Professor McGonagall, and Professor Snape.”

Dumbledore nodded, and used Floo powder to invite Professor Snape, suggesting he bring a pepper-up potion with him, to his office, and to ask Professor McGonagall to bring Ginny and Hermione.

The two girls and the head of Gryffindor arrived first.

“Harry!” Ginny called, looking shocked at how tired and drained he looked. “What happened to you?”

“I’ll tell you when Professor Snape gets here,” Harry yawned.

Ginny sat next to him, and made him lie down so his head was on her lap. She gently caressed his hair, their audience pretty much forgotten.

McGonagall and Hermione exchanged a soft smile, and sat down quietly.

“Sorry I’m late,” Snape explained as he burst into the room with far too much energy for Harry’s liking. “I didn’t have any ready, so I brewed a batch up quickly.”

“Thank you, Severus,” Dumbledore smiled at him, and created him a chair.

Snape took one look at Harry, and handed him the potion, instantly recognising it was for him.

“Thanks,” Harry said, having trouble keeping his eyes open. He sat up and emptied the bottle in one go.

Everyone watched him, expecting to see the smoke come out of his ears, but nothing happened.

“Did it work?” Hermione asked.

“Yep,” Harry smiled. “I no longer feel like I need to sleep for a year. A few days should do it now.”

“Harry,” Snape frowned. “That potion should have you bouncing off the walls like an annoying Gryffindor.”

“M’eh,” Harry said, emphasising it with a wave of his hand. Several large plates of sandwiches appeared on the desk, and Harry wasted no time in demolishing the food. “Sirius is in love,” Harry eventually dropped into the conversation.

Snape dropped his plate. “What!?”

“Yeah, that’s what I thought,” Harry grinned. “It turns out that while we all thought Sirius was dead, the old mutt was ‘making the beast with two backs’ with an interesting Muggle named Juanita.”

“Juanita?” Dumbledore asked, his eyes twinkling.

“Yep, she’s a very pretty Ecuadorian.”

“How do you know this?” Hermione demanded.

Harry took a deep breath, and reached for his girlfriend’s hand. “I persuaded Sirius to teach me to Apparate.”

“Good idea,” Ginny smiled.

“After going through the basics this afternoon, he told me to Apparate us both to one of the Galápagos Islands, off the coast of Ecuador. While there, he told me why he’d been incommunicado for so long. Then suddenly Juanita appeared and punched him out.”

Laughter filled the room, especially from Snape, who was feeling a lot more sociable towards Black, after Ginny’s revenge earlier.

“Anyway, I could tell they were in love with each other, so I Summoned Juanita’s jewellery, and then transported the three of us back to Grimmauld place. I told them that they were still in love with each other, then Apparated back to Hogwarts, leaving them together.”

Harry was getting sleepy again.

“You can’t Apparate in Hogwarts,” Hermione stated.

Harry didn’t reply, he was asleep on Ginny’s shoulder. The girl lightly twisted, letting his head drop back into her lap.

The two teachers and two students automatically turned to Dumbledore for an answer.

The ancient headmaster’s eyes twinkled at the merrily, as he sat back in his chair. “Creating anti-Apparition wards is extremely difficult. What you are in effect doing is creating a permanent magical barrier around the area you want to protect. As you know, magic is a living thing, and is never stationary.

“From what I can tell, Harry was doing his first long-distance Apparating and decided to stop half way through it and have a look around.”

Snape and McGonagall both started. They looked at each other, and nodded together. They vanished, were gone for several seconds, and then reappeared where they had been.

“You’ve seen the Void?” Dumbledore asked them, a smile on his face.

“Yes,” Severus replied. “Good word for it. I’d never thought of having a look around there before. I could see the wards, very impressive.”

“Did you see the holes?”

“Yeah, but they were hardly there.”

"That's what Harry Apparated through."

"Could Voldemort do it?" Snape asked.

"I don't think so," Dumbledore replied cheerfully. "It's extremely unlikely he'd even try. If it hadn't occurred to us in all our years, I doubt it would occur to him."

"So why is Harry so tired?" Ginny asked. The idea that her boyfriend could Apparate in Hogwarts was extremely appealing; she could see all sorts of uses for it, and a few of them even had something to do with schoolwork. She was enjoying having Harry sleeping on her; it showed a level of trust in her that she really liked.

"Ginny," Professor McGonagall smiled at the red-haired witch, "the average wizard can Apparate around the country with ease, maybe get into Europe. Basically, the farther you go, the more tiring it is. Harry took another person half way around the world, something that took a phenomenal amount of power. He then brought two people back with him. I will be having a very serious word with Sirius about letting Harry do that. I can't guess how tired he must have been."

The five of them spent the evening discussing the events of the day, while Harry slept as peacefully as he ever had. Ginny's soft fingers were keeping away any nightmares.

Eventually, Dumbledore sent the two girls back to the dorm, promising to take Harry to the hospital wing where he could sleep off his exhaustion.

From: Bill

To: Brothers, all

Subject: My back hurts

Do you know why my back hurts?

Because I had to sleep on the bloody couch last night. My darling half-veela girlfriend used two languages to express her dissatisfaction at our actions against 'darling 'Arry'.

I don't like the couch.

I suggest we let Harry date Ginny.

Bill - And I'm not sure what "comment peut on etre aussi stupide et borné, ça me dépasse!" means, but by the expression on her face, it wasn't good!

From: Charlie

To: The Weasley Boys

Subject: Re: My Back Hurts

Well, Tonks also expressed her displeasure, vocally I might add. Having a metamorphagus as a girlfriend might have some perks, but it's EXTREMELY disquieting when she turns in to Mum to bawl me out.

Couldn't you have kept your bloody girlfriend in check, Ron?

C.

--
Draconis dominium

From: Youngest

To: Older ones

Subject: Re[2]: My Back Hurts

Well, I warned you this would happen. And don't even think about backing out now. So what if you lot are sleeping on the couch? I've been going through it for days now.

We're in this together.

Oh, I had an idea. Why don't we do a Weasley Huddle on Harry?

Ron.

From: Mr P Weasley

To: Siblings

Subject: Re: Re[2]: My Back Hurts

Well, I too spent last night on the couch. Penelope would not even allow me to get a clean robe today.

However, Ron is right, we are in this together. It is merely a minor setback.

Now, as for the Weasley Huddle idea, as the latest recipient of this technique, I can vouch for its effectiveness. Although candour does force me to admit that as frightening as the rest of you are, it's our little sister who is by far the scariest.

I don't know if you have noticed that her eyes glow when she is feeling passionate about something. They were glowing when she called me a 'pig-headed invertebrate' and I could feel them burning inside me. It was extremely disconcerting. I'm afraid that it was Ginny who forced me to examine what I was had been doing, and made me realise what a total tosser I had become.

I'm still grateful that you all rescued me from the path I was merrily heading down. I forgot the cardinal rule of being a Weasley: Family comes first.

Percy - a night on the couch makes one extremely introspective

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From: The twins

To: Not the twins

Subject: Bloody Hell!

What is it going to take to get you guys to give in? Ginny's old enough to look after herself. And quite bloody frankly, Harry's the best man for her.

Have any of you even seen the Prophet this morning?

Harry captured Pettigrew AND freed Sirius Black in one bloody day. Need we point out how long the Order has been trying to do that? Over twenty bloody years, that's how long.

We are NOT going to lock Harry in a room and try and scare him till he leaves Ginny like we did with Percy - it simply won't work. He's faced Voldemort!

We do not like being kicked out of bed either, especially when, for the first time EVER, we don't want to be part of this anymore.

Oh, and Percy, you were being a git; it doesn't stop you being our brother, though.

F&G

This Means War 6 - Are You Listening To Me?

From: Minerva McGonagall

To: Sirius Black

Subject: Apparating

Sirius,

Please come to my office at your earliest convenience. We need to have a discussion regarding your unusual techniques for teaching Apparating, and exactly why Mr Potter is currently suffering from a case of magical exhaustion.

Professor McGonagall.

--

Deputy Headmistress, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

From: Sirius

To: Reverend Moony

Subject: Erm...

Moony ol' boy, I feel that I should make a confession about now.

After my Apparating lesson with Harry yesterday, he's now in the hospital wing with a case of magical exhaustion, and I'm at Grimmauld place with Juanita.

S.

From: *rubbing his eyes*

To: The confessor

Subject: Re: Erm...

Who, or what, is a Juanita? And why is Harry in the hospital wing?

It was an easy job, Sirius - only you could make it more than that.

Confess all!

Remus.

From: Facing death row

To: My best friend

Subject: Juanita.

Before you have a go at me about Harry, I should tell you that I have been summoned to McGonagall's office to have a discussion about Harry. I don't think she's realised that I left school many years ago - and I don't think she cares either. I feel like I am fifteen again, and it's not a pleasant experience.

As for Juanita... She, not what, is kinda, well, the girl I fell in love with when I was in the Galapagos Islands.

Sirius

From: and I thought werewolves had wonderful hearing

To: Mr I-was-alone-on-an-island-for-months

Subject: Re: Juanita

Excuse me? I could have SWORN that you claimed to have spent the entire time you were there, magically exhausted as Padfoot.

I feel an explanation is in order. I will leave it to Min to have a chat with you about Harry.

R.

From: *looking bashful*

To: Werewolves do have good hearing

Subject: Re: Re: Juanita

Well, I was able to turn back to myself after a couple of months, but I had no real way of contacting anyone. I didn't have my wand, so I couldn't send a message that way, and as I didn't know where I was, I could hardly Apparate anywhere. You know that my long distance Apparating is suspect.

While I was human, I met Juanita when she was walking on the beach. For some reason, she took me in and looked after me. It took over a month before I could even say 'thank you' in her own language.

As my knowledge of Spanish increased, so did our relationship. I could just be me with her; I didn't have to put up a façade, or worry about my family's illustrious history.

When the owl arrived from Harry, with that heart-rendering letter saying a final goodbye to me, I was half devastated that I would be leaving Juanita, and half excited that I would see Harry and you again.

After I replied, Dumbledore sent me a Portkey as a sock, and I left, promising to go back to her. The problem was, when I got here, and I was on the run again, I couldn't do it, not to her. I couldn't ask her to live like I was.

Yesterday, I asked Harry to take us back there, so I could explain in person what happened to me. It was also a test of his long range Apparating. Well, he passed with flying colours. He dual Apparated us both there with hardly any effort.

While I was explaining to Harry what had happened, Juanita - who had been waiting for me - came up, punched me out, and then kissed me senseless. You know, I'm not sure which one had more effect on me, damn that girl can kiss!

Harry decided to intervene then, grabbed her jewellery and Apparated us both to Grimmauld place. I didn't even know he was going to do it.

The strange thing is, I don't think Harry needs glasses any more. He took them off to see if I loved her, and it was like looking into Dumbledore's eyes, only without his years of experience.

Sirius - Being serious for once.

From: Your friend

To: Dirty Dog

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Juanita

Only Sirius Black would escape from certain death, end up on a gorgeous island, and fall in love.

I think I should meet Juanita; I'll pop by later today.

As for your long distance Apparating, I still remember the time you missed, and ended up in that gay bar in London, in your Quidditch leathers.

Moony.

From: *embarrassed whimper*

To: I thought it was elephants that never forgot.

Subject: Lily

Here's the deal. You never tell Harry that story, and I don't tell about that time you asked Lily out on a date in our fourth year.

Padfoot

--

woof

From: Orla Quirke

To: Harry Potter Fan Club

Subject: Heroism

Guys,

Have you seen The Prophet this morning? It seems that Harry managed to capture a senior Death Eater and free his Godfather.

Where is Harry this morning?

Orla

--

President of the unofficial Harry Potter Fan Club

From: Laura Madley

To: Harry Potter Fan Club

Subject: Re: Heroism

Oh No!

Harry's in the Hospital Wing! I was talking to one of the 5th year prefects who saw Professor Dumbledore and Professor McGonagall levitate him there last night.

He must have been injured in the fight to capture that Pettigrew character.

What are we going to do?

Laura

From: Kevin Whitby

To: Other Fan Club Members

Subject: Re[2]: Heroism

From what I've heard, this is so like Harry. He does everything himself and always puts himself in danger.

I'll bet he was put under the Cruciatus curse - that's why he is in the Hospital Wing.

Isn't there some form of reward for capturing Death Eaters? If not, there should be!

Kev

From: Orla

To: Harry Potter Fan Club

Subject: Re[3]: Heroism

That's awful! I can't believe that anyone would put one of the Unforgivables on Harry. And I heard a rumour that it's not the first time he's suffered from that curse.

Ok, here's the plan. Laura, you're in charge of the get-well cards. Make as many as you can. We could also try sending something to Ginny Weasley as well, maybe some sort of consolation card - she might be more sympathetic if we're nice to her.

I'm going to talk to Susan Bones - she was one of the girls who were fighting over Harry that night in the Great Hall. Her aunt is the head of Magical Law Enforcement at the Ministry. She'll know if Harry will get a reward for his heroism.

Orla

--

President of the unofficial Harry Potter Fan Club

From: Orla Quirke

To: Susan Bones

Subject: Harry Potter

Susan,

Hi, I'm Orla Quirke, a 2nd year Ravenclaw. I'm currently the President of the Harry Potter Fan Club.

I'm Mmailing to ask if you could find out if Harry will be receiving an award for capturing the Death Eater yesterday, and for freeing Sirius Black.

At the moment, Harry is in the Hospital Wing, recovering from his injuries, and it seems like he should receive something for his heroics.

With many thanks,

Orla.

--

President of the unofficial Harry Potter Fan Club

From: Susan Bones

To: Aunt Amelia

Subject: Reward

Hey Auntie,

You'll never guess what! Harry has a fan club at Hogwarts *laugh*. They just Mmailed me and asked a good question. Is Harry going to get a reward for capturing that Death Eater yesterday? He's currently in the hospital wing, and I heard that he's in a bad state. He deserves *something* for fighting the Death Eaters.

Sue.

From: Amelia Bones (Head of Magical Law)

To: Minister Fudge

Subject: Reward

Cornelius,

I believe that it would be a good idea if the Ministry of Magic were to offer a public reward for information leading to the capture and prosecution of Death Eaters.

Amelia

From: Cornelius

To: Amelia

Subject: Re: Reward

Excellent idea. It will make me look thoughtful and generous in the eyes of the voting public.

C.

--

Vote Fudge in the upcoming elections. A vote for Fudge is a vote for Stability and Prosperity.

From: Amelia

To: Fudge

Subject: Re: Re: Reward

That’s wonderful to hear. I have notified the press that you will be awarding Harry Potter 1000 Galleons for his work in capturing Peter Pettigrew.

Oh, and do stop by my office sometime this afternoon. We need to talk about the investigation as to why Sirius Black was sent to Azkaban without a trial. I have informed the press that there will be a full and public investigation.

Amelia

From: The Minister of Magic

To: The Head of Magical Law Enforcement

Subject: Investigation

Amelia,

Are you quite sure that we need to bother with a full investigation? I can assure you that Millicent Bagnold followed Ministerial procedure to the letter.

I think it would be better if we just continued as normal.

Fudge

--

Vote Fudge in the upcoming elections. A vote for Fudge is a vote for Stability and Prosperity.

From: The Head of Magical Law Enforcement

To: The Minister of Magic

Subject: Re: Investigation

Think what you like, Fudge! I have launched a full investigation. Kingsley Shacklebolt and Percy Weasley are in charge, and have a full remit to investigate everything that has happened recently, as well as what happened all those years ago.

The results will be fully available to the press.

If I were you, I’d consider giving the reward to Harry now, as it may be your last chance for some good press before the election.

A.

The Hogwarts Hospital wing was quite different now, when compared to how it had been the year before. It had been a running joke for many years that Harry deserved his own wing since he was in there so much. The joke didn’t seem quite as funny, considering everything that had been happening to him.

Madam Pomfrey had decided to do something about it, this term. She had borrowed Hermione for an afternoon, and together they had remodelled one of the smaller rooms. It looked the same from the outside, but inside, it had several desks, a couple of comfy couches that could either be slept on, or sat on, and had a perch for Fawkes, and a bed for Snuffles. In effect, it was the perfect environment for Harry to be unconscious in, and for his friends to sit around in.

The desks were in place so that visiting students could do their homework, while keeping him company, and occasionally Madam Pomfrey would turn a blind eye to a student (normally Ginny or Hermione) who would spend the night there.

At the present time, the room was decorated with over a thousand get well cards, as well as small presents from grateful wizards and witches who wanted to say thank you for his efforts in capturing one of Voldemort’s key Death Eaters.

Ginny was curled up on one of the couches, a pad of parchment perched on her knee and a text book in one hand, as she contentedly studied her History Of Magic, while keeping a close eye on her boyfriend.

Hermione was sitting down at a desk, a pile of books next to her, as she did some extra credit transfiguration homework. She was much happier to spend all her time here now, as she had a desk to work on. She almost preferred it, actually, because it gave her a chance to work alone and study for pleasure and not have to help everyone else out.

Both of the girls had a better than average knowledge of first aid, almost as good as paramedic in the Muggle world would have. They had both learnt as much as they could, recognising that it was a skill that would always be useful when you were a close friend of Harry Potter.

“What should I do about this Fan Club?” Ginny asked, breaking the comfortable silence they had been studying in for the past several hours.

Hermione paused in her writing and looked thoughtful. “What do your instincts tell you?” she returned.

Ginny nibbled on the end of her quill, a thoughtful look on her face.

“Part of me wants to shut it down and tell them to leave my Harry alone,” she said. “But, I think a bigger part of me wants to encourage it. Not for Harry, or his fame, since we both know he hates that. But because it gives people someone to focus on. Let’s face it, if people are in a Harry Fan Club, they are not likely to become Death Eaters.”

Hermione nodded, considering her friend’s suggestions.

“True. How about I do something similar to our Defence Association coins for them? It could be like a membership card. If we’re clever, it will also mean we can keep an eye on them at all times, and rein them in if needed.”

“If we’re going to go that far, then we should get Harry to turn them into Portkeys. That way, if anything happens, they can always escape.”

“That’s a good idea,” Hermione praised. “I’ll get to work on the coins, and then we’ll get Harry to make them into Portkeys when he wakes up. I wonder why no one’s done that before.”

The two girls settled into silence once more, keeping their vigil.

Harry felt himself swim back into consciousness. He kept his breathing regular and his eyes closed. He wasn’t sure where he was, and didn’t want to tip anyone off that he was awake if he was in captivity (again). He cracked his left eye, just enough to take in his surroundings, and relaxed. He didn’t quite groan, but came close. He still wasn’t sure how he felt about having his own room in the hospital wing. He’d prefer to never see the damn thing again.

With his location secure, he looked around, and immediately saw his girlfriend on the couch. She was curled up like a cat, her head on the arm, asleep. The position she was in was the same one that had attracted his attention the year before. She had been in Sirius’ kitchen, waiting for news about her father, and he suddenly noticed that the firelight was being reflected in her eyes. It had been the first time he had really thought of her as something more than Ron’s little sister.

A quick glance around the rest of the room was enough to show that they were alone. And that he didn’t have his wand. The problem was that he felt Ginny would be a lot more comfortable in bed with him.

He held up his hand, and concentrated hard. Most of the times he had done wandless magic in the past had been done when he was emotionally unstable. He had used his anger to subconsciously power it. He wasn’t feeling anger at the moment, just a fierce desire to make sure that Ginny was comfortable, and that he would sleep better as well.

Instead of anger, he started to think about what his red haired girlfriend had done for him in the previous few days, how alive he had felt, and how loved. He felt like he finally had something personal that was his and his alone. The hole in his heart that had widened with Sirius’ almost death was being healed. The best thing he could say about the kissing was that it wasn’t wet. It was alive. She had the ability to make his heart race, his mind blank, and his knees start to knock.

The more he thought about it, the more he relaxed and just let his will take over. He watched, his face breaking out into a smile, and Ginny floated into the air and made her way to him. Freed from the confines of the couch, she stretched automatically, which allowed Harry to place her down next to him. She snuggled into the warmth of his body, so he placed an arm around her, holding her close.

He fell asleep again, now with the airy fragrance of her hair in his nose and the soft feel of her breath across his chest. He couldn’t ever remember feeling so content.

“Ginny Weasley!” Hermione almost yelled, as she walked in the next morning.

“What?” Ginny asked, slowly waking from one of the most relaxing sleeps of her life.

“What are you doing on his bed?”

Ginny’s conscious mind returned with a vengeance, and she tried to sit up. Only to find that Harry’s arm was holding her close, and showed no sign of letting go.

“She looked uncomfortable on the couch,” Harry interrupted, his voice a lot deeper than normal with sleepiness. “So I levitated her over here.”

Ginny squirmed under his arm, so he released her. He was pleased he did when a second later she placed a very firm kiss on his lips.

Hermione looked amused, and sat down on the couch and waited for the kiss to end.

“How long have I been out this time?”

“Only two and a half days this time,” Hermione replied. “If you two can manage to separate yourselves, I promised to tell Poppy when you woke up.”

Ginny smiled and reluctantly climbed out of bed. She moved one of the couches nearer, and sat back down again, while Hermione went to get the nurse.

Harry looked at her shyly. "I hope you don't mind?"

She shook her head rapidly and grinned. "I've wanted to sleep with you for years," she told him honestly, enjoying the cute blush that was his response, and then continued, "I slept really well. How are you feeling?"

"Awake," he replied laconically. "Which is a vast improvement."

"Well, Hermione's got all your homework, and she's put aside several hours to give you a crash course in what you missed, so you'll catch up easily. Sirius, Remus, and Juanita have popped by, as did the Minister of Magic."

"Fudge?"

"Yep," Ginny grinned. "It seems that your capture of Pettigrew was rewarded with a thousand Galleons."

"You're kidding me, aren't you?" Harry groaned.

"Nope."

Harry felt the cute redhead was enjoying this far too much. "Everyone thinks that you are in hospital recovering from your injuries you got fighting Voldemort."

"What injuries?"

Ginny laughed.

"The papers are all saying that you were gravely injured in a battle with a group of Death Eaters," she smiled. "We felt it was better that no one knew about your Portkeys, or your Apparating skills, so we let the press run with it. Haven't you seen your room?"

Harry looked around wildly, and groaned again as he saw the decorations.

"Glad to see you're awake, Mr Potter," Madam Pomfrey smiled as she entered the room.

Harry grinned at her. "Well, it has been several weeks since I've seen you."

"Next time, Mr Potter," the strict nurse smiled, "just pop in for a drink."

"Yes, Ma'am."

She laughed softly and checked him out. "What are we going to do with you, Mr Potter?"

Harry, moving with her, replied, "Let me leave so I can get some breakfast?"

"Well, you seem fine. No long range Apparating for a few days, though. You drained a lot of your magical power, and it will take some time to get it back."

Harry nodded, deciding that it probably wouldn't be wise to tell her of his wandless magic experiments the night before.

From: Draco Malfoy

To: Dad

Subject: Snape

Attachment: Snape_Evidence.pmt

Dad,

You may have heard some rumours about me that are not true. They were made up to discredit me. I AM NOT GAY!

To help clear my name with our Lord, I have attached some evidence that conclusively proves that Snape is a traitor and works for Dumbledore.

Draco

From: Lucius Malfoy

To: Son

Subject: Re: Snape

Draco,

Son, you don't have to pretend around me. As much as it pains me to admit, I had often thought that you were gay, and hearing what I did has only confirmed that. We are an old family and you are not the first pervert in our ancestral line. Just the first to be publicly exposed.

The evidence regarding Snape is compelling, and I will pass it on to our Lord. It might have saved your life.

Lucius

From: Lucius
To: Voldemort
Attachment: Snape_Evidence.pmt
Subject: Severus Snape

My Lord,

Draco wanted to prove that he is still a valuable member of our people at Hogwarts. Attached is conclusive proof that Snape is the spy we have been chasing for all these years.

L.M.

From: Lord Voldemort
To: Lucius Malfoy
Subject: Re: Severus Snape

I will be calling a meeting tonight, where we will ask for Severus' opinion of this evidence.

I will make a public example of him.

I am pleased to see that your son is still loyal. I will refrain from passing judgement on him until we have seen if our plans for Hogwarts take shape.

L.V.

--
Victory or Death

"Thank you all for coming," Dumbledore said with a smile. "It's been some time since we have had a full staff meeting, and I thought it would be advantageous if I brought everyone up to date on what is happening at the moment."

There was a general hum of agreement from the gathered teachers. They had left the prefects in charge for the evening, while they had the meeting, with strict instructions that they were not to be disturbed.

Snape got to his feet, and looked at Dumbledore, clutching his arm. Dumbledore nodded, and Snape pulled out a Portkey and vanished.

"The first item on the agenda is the House Elves' proposal to redecorate the Great Hall for the Halloween ball."

Harry was sitting in the Common Room, alone in front of the fire. It wasn't that he was feeling unsociable; he just had an aura of being unapproachable at the moment. He really wanted to relax and with Ginny catching up on some of the sleep she had lost looking after him, he was more than happy to spend the evening alone. Hermione was out doing prefect duties and to be honest, he didn't want to talk to anyone else.

He frowned as he felt Voldemort knocking on his mental shields. He had been practising Occlumency for the past year and had no problems keeping his enemy out of his mind these days. The mistakes he had made that had led to Sirius' supposed death, had been a major incentive for him to improve his skills.

This attack was different; it was as if Voldemort really wanted to tell him something. Harry made a decision and jumped to his feet. He hadn't realised that the Common Room had emptied. He walked over to the stairs at the entrance to Ginny's Dorm, and concentrated hard, with his wand in his hand. He slowly floated up the stairs, avoiding the trap to keep the boys out. He knocked hard on the door.

The door opened slowly, and one of the Ginny's classmates looked at Harry in surprise, noticed the way he was floating, and simply asked "Ginny?"

"Please, it's important."

The girl nodded and dashed to wake Ginny up. The very fact that Harry Potter was floating outside the door, his scar a vivid red, alarmed her. Well,

actually, it scared her. A great deal.

"Ginny, wake up!" the girl said, shaking the sleeping girl's shoulder.

"What is it?" Ginny asked sleepily.

"Harry needs you, it's important."

Ginny jumped out of bed, instantly awake upon hearing those words. She pulled a robe over her nightie, and ran to the door. "What's the matter?"

"Voldemort wants to talk to me," he explained briefly. "I need your help."

"Dumbledore's office?" she asked.

"Yep, come on. We have no time to waste."

Ginny ran down the stairs, while Harry floated down. Together, they ran out of the Common Room, neither having any idea that the legend of Harry Potter had just acquired a new chapter.

They arrived in Dumbledore's office to find it empty. Fawkes chirped a welcome at them, but offered no explanation for Dumbledore's absence.

Harry frowned as he explained the situation to his girlfriend.

"Voldemort is trying to send me a message," he told her. "I think I should lower my shields and let him talk to me."

"Are you sure?" Ginny looked pale, her long hair was loose around her shoulders, looking sleepily tussled.

"No," Harry admitted. "But it might be important."

He looked at her pleadingly.

"Hold me while I do it?" he asked.

"Of course," she smiled at him, moving to the couch in front of Dumbledore's desk and pulling him along with her. She couldn't have explained just how honoured she felt at that precise moment. And how proud of Harry she was. So many times in the past he would have done this on his own, choosing to fight his own battles. This time he had asked for help, and asked for help from her. It made her realise that when he said he loved her, he hadn't been lying or exaggerating.

Harry moved over and stretched out on the couch, his head in her lap again. He smiled up at her, trusting her to look after him, and closed his eyes.

With a deep breath, he lowered his Occlumency shields.

There was a Death Eater meeting in progress. Twenty of the masked people surrounded Voldemort in a semi circle.

"It seems that we have a traitor in our midst," Voldemort hissed, and then seemed to look directly at Harry. "And we have our special guest here. Mr Potter has joined us to see what happens to those who betray me. Isn't that right, Severus?"

Voldemort pointed his wand, removing Snape's mask.

"It has come to my attention that our esteemed Potions professor has been passing on information to Dumbledore," he announced to his group of lackeys.

Snape sneered at the statement.

"Might I enquire as to where you received this information?" he requested. "I have been loyal since I joined."

Voldemort might have looked amused, if his snake like face was capable of displaying that emotion. "Draco Malfoy sent me a very convincing report."

"That little toad?" Snape did look amused. "You trust the word of someone who spends most of his time trying to chat up a guy in Hufflepuff?"

"A toad he may be," Voldemort mused, "but he is convincing all the same. Did you, or did you not, create a potion that fixed Harry Potter's eyesight, and make friends with him?"

Snape blinked, surprised that the Dark Lord was aware of those actions, and that was all Voldemort needed.

"*Crucio*," he hissed at Snape, who dropped to the floor in agony.

Harry opened his eyes, his face pale. "Voldemort has got Snape. We're going to have to rescue him."

How?" Ginny asked. She stroked his hair back, letting her fingers gently brush over his scar, which still blazed a brilliant scarlet against the pale white of his forehead.

Harry thought for a second.

"I'll send Snape an Mmail, and we can hope Voldemort will be arrogant enough to let him read it. We're going to need some help," he decided. "Can you go and find Hermione? I'll send the letter to Snape."

Ginny nodded and stood up with Harry. She went to leave, but Harry grabbed her and pulled her into a close hug.

"Thank you," he whispered into her hair.

"I love you," she replied softly, gently kissing him, before running out of Dumbledore's office to find Hermione.

"Where are you, Professor Dumbledore?" Harry asked the empty room. Fawkes chirped once more, in what sounded like a laugh.

Harry sat down behind Dumbledore's desk, and picked up a quill. It took him several minutes to write the Mmail and send it.

Snape was in trouble; he knew that he was going to die soon, and he welcomed it. He'd been under the curse for too long now to want to survive. The pain seemed to last for eternity. He gasped for breath as Voldemort removed it.

"How are you feeling, my loyal servant? Are you looking forward to death?"

Snape looked around, feeling the contempt the other Death Eaters had for him. He really didn't care. He looked down, as the sign for an incoming Mmail appeared. He was filled with a sudden wild hope.

Voldemort had said that Harry was watching, and at the time he felt that the idiot boy had failed his Occlumency, but he suddenly hoped that Harry knew what he was doing.

"May I read it?" Snape asked, his voice weak from pain.

"Of course, you can," Voldemort gloated. "Just keep in mind that it will be the last thing you ever do."

Snape read the Mmail, and started to laugh - a choking, hacking laugh.

"What is so funny?" the Dark Lord demanded, surprised by the unexpected reaction to the Mmail.

Snape took a deep breath and began to read the Mmail out loud.

From: Harry Potter

To: The Dark Tosser

Subject: My Potions Professor

Dear Tom,

It has come to my attention that you are planning on killing my Potions Professor. While his personality is a little hard to live with at times, I'm afraid that I really can't let you do that.

At the moment, Tom, I haven't got the time to deal with a half blood like you.

I eliminated Pettigrew and freed my Godfather a few days ago; tomorrow, I am going to be busy sorting out my personal life. As you can see, my time is limited, and I'm afraid that you are just not enough of a priority for me at the moment. Perhaps if you had any degree of competency, I'd be more tempted to deal with you immediately regarding your rather irritating behaviour, but let's face it: anyone who can't even kill a defenceless baby is pretty damn incompetent.

I suggest you spend some more time with Lucius and your other catamites - Draco Malfoy being gay obviously runs in the family - and when I have some time, we'll fulfil the prophecy and live happily ever after.

Well, I'll live happily ever after anyway.

Going back to Professor Snape, as I said, you're not allowed to kill him, so I have taken steps to ensure his rescue. As soon as he finishes this Mmail in fact."

Snape looked up at the enraged red eyes of Voldemort, and said, "Harry finishes the Mmail with these words:"

The words Snape used, on Harry's behest, were crude, extremely to the point, and fully explained Harry's feelings about the Death Eaters and Tom in person.

As Snape finished the words, the Portkey activated, pulling him through space. The sensation was too much for him, after all the torture he had undergone, and he passed out.

“FIND HIM!” Voldemort yelled. “Find out how he got away, find out what happened. I demand that you bring him back so I can kill him!” the Dark Lord screamed in rage as he hopped around on the spot. Like a toddler having a tantrum, he threw his hands into the air, and cursed in several languages.

“Bring him to me!” he yelled, in English, then started firing out random curses to anyone in sight. “Kill him, kill them both, kill them all,” he contradicted himself in his rage.

The Death Eaters Apparated away, each asking the same question.

“Voldemort’s a half blood?”

The staff meeting finished, and Dumbledore lowered the wards that were stopping people from receiving Mmails. As always, the Headmaster had many more than he could deal with, but his automatic filtering put the important ones first. He read Harry’s, and paused.

“Would you all mind staying for one more minute?” he asked loudly, causing the teachers to sit back down. “There appears to have been an interesting development regarding Harry, Severus, and Voldemort.”

Dumbledore used a charm on the wall behind him, and an image of his office appeared.

Snape reappeared in the Headmaster’s office, on the couch.

Harry watched from Dumbledore’s chair, letting Hermione look at the Professor.

“He needs some of the post-Cruciatius potion. And maybe a few other potions as well,” she pronounced, after a brief examination of the unconscious professor.

“Can you get what you need from the Hospital Wing?”

Hermione nodded, “There is no post-Cruciatius potion there, though.”

Harry nodded, as he followed his friend’s thoughts. “And we haven’t got the password to the dungeons. I’ve Mmailed Dumbledore, but he hasn’t replied.”

“They are all having a staff meeting in one of the private rooms. As a courtesy, they all turn off the Mmail notifications,” Hermione explained.

“Who’s the best student who could brew one of those potions?”

Ginny and Hermione exchanged a long look.

“Probably Blaise,” Hermione admitted reluctantly, not liking having to admit that she wasn’t the best at something.

“Do we have the ingredients needed?”

“Everything but the Mandrake.”

Harry thought for a second.

“Ok, here’s what we’ll do: Ginny, go wake Neville up, get him to harvest some for us immediately. If he asks about permission, tell him I’m taking full responsibility. Hermione, can you try and find Susan Bones first - she’s trustworthy - then get to the Hospital Wing and get what you need and bring it back here. I’m going to get Blaise and bring her here. It’s neutral territory, so she should be pretty comfortable.”

“If you see any of the prefects we trust, send them here as well; the more people we have to help, the better. In fact, I’ll wait here for a few minutes, as I’d rather not leave Snape alone and unconscious.”

The two girls nodded and ran out, Ginny still in her nightclothes. “Did you notice how Harry looked sitting in Dumbledore’s chair?”

Ginny nodded and smiled. “It will be his someday. After he sorts out the Ministry,” she confidently predicted.

“It seems that Severus’ cover as a spy has been broken,” Dumbledore explained to the watching faculty. “He has also been tortured. Poppy, is there anything that you could do, that Hermione and Ginny aren’t?”

The school nurse shook her head, a touch of pride on her face. “No, I’ve taught both girls what to do in a situation like this.”

Dumbledore nodded. “I think that I would like all of us to stay out the way, and watch what happens. I want to see how Harry handles being in a leadership position, with no one to turn to. We will only step in if it starts to endanger Severus’ health.

“Filius, would you mind charming the walls, so that one follows Ginny, one for Hermione, and the other to follow Harry?”

“Of course not,” the diminutive professor replied cheerfully.

Dumbledore turned to watch the wall with his office again; if anyone had wondered what he had thought about Harry sitting in his chair, they would have been reassured by the bright twinkle in his eyes.

Hermione laughed under her breath, and continued to the hospital wing, shaking her head in admiration of Ginny's ambitions for Harry. She approved of them, of course, and would give them her full support. She paused only long enough to send Susan, luckily the first prefect she met, to the Headmaster's office.

Harry looked up as Susan entered. "Did Hermione or Ginny explain what's going on?" he asked.

"No, Hermione didn't say what the problem was, only that you needed help urgently."

"Ok," Harry said, while deciding exactly what to tell the prefect. "Snape's been a spy for our side for a long time, Voldemort found that out this evening, and has been torturing him. I rescued him about ten minutes ago, but the teachers are locked in a meeting and we can't contact them, and he needs the post-Cruciatius potion. I've got Ginny and Hermione getting the ingredients we need. I'm going to get Blaise from the Slytherin Common Room now; I just need you to keep an eye on Snape."

"If anything happens, Mmail me, and I'll be back immediately."

Susan nodded, hiding her amazement at the little details that she had just heard, and watched as Harry ran out of the office. She shook her head, and decided questions could wait. She conjured a damp cloth, and washed the tears and sweat off the professor's face.

She didn't even think to ask how Harry was going to get into the Slytherin Common Room.

Harry rushed down into the dungeons and out towards the great lake. He pulled to a stop outside a statue of Salazar Slytherin.

"Would you mind opening up, this is an emergency,," he hissed in Parseltongue.

The statue blinked in surprise, and then obediently opened. Salazar had been a Parselmouth, and had set the Common Room so that anyone with the skill could get in.

Harry entered the low ceiling room, and had a sense of deja-vu from his second year.

"You," he pointed at one of the girls he didn't recognise. "I need Blaise Zabini urgently. Please go, wake her up."

The girl gulped, and followed his order instantly.

"What the hell are you doing here?" the irritating voice of Pansy Parkinson demanded.

"Who are you?" Harry asked.

"I'm..."

Whatever she was going to say was stopped as Harry used the distraction of his nonsensical question to point his wand at her.

"Expelliarmus, Petrificus Totalus, Incarcerous, Silencio ."

He didn't even look at her as she flew backwards through the air, her wand flying into his hand. She landed in a chair, where two more curses hit, one freezing her into stone, the other tying her up in thick ropes that appeared from no where. The final spell took away her ability to talk.

Crabbe and Goyle, who had followed the noise, started to advance on Harry - they were protecting Pansy now, so they knew they had to do something.

"Don't even think about it," Harry advised. "How do you think your parents will feel when I tell them I couldn't have captured Pettigrew without your unwitting help?"

"Huh?" Goyle grunted.

Harry was aware that most of the people in the house were now in the Common Room, watching him. He also realised that he was on a knife-edge at the moment, both from a personal safety point of view, and for the future of Death Eater activity in the school.

"Remember that Mmail you sent Fudge the other day? I needed him out of the way so I could get Pettigrew on trial with out Fudge interfering. Do you really think that your fathers would be pleased to know that you helped me out?"

Crabbe and Goyle looked at each other, their thought processes lumbering and slow.

Harry took a deep breath before speaking. The reactions of the students to what he was about to say could have far-reaching consequences for everyone at the school.

"You two have been following Malfoy first, and now Parkinson, for the past six years. Where exactly has it got you? You're pretty much universally

hated, everyone treats you with disdain, and the people you supposedly protect treat you like dirt.

“Why do it?”

“Dunno,” Goyle admitted, a bit reluctantly. “Don’t know what else I can do.”

“Then stop. Draco’s already proved that you could go against your family wishes by being gay, you can do the same. You fight for me, against the Death Eaters and I can promise you respect; that you will not be treated like you have been. You might even find proper friends.

“Or you can try and fight me. And you will end up like Pettigrew - an empty shell, his soul sucked out by Dementors. The choice is yours.”

Crabbe and Goyle looked at each other.

“Take a seat for now,” Harry said kindly. “Get back to me with your response.”

He twisted violently, avoiding the Hex that he had only just sensed. He twirled, facing Draco Malfoy. He didn’t go for subtlety this time; he threw both his hands forwards, and threw a banishing charm at the backstabbing Death Eater wannabe. His annoyance at being attacked from behind meant he was a little enthusiastic in his magic, and Draco flew thirty feet through the air, before impacting hard against the wall.

“What’s going on, Harry?” Blaise asked, trying to interfere before this confrontation turned into a full-scale war. She wasn’t worried about Harry, he could look after himself, and her group would fight with him anyway, but a lot of the students would only find that out the hard way.

Harry turned to her and smiled, the hardness draining from his eyes.

“Blaise,” he acknowledged. “Snape was betrayed by that tosspot over there, and was captured by Voldemort.”

He paused for the standard gasp from students that happened whenever he mentioned that name. “I rescued Snape a few minutes ago, but we need some post-Cruciatous potion. There’s none available at the moment, and Hermione said that you are the best at making it. I’ve got her getting the ingredients, and Ginny’s getting Neville to harvest some Mandrake at the moment.”

Blaise nodded, “Let me get my stuff.” She turned and ran back into her dorm room.

Harry faced the rest of Slytherin house.

“Over the last five days, I’ve captured one of the senior Death Munchers, and rescued your head of house from Voldemort. You have a choice that I want you to think about. You can continue to be Death Nibblers, like you have been, and you will end up against me - and you will lose.

“Or you can abandon the Dark Tosser and join me in opposing that pretentious incompetent idiot. I promise you that you will be allowed into the Defence Association classes, where you will learn to look after yourself, and will; find that serving an insane half blood lunatic was a really stupid idea.”

He wasn’t trying to be intimidating, and his magic was firmly under control as he tried to persuade them to join him. He was just Harry, another student, stating the facts with unalterable self-belief. And because of it, he actually garnered more respect from the students used to the magical posturing of their peers.

“Look at the two senior Death Nibblers in your house. Pansy Parkinson and Draco Malfoy. Look where it’s got them.”

Draco got back to his feet unsteadily. “Snape was a Death Eater. He deserved what he got.”

Harry shook his head pityingly.

“Snape is not, and never has been, a supporter of Voldemort, you idiot,” he replied. “I was there, Draco! He was tortured nearly to death because you betrayed him. Snape has saved thousands of lives over the past twenty years. There is proof that he is not a supporter. There is no Dark Mark on his left forearm.”

“But,” Draco started.

“*Stupefy*,” Harry sighed at him. “I’ve not got time to waste on you right now, Draco. Go back to chasing after Terry.”

He looked one more time at the silent students.

“The Sorting Hat wanted to put me in Slytherin. I begged it not to, because of the impression that Draco made on me. You’ve got to ask yourself if this is what you want. If being hated and feared by the other three houses is the image you want to portray.”

Harry and Blaise walked out together, leaving the students to talk among themselves.

“It looks like Harry has taken note of the Sorting Hat’s song,” Minerva said, a small smile on her face. “He seems to be uniting the houses, one way, or another.”

The other teachers nodded, enjoying the show.

They reconvened in Dumbledore's office; it was the first time that Blaise and Neville had been inside it.

Blaise and Hermione set to work, while Harry, Ginny, Neville, and Susan watched.

"We have a new challenge," Harry said.

"What?" Ginny asked. She was a little sleepy, but having far too much fun to even contemplate going back to sleep.

"We need a way of removing Snape's Dark Mark. I told the Slytherins that it has gone, as proof that Snape isn't a supporter of Voldemort."

"So, we're going to need a research party?"

Harry nodded. "With our best student tied up with potion making, I think we're going to need some Ravenclaw help."

Dumbledore watched, and then closed his eyes, sending a message to his pet.

Fawkes squawked and flew over to a bookcase, landing on a pile of identical books.

"What is it?" Harry asked the bird, walking over to have a look. He opened one, and smiled happily. Hermione would kill for this type of book, since it looked as if it was some sort of an index. You looked at the book name, and it became that book.

"Ginny, Neville, Sue, you're on research mode. I'm going to go borrow a few Ravenclaws. Any preferences? They need to be people we can trust fully."

Neville Longbottom and Susan Bones looked at each other, and gave a shy smile. They suddenly realised that they were also being trusted, and both quietly swore to themselves to be worthy of that trust.

It didn't matter to Neville that Snape had been such a git all these years; he wasn't doing it for him - he was helping because Harry asked.

"Roger Davies and Morag McDougal," Hermione interrupted from the corner.

Harry laughed softly and gave his three researchers the index books and jogged to the west side of Hogwarts to the Ravenclaw Common Room.

He looked at his watch, and was surprised to find it wasn't that late - he'd done a lot in the last twenty minutes. He magically knocked on the door.

A second year Ravenclaw, who Harry thought was named Orla, opened the door.

"Hi," he smiled at her. "Could you get Roger Davies and Morag McDougal for me?"

The girl stared at him, changed several colours of red, and then shut the door sharply in his face. A few minutes later, the door opened again, and the two students came out, shutting the entrance behind them.

"What's the problem, Harry?"

"I need your help on an emergency research job. We need to find a way to remove the Dark Mark, and we need it now."

"You never do anything by half, do you, Harry?" Roger stated. "Why us?"

Harry shrugged and grinned. "Hermione's tied up with Blaise making a post-Cruciatius potion, and she said that you two were the best."

Morag smiled. "It sounds like fun, lad," she said in her thick brogue. "The library?"

"Err no," Harry corrected. "I've commandeered Professor Dumbledore's office. We're working out of there, it is neutral territory."

The two students looked at each other, and followed Harry back to the Headmaster's office.

"It's for Snape?" Roger asked, in shock, as they entered.

Harry sighed, and repeated his explanation for what he hoped was the last time.

"Snape's a spy for us. Draco betrayed him to Voldemort. I rescued him earlier. Hermione has made him comfortable, and we're keeping him unconscious till his potion is ready. In order to prove to the Slytherins that he is not a Death Eater, I said that he doesn't have the Dark Mark anymore."

"These books are like an index. When you find a book you want, in the list, you just tap the entry with your wand, and close the book. When you reopen it, it's the book you requested."

"So, we have two Ravenclaws, four Gryffindors, one Hufflepuff, and one Slytherin working together," Professor Sprout said with pride.

Flitwick nodded, "It is good to see. I think that I am most impressed with Harry's ability to make decisions, after listening to the advice of the people

around him.”

“I think the important question is,” Rolanda Hooch said, with a frown, “will Snape allow me to change my bet for Harry?”

“Found it!” Morag announced with a wide smile. “I think.”

Harry closed his book, and relaxed into the chair. He hadn’t realised exactly how comfortable Dumbledore’s chair was. He looked down at the notes in front of him. It was a composite of everything the group had found over the previous hour. Hermione and Blaise had joined them, while the potion bubbled merrily in the corner.

“Ok, to sum up. The *Morsmorde* spell creates the Dark Mark, and is the same spell used to make the large one that they use to announce an attack. The big one has green sparks; the one on the arm is pure black. We know that it’s used as a communication tool by the Dark Tosser to call his Death Munchers for a meeting, and it turns red when it is being used - I saw Pettigrew’s once.

“The Mark itself attaches itself to the main artery in the arm, and worms its way to the heart, the base of the spinal column, and the back of the brain. It can then be used to cause agonising pain, and if necessary, death.

“Voldemort’s remote access to it is through a form of Legilimancy, and can only cause some pain and be a beacon. For the advanced stuff, he needs to be touching it.

“The Dark Mark is a corruption of an earlier spell, which was used in primitive times as a form of tattoo that showed people’s tribal loyalties. It ensured that people didn’t betray their tribe - and if they did, they died. Voldemort added the pain and summoning bits.

“So, what have you got Morag?”

Morag frowned, “It’s the original spell they used, to remove the Mark from women when they were marrying out of the tribe. It looks really difficult though.”

“Let me have a look,” Hermione said instantly. She walked over and crouched next to the Scottish girl. She looked up at Harry. “I can modify this so you can do it, but it’s going to take a load of energy. Why don’t you nip down to the kitchens and get some food, while we work on this spell.”

Harry nodded, and stood up. “You’ve all done a brilliant job so far this evening. We’re on the home straight now. I can’t thank you enough.”

There was silence as he walked out.

“Hermione, we haven’t got time to modify this spell,” Morag said quietly. “It would take months of work.”

“Ginny?” Hermione asked, knowing it was up to her more than anyone else.

Ginny nodded slowly. “Ok, I’ve got to ask that you don’t tell anyone what I am about to tell you. You’re here because we trust you. If Voldemort found out about this, it would probably mean a full scale attack against Harry, before we are ready.”

The students nodded solemnly.

“You have all seen Harry in the Defence Association, and the way he can suddenly end a duel by moving faster than you can see?” She didn’t wait for a response to her rhetorical question. “Well, we worked out that Harry doesn’t know what he can’t do. He has no limits. His upbringing as a Muggle with very little access to the outside world has meant that he has no clue what is possible and what isn’t.

“If we tell Harry that this spell will work, he will do it and it will work. As long as he believes it.”

“Wow,” Roger said softly. “So all we have to do is pretend we’ve made the changes, and he’ll subconsciously do the rest?”

“Yep.”

Blaise’s eyes went wide, as she leaped to her feet, picked Ginny up off the chair, and swung the smaller girl around exuberantly. “Do you know what this means?”

“That we are going to win?” Hermione asked for Ginny.

“Exactly,” she smiled as she hugged the younger girl tightly. “Don’t lose him Gin, because there are a lot of girls waiting to take your place. Me included.”

“I won’t,” Ginny said with confidence. “Believe me, I won’t.”

Blaise’s exuberance broke the ice, causing the others to relax.

Harry returned to find the others chatting, and paused to watch it. It was the first time he had ever seen members from each of the four houses so relaxed with each other. Even Neville seemed to be fitting in.

Harry walked into the office. “I brought some stuff for everyone,” he said as he sat back down in Dumbledore’s chair. “How’s the potion doing?”

“About five more minutes,” Blaise replied cheerfully.

“And the spell?”

“Ready. Professor Snape is going to need to be awake though, as he’ll need to help you fight it.”

Harry nodded. “Then I suggest we eat.”

“Albus, I’m a little concerned about the amount of magic Harry is using. He’s still recovering from a case of Magical Exhaustion.”

Dumbledore nodded slowly. “I can understand your point, Poppy, but I think we should allow Harry and his friends to proceed. They’ve already learnt more about the Dark Mark this evening than most people ever do. We’ve been searching for a way to remove it for sometime, and could never make that spell work properly. I believe it is more important that we allow Harry to proceed, and worry about his health later.”

“Ok, can you wake him up Gin?”

“Enervate,” Ginny said, pointing her wand at Snape.

Snape took an agonised breath, and sat up.

“Here, drink this,” Harry said, offering him a goblet full of the post-Cruciatius potion.

Snape swallowed the potion in one, and groaned in relief.

“Thanks,” he muttered, as the potion repaired his damaged nerve endings.

“It was our pleasure,” Harry smiled.

Snape looked around, and was surprised to see how many students were there, and that Neville was smiling at him.

“We’re going to have to remove your Dark Mark. We can’t let Voldemort control you any more” Harry said. “The guys have helped with the research, but we need you to help.”

“It’s impossible to remove,” Snape protested, he was still a little groggy, and didn’t want to think about what the group of students meant.

“We can do it,” Harry reassured him. “But you are going to have to trust me.”

Snape nodded slowly, focusing only on the boy in front of him.

“Do it,” he said, holding out his left arm.

Harry took a deep breath, and chanted the spell under his breath. He felt like his consciousness was sucked into the pulsating evil of the Dark Mark. He could feel Snape working with him, helping him as he pulled the strands of energy back into the Mark.

Outside, Ginny moved over to Harry, and wrapped her arms around him; she could feel his heart racing. She lightly wiped his forehead, removing the sweat that was starting to build up.

The mark seemed to pulse, and started to fight. Both of them felt Voldemort attacking their minds, as the Dark Lord realised what was going on, and tried to interfere.

“Leave me alone!” Harry yelled, his mind merging with Snape’s for a brief second, and they both pushed with all their might.

The connection to Voldemort vanished and a second later, the Dark Mark did as well.

For the first time since he had received the Dark Mark, Snape smiled. A full on, proper smile.

“Thank you, all of you,” he said simply.

Harry smiled, and then slumped into Ginny’s arms, unconscious.

Ginny laid him down quickly and started to cast some spells; Hermione joined her a second later.

“He’s exhausted,” Ginny diagnosed with relief.

“I must congratulate you all,” Professor Dumbledore said from the doorway, the three other Head of Houses behind him. “The way you have worked together was extremely impressive, and much needed in these difficult times.

“Severus, how are you feeling?”

“Wonderful,” Snape said with an honest grin. “I’ve not felt like this in...well, ever.”

“Minerva, will you take Harry to the Hospital Wing? Ginny, Hermione, I’m sure you will want to accompany her. Neville, if you go with them, Professor McGonagall will see you back to the Gryffindor Dorm.”

“I’d like to thank the rest of you, and ask that you accompany your Head of House back, and that you tell no one what has happened for now. We will discuss it in the morning.”

From: Minerva McGonagall

To: House Heads + Dumbledore

Subject: Points

So, how many points are we going to give to whom for tonight’s work?

Min

--
happy purr

From: Fil

To: Dumbledore (Featuring the Head of Houses)

Subject: Re: Points

Minnie, be nice. We all know there were more Gryffindors than the other houses put together. I don’t see why we should award points at all. Or if we do, we should award them equally. Everyone worked together.

F.

From: Pommie

To: Fellow leaders

Subject: Re[2]: Points

I agree with Filius. Susan might not have had a major part, but neither did Neville. Harry utilised the skills he needed and everyone should be rewarded fairly.

P.

From: Sewvie

To: The guys

Subject: Re[3]: Points

Hey,

Well, I think we should award everyone’s house the same, then give Harry a few extra - managing to remove a Dark Mark and rescuing me from Wart-Face should be deserving of something - not that all the students would agree. *grin*

Sev.

--
Advocating the end of silly wand waving for fifteen years

From: Minnie

To: Sewvie & the others

Subject: Re[4]: Points

You do realise Severus that it is going to take us sometime to get used to you being in a good mood? We’ve had years of %^\$)hole Snape to deal with.

M.

From: Sev

To: Min & the gang

Subject: Re[5]: Points

Why does everyone love calling me that? First Blaise, then Ginny, and now you?

Was I really that bad?

S.

--

Advocating the end of silly wand waving for fifteen years

From: Minnie, on behalf of Pommie and Fillie

To: Severus

Cc: The be-half-ees

Subject: Re[6]: Points

YES!

Min

--

contented pun

From: Albus

To: Senior Staff

Subject: Re[7]: Points

I have the solution for the point's issue. It seems that Mr Potter anticipated this, and left me a note with his suggestions.

-

Susan Bones: Nursing skills, Research, and looking after Professor Snape - 30 pts

Morag McDougal: Research - 30 pts

Roger Davies: Research - 30 pts

Blaise Zabini: Brewing a perfect Post-Cruciatius potion - 30 pts

Ginny Weasley: Research, support - 30 pts

Hermione Granger: Research, support - 30 pts

Neville Longbottom: Research, a perfect harvesting of Mandrake - 30 pts

For working together and overcoming house rivalries:

Slytherin house: 70 pts

Ravenclaw house: 40 pts

Hufflepuff house: 70 pts

Gryffindor house: 10 pts

Which gives each house 100 pts.

-

I found it amusing to note that Ginny's originally read "Ginny Weasley: Research, Support - 20 pts, for managing to be drop dead gorgeous, and insanely cute in her nightie at the same time - 50 pts," but he crossed that bit out.

I shall award the points at breakfast tomorrow.

Albus

--

Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot and Chairman of the International Confederation of Wizards

The students who arrived at breakfast the next morning, had one of the biggest shocks of their lives. At the professor's table sat Severus Snape with a smile on his face. While that was shocking in itself, the biggest was reserved for his hair... It looked... washed?

Snape and Blaise had returned to the Slytherin Common Room to find that all of the students were still awake and waiting for them. He had been slightly surprised by the cheer he had received.

He had answered a few questions, admitting that he had been a spy. While he was no longer a spy, and without the Dark Mark he was a lot more cheerful, it didn't mean he had enjoyed a complete personality transplant. That had been proved when he had promised Draco Malfoy that he was going to make his life hell for his remaining time at Hogwarts. The quiet round of applause that had followed his announcement showed that there had been a major change in the public attitude of most of the House's students.

As he left for the evening, Blaise had asked him what he was going to do with Pansy. Snape had just smiled evilly and said, "I'm sure that Harry will release the magic when he gets bored."

It hadn't gone unnoticed that the Professor had referred to Harry in a familiar, almost friendly way.

That had been the last nail in the coffin of the Junior Death Eaters. No one wanted to be against Harry, and they didn't want to be referred to by the derisory title of Death Nibbler either. The main advocates for joining the Dark Lord were now too scared to do anything, so for the first time, Slytherin house was being ruled by the moderates and it meant that Blaise, being a friend of Harry's and having worked to save Snape, was now the unofficial head. And she was even nice to Crabbe and Goyle, who had taken to shadowing her, now.

Professor Dumbledore stood and surveyed his school with satisfaction. He could honestly say that he was happier now than he had been for many years - almost since the first war with Voldemort started.

As the students slowly quietened down and turned to face him, he announced, "Last night, Professor Snape's cover as a spy against the Death Eaters was destroyed." After a brief discussion, He and Severus had decided to come clean with the entire student body to stop rumours about him circulating.

"He was captured by Voldemort." Like Harry, he had perfected the art of pausing for the shocks and gasps of horror at the mention of that name. "And tortured. Mr Potter then rescued him, which is the second time that Mr Potter has struck a deadly blow against Voldemort this week.

"Unfortunately, both myself, and the Hogwarts teachers were in a staff meeting, and were unaware of this. Mr Potter then arranged for some of our best students to work together and cure Professor Snape's injuries, saving his life.

"With that in mind, and on the behest of Mr Potter, who is recovering in the Hospital Wing again, I would like to award 100 points to Blaise Zabini and the Slytherin house, 100 points to Morag McDougal and Roger Davies and the Ravenclaw house, 100 points to Susan Bones and Hufflepuff house, and 100 points to Ginny Weasley, Hermione Granger, and Neville Longbottom from Gryffindor house. These points are awarded for their outstanding teamwork and school spirit, not to mention their amazing results. This can be seen by the completely healthy Professor Snape sitting next to me."

The other students looked at each other, and then burst into rapturous applause, causing those who were named to blush furiously.

"Wait a second," Morag's brogue easily rose above the cheering. When the noise level dropped, she asked, "What about Harry?"

Every head swivelled towards Dumbledore again, with the exception of Draco Malfoy, who was glowering. His glowering was not as effective as it once was - not after Terry had pointed out that it was actually pretty cute.

The headmaster's eyes twinkled merrily, "I'll leave that up to you. I suggest you work with Miss Quirke."

Every head turned, including Draco's, to stare at the second year Ravenclaw, who was blushing furiously.

From: Albus Dumbledore

To: Harry Potter

Cc: Aberforth Dumbledore

Subject: Tea

Harry,

On behalf of my brother, I'd like to invite you to tea on Friday night. If you would be as kind as to come to my office at 7 pm, we'll go there directly.

Albus

--

Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot and Chairman of the International Confederation of Wizards

From: Harry Potter

To: Aberforth Dumbledore

Cc: Albus Dumbledore

Subject: Re: Tea

Dear Sir,

I would be delighted to come to tea on Friday. Would it be too rude if I were to invite my girlfriend (Ginny Weasley) to come as well?

Sincerely,

Harry James Potter

From: Abe

To: Harry

Cc: Albus

Subject: Re[2]: Tea

Harry, please feel free to bring your girlfriend. It will be no trouble at all.

See you on Friday.

Abe

From: Harry

To: Gin-Gin

Subject: Friday

Hey sweetheart,

I've been invited to join Professor Dumbledore at a tea with his brother, Aberforth (the one who's supposed to be crazy - although how you'd get more crazy than the Professor, I don't know) on Friday evening. Anyway, I asked him if he would mind you coming as well, and he said it wasn't a problem.

Love you.

Harry

From: Ginny

To: The boy I'm in love with

Subject: Re: Friday

I'd love to go, it sounds like it could be a load of fun. One Dumbledore's bad enough, but two in the same room could be amazing.

When are you going to play your prank on my brothers?

Your Ginny

From: Eyes as green as a freshly pickled toad

To: The poet

Subject: Re[2]: Friday

I'm thinking Saturday would be a good day - probably during the evening meal. I've just got to get some advice from Remus and Sirius on how to do something, and I'm ready.

Love you

Harry

From: *blushing wildly*

To: Did you have to remind me?

Subject: Re[3]: Friday

I DIDN'T WRITE THAT. Fred and George did to tease me. They did apologise though, and I've forgiven them.

So, what do you have planned?

nuzzle

Gin

From: Yeah, I did

To: Eyes as brown as freshly skinned bear

Subject: Re[4]: Friday

You know I'm not going to tell you, so don't even try and get it out of me. It will be a surprise.

hug

Harry

From: Ginny

To: At least you're not as bad as the twins

Subject: Persuasion

Why don't you meet me in the Common Room, and we'll go somewhere to see just how persuasive I can be.

Ginny

From: Harry

To: Ginny

Subject: Re: Persuasion

I'm there now

From: Ron

To: The others

Subject: Rumours

Guys,

I've heard some really strange rumours today.

First off: Harry saved Snape yesterday - that you know about - but the rumour is that he found a way to remove Snape's Dark Mark.

Second: Don't open any attachment from Harry - I'm not sure, but that might have been the way he saved Snape - it's the only thing that made sense.

Thirdly: I think that Lavender and Parvati know what Harry has planned for us. Every time they look at me, they start to laugh.

Finally: I've got to ask if this is really worth it. I miss my girlfriend, I miss my best friend, and I even miss my sister. I've had a very boring ten days, whereas my friends have turned the school on its head.

Ron

From: Percy

To: Ron

Subject: Re: Rumours

Ron,

I know it's hard at the moment. But we are acting in people's best interests. We're protecting Ginny till she is old enough to look after herself.

Perce.

--

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From: Ron

To: Perce

Subject: Re[2]: Rumours

Perce, does Ginny really need protecting though? Mum and Dad don't seem to think so. She's certainly happy at the moment; in fact, I can't remember her being this happy. She's glowing.

If we're doing this for her, why are we going to take that away?

R.

From: The Dragon Master

To: Those who don't know the glory

Subject: Re: Rumours

Ok, I'll avoid any Mmails from Harry. Not that I have received too many from him. I wouldn't worry too much about Lavender and Parvati; it's possible that it's just your haircut.

C.

--

Draconis dominium

From: The curse breaker

To: Egypt is lovely this time of the year, you should try it

Subject: Re: Re: Rumours

Ditto on the Mmails. You know, despite everything, I'm kinda nervous about this prank of Harry's. It's like a weight just hanging there. I wish he'd just get on with it.

Bill

From: We told you so

To: Siblings

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Rumours

WE TOLD YOU SO. Look, if you're all so proud, let's just accept the prank, then apologise and get on with our lives - that way no one loses face.

F&G

From: Percy

To: The faint hearted ones

Subject: Perseverance

Guys, I know that it is uncomfortable waiting for the hammer to drop, but we are doing the right thing.

Percy

--

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"You look amazing," Harry smiled at Ginny. She was wearing a light yellow dress, similar to the one that had entranced him the day she had made her apology. He pulled her into a hug, just wanting to feel the soft warmth of her body pressed against him, and buried his face in her hair. "I probably don't say this enough," he confessed, "but I love you, Ginny Weasley."

She smiled into his chest, snuggling in a little. "I always feel so safe and warm when you hold me," she whispered, her soft voice barely reaching him. "It's like I know that you will never let anything touch me, never let anything bad happen to me. I feel like I'm the most important person in the world."

Harry felt his heart leap as he listened, and he tightened his hold on her. "You are the most important woman in the world," he whispered back to her. "You always will be."

Ginny tilted her head back, and watched as Harry smiled with his eyes, then leant forwards and touched his lips to her. It was a kiss of pure emotion, not passion, as they told each other through touch what they had said in words.

Arm in arm, they walked out together, neither of them even noticing the faintly nauseous expression on Ron's face.

"Harry, if you could Apparate us to Llanddewi Skirrid, it would save a lot of time."

"Apparate us there?" Harry asked with a grin, "I don't think I can even pronounce it."

Dumbledore laughed heartily and smiled as Harry grabbed his and Ginny's hands and Apparated them. He got them through the wards so quickly that his two guests didn't have time to see the void.

They arrived outside St David's Church, the sound of a W.G. Vowles Pipe Organ echoed through the air. Harry and Ginny turned in a full circle slowly, taking in the bucolic surroundings.

"That's Skirrid Fawr, or Holy Mountain," Dumbledore said quietly, as they gazed upon the outcrop that almost seemed to hang above the village. "Farmers used to bring soil from one of the Valley's down and spread it on their fields. They thought it was a panacea for numerous farm related ailments."

There was a thin veil of mist that seemed to hang in the air, lending the whole scene an air of unreality.

"Abe's house is this way," Dumbledore smiled, and walked off.

Harry shrugged off his jacket and draped it around Ginny shoulders. They were both wearing Muggle clothing. She shot him a grateful smile, looped one of her arms though his, and they strolled off together.

Albus smiled to himself, as he led them to a small cottage on the outskirts of the village. He opened the gate, and then paused as a goat ambled up to him.

"Albus, so very good to see you again," the goat said cheerfully.

"And you too, Michael. How are things?"

The goat seemed to smile, "Good. Good. Good company, good grass, what more could a goat ask for?"

"A very good question," Albus smiled. "We are expected."

Of course,” Michael backed up a few steps, and bowed in welcome. “Abe’s waiting for you inside.”

The three walked in together, and were immediately hit by the wonderful smell. “Abe, you’ve made your stew!” Albus sounded delighted.

“I could hardly have such distinguished guests and not,” Aberforth replied cheerfully. His long white hair seemed freshly washed, and he was wearing simple wizard robes in dark brown.

“It’s nice to meet you, Mr Dumbledore,” Harry said, offering his hand. “I’m Harry Potter and this is my girlfriend, Ginny Weasley.”

“I think that, for this evening, you shall call me Abe, and Albus Albus. With two Dumbledores in the house, it could get confusing.” He shook Harry’s hand warmly, and then kissed the back of Ginny’s.

Albus rolled his eyes, “Now, you turn on the charm,” he grumbled. “You didn’t do that the last time I brought a lady here.”

“That was 1922,” Abe protested. “And she was hardly a lady.”

“I was courting her!”

“Exactly!”

Ginny giggled softly, while Harry was looking at Aberforth with his head tilted. “You’re the barman at the Hog’s Head,” he stated.

Abe nodded. “Guilty as charged. It’s one of my roles that I do as a favour for Albus here. It’s amazing what people tell a disreputable barman when they have had a few too many drinks.”

Harry laughed. “I’ve got to confess, that when the Professor said that you had practised inappropriate charms on a goat, I didn’t think it meant that you had charmed them to talk.”

“What did you think?”

Harry blushed and refused to answer. Albus and Aberforth looked at each other, and then roared with laughter.

“What?” Ginny asked, looking faintly confused. Harry leant in and whispered in her ear. A second later, Ginny turned the familiar Weasley red, and then burst out laughing.

Abe moved sharply around his cottage, and took the jacket from Ginny’s back.

“Sit down, all three of you. Would you like a drink?”

“Please,” Harry said, sitting on the uncomfortable looking couch. Ginny sat next to him immediately. They both looked shocked as the couch morphed, moulding itself to them.

“Wow,” Harry half groaned.

Aberforth looked delighted. “Wonderful chair, that one. Picked it up in Hong Kong back in 1937. Charmed to fit anyone perfectly. Of course, one of China’s Warlords was most upset I got it before he did. I was persona non grata around there for quite some time.”

He vanished into a small alcove and returned a second later with four steaming mugs, which he passed out with a smile. “Drink up, there’s plenty more where that comes from.”

Ginny took a small experimental sip, and then gasped in pleasure. “What is this?” It tasted a little like Butterbeer, but only in the way that Dom Perignon tastes a little like cheap wine.

“My own personal recipe, I made it just before the first war. Of course, that was before the Wizarding world got a hold of it, corrupted it into that junk you drink, and patented it. I’ve never forgiven them for that.”

“Wait a second,” Albus interrupted, looking shocked. “Are you telling me that you leaving the Wizarding world was over a drink?”

“Well of course, what did you think it was?”

“Well, their incompetence and mismanagement during the first war.”

“Don’t be silly, Albie, I’d never leave over something as unimportant as that.”

Harry and Ginny watched the two brothers banter back and forth, and laughed together. They already liked the thinner version of their headmaster.

A chime struck melodiously in the background. “I hope you’re hungry,” Abe said as he jumped to his feet. He had the same sprightly energy of his brother.

“If we weren’t before, the smell alone is enough to make us,” Harry admitted.

Aberforth walked over to the kitchen area. Four plates leapt out of the cupboard and moved over to the cauldron where generous portions of the stew obediently leapt out of the cauldron and onto them. To one side, a freshly baked loaf of home made bread conveniently sliced itself into eight wedges, of which two attached themselves to each plate. A knife and fork jumped out of the cutlery tray and floated along besides the plates.

“Shall we sit at the table?”

The three guests stood and walked over to the table. The table walked away from them.

“Stop that,” Aberforth grumbled at it. “I’m sorry, damn table has a mind of its own. Made by a Swiss wizard at the turn of a century; it has ideas above its station.” He walked over and kicked it firmly. The table yelped, and then settled down.

Harry sat opposite Ginny, leaving the two Dumbledores to face each other. A plate landed in front of each of them. The two teenagers exchanged a long look. They had seen wandless magic before, but never with such an amazing ease and careless competence. If their professor was good, his brother was an absolute master.

They dug in without ceremony, the bread tasted amazing, as did the stew.

“Antipodean Opaleye dragon eggshells?” Albus asked.

“Nope,” Abe replied with a happy smile.

“Powdered bicorn horn?”

“You’ve said that one before. Back in the summer of ’76, during that heat wave.”

Albus looked disgruntled. “Shrivelfig?”

“Nope.”

“What are you asking?” Harry enquired.

Aberforth grinned. “Albus has been trying to guess what goes into my stew for years, he’s been remarkably unsuccessful.”

“It’s Marjoram,” Ginny blurted, without thinking about it.

Albus looked at his brother. “Is this true?”

Abe looked reproachfully at Ginny and sighed, “Yes.”

“A Muggle spice?”

“Yep.”

The ancient and venerable professor shot to his feet, and danced an unholy jig; he jumped into the air and clicked his heels together.

“100 points to Gryffindor,” he cried happily.

“Oh Albus, do sit down, you’re embarrassing yourself,” Aberforth complained bitterly.

“No I’m not,” Albus replied happily. “I’m embarrassing you. It’s a completely different thing.”

“I’m sorry,” Ginny apologised, blushing.

“Not your fault, my dear,” Abe smiled at her. “He still hasn’t worked out what goes into my Butterbeer.”

Albus stopped, mid dance, and frowned at him. “I don’t suppose you’d just tell me?”

“Not on your life, my dear older brother. Not on your life.”

After the dinner, which Harry claimed was as good as anything that had ever appeared from Molly Weasley’s kitchen, they sat back down on the wonderful seats.

“Now Harry,” Aberforth said, “I actually invited you here to talk a bit about wandless magic. What do you know about it?”

Harry sat a little straighter in his chair, and frowned thoughtfully.

“Well, wandless magic is simply that, it’s doing magic without using the magical core of a wand as a focus. It’s a lot more difficult to do, but is obviously a lot more useful as well - especially if your wand gets taken, or you’re duelling a brother wand. It’s powered by strong emotions, normally anger, or hate.”

“Excellent,” Aberforth praised cheerfully. “Have you tried any doing it with any other emotions?”

Harry nodded, “A couple of nights ago, I did some consciously, and I wasn’t angry at the time.”

“What did you do?”

He blushed slightly. "I levitated Gin from a couch into bed with me."

Aberforth roared with laughter. "Wonderful. Could you demonstrate now?"

Harry nodded, and smiled reassuringly at his blushing girlfriend. He looked into her eyes, and slowly started to think about what she meant to him, again.

Ginny found herself entranced, like the first time they had kissed properly, and she had felt the core inside of him. She could see the core this time, she could see inside him, and it took her breath away. She didn't notice that she was floating - all she could feel was the raging inferno inside him, and she knew she was safe, that she could understand it.

Harry lowered her back to the couch, and leant forwards. He'd seen inside her, she'd opened herself as much as he had, and it took his breath away. He'd seen her desire, her love, her acceptance of him, and it had affected him to his heart.

Gently, they kissed, their audience forgotten, reaffirming their vows to each other.

Unselfconsciously, they turned as one to their octogenarian hosts.

"Excellent," Abe smiled at them. He didn't mention the kiss; he felt privileged to have witnessed it. He had been able to sense the emotions they had been experiencing, and it was almost breathtaking. It was exactly the sort of thing that Voldemort would never, could never, understand. "Can I see your wand?"

Harry nodded and handed it over.

The ancient wizard walked over to his fire, and pulled out a stick. He cut it to a similar length, and then concentrated hard. The stick seemed to blur, before appearing as a perfect replica of his wand. He handed the stick to Harry, and the wand to Albus. "One of my teachers, a frightfully intelligent chap I studied under in the Himalayas in the last century, did this for me. I want you to use this fake wand at all times. It will allow you to practise wandless magic, in public, so no one will know."

Harry looked at his professor, who nodded cheerfully, his eyes twinkling merrily. "Thank you."

Aberforth wandered over to a set of drawers, and rummaged through them noisily.

"Lost something?" Albus enquired.

Aberforth pulled his head out of the drawer to show his brother a foul look. "Not all of us have an office full of paintings to remind us where we have put everything. Ahh, here we go."

He walked over and held out his hands to Ginny and Harry. "A small token for your visit. I got them from a delightful couple in Venice forty years ago. I think they will appreciate being owned by you."

Harry and Ginny took the two necklaces, which were a small amber stone with a rune carved in the side. They immediately put them around their necks, and then gasped.

Abe smiled cheerfully. "See, I knew they would work for you. They will allow you to feel each other's emotions. I'll leave it to you to work out how to use them properly."

"Thank you," the two said softly, touched by the gesture.

"My pleasure. Now, did I tell you about the time that Albus and I went on holiday, and Albus was arrested for an incident involving two nuns, a salami, two pints of red sauce, and the small dog named Jarvis?"

From: Harry

To: The remaining marauders

Subject: Prank

Guys,

Can I pop by sometime today? I need a bit of advice for the prank.

Harry

From: Padfoot

To: Harry

Cc: Moony

Subject: Re: Prank

Harry, pop by for lunch. Juanita wants to talk to you and she's promised to cook. Moony'll be here.

S.

--

woof woof

From: Lav

To: The boy who is gonna prank

Cc: Parvati

Subject: Costumes

Harry,

The costumes are done and look good, if I do say so myself. We've got to ask though, why this? I mean, there is a lot more embarrassing stuff you could do to them.

Lavender

From: Harry

To: My favourite seamstresses

Subject: Re: Costumes

That's great news. I'll pick them up this afternoon. Please keep them away from Ginny - you know how determined she can be.

As for the prank, I'm kinda between a rock and a hard place. Obviously, I need to do something big just from a pride point of view. But I can't do anything too humiliating. I will not be the cause of a big rift between Ginny and her family. I know that at the moment, she wouldn't mind, but I do. I want my best friend back. I want to know that I'll be welcome by everyone at the Burrow this summer.

Besides, I have a plan.

Harry

From: Harry

To: The members of S.P.O.T

Subject: Help

Ladies,

Hermione has told me that you are willing to help with my prank on the Weasley boys - in return for front row seats.

The prank will be this evening, at around 7pm. I can provide Portkeys that will get you to Hogwarts, but I need something put into the boys' food.

Can I arrange to meet with you, and ask that you add it to whatever they eat this evening?

Regards,

Harry.

From: Fleur

To: Darling Harry

Subject: Re: Help

Harry, I can meet you at the 3 Broomsticks at 3 pm. It will be good to see you again.

Gabrielle asks about you often; she was devastated to learn that you have a girlfriend now.

Fleur

From: Tonks

To: Harry

Subject: Re: Help

Wotcha, Harry. I've got a problem: Charlie's gone back to Romania for a few days.

T.

From: Penelope Clearwater

To: Harry Potter

Subject: Re: Help

Harry,

I would be delighted to offer my assistance this evening. Percival is doing some over-time at the office this afternoon. I'll be in our flat all day.

Regards,

Penelope

From: K & A

To: Our favourite seeker

Subject: Re: Help

Not a problem for us. We said we'd bring the boys some sandwiches later today. Pop by anytime.

Looking forward to the show.

K&A

From: Hermione

To: Best friend

Subject: Re: Help

Harry, do you really need my help with poisoning Ron?

H.

From: Harry

To: The other important female in my life

Subject: Re[2]: Help

Actually, no. :-) Dobby's already volunteered to help out with Ron. Professor Flitwick's helped with a couple of charms I needed. Padfoot and Moony have helped with the powder that I need to make them do what I want. Lav and Parv have done amazing jobs on the costumes. I've got permission from Professor Dumbledore to make a few modifications to the Great Hall, so I think I am all set.

Harry

Harry Apparated to the square outside Tonks' house, and knocked on her door.

"Alright, Harry?" Tonks grinned at him as she opened the door. "Come in."

Harry followed the Metamorphmagus into the small two bedroom flat, and smiled as he looked around. All the furniture was pushed against the walls, leaving the floor completely clear. As he remembered how clumsy she could be, he guessed it was a good idea.

"So, should I bother to ask how you got here when you should be in school?"

“Probably not,” Harry grinned at her. “I need your help.”

“I told you Charlie’s in Romania?”

“Yep, but that’s not important.” He leant forward and grabbed her hand, as he’d found out from Ginny earlier where Charlie was. A second later, they arrived at their destination.

“You just dual-Apparated us to Romania?” Tonks asked, stunned.

“The Carpathian ridges, to be precise,” Harry grinned. “And yeah, it’s a little skill I picked up.”

“What do you want me to do?” Tonks sighed.

“Charlie should be in that camp over there. They’d recognise a small white boy, but certainly wouldn’t recognise a disguised Gypsy.”

Tonks shook her head and laughed softly. “Fine, wait here.” She walked off towards the dragon camp, and as Harry watched, she seemed to blur as she shrunk and her clothing changed.

From: Harry Potter

To: Professor Snape

Subject: Help

Professor,

If I was to tell you that it was the Weasley Twins who redecorated your dungeon into pink a few years ago, would you then be interested in giving me a hand later?

Harry

From: Professor Severus Snape

To: Mr Potter

Subject: Re: Help

Harry,

Where exactly are you? Half the school is abuzz with the idea that you’ve vanished, and are off fighting Voldemort single-handedly.

To be honest, I’ve wanted revenge on Fred and George for many years, so yes, I will help. What exactly do you require?

Oh, and I have to thank you for the final words to Voldemort. I can’t tell you how long I have wanted to say that to him.

S.

--

Advocating the end of silly wand waving for fifteen years

From: Harry

To: Professor Snape

Subject: Re[2]: Help

Professor,

I’m in Romania at the moment. I’ve just asked Tonks to put some stuff into Charlie’s food.

As for the help, at around 6:55 pm today, I’m going to need a hand creating a stage in the Great Hall.

A grateful Harry

From: Sev

To: Albus

Subject: Harry

Albus, just to put to bed some of those ridiculous rumours, Harry is currently with Tonks in Romania.

He has asked me for some help creating a stage in the Great Hall this evening. I have agreed.

S.

--

Advocating the end of silly wand waving for fifteen years

From: Albus

To: Severus

Subject: Re: Harry

I am pleased to hear that. I did give Harry permission to visit the ladies he has asked for help, and while I did not expect him to end up in Romania, I cannot say that I am surprised.

I am delighted to see the two of you working together. While I hesitate to say it, I have mentioned in the past that Harry is not his father, and it is nice to see you seeing him for himself.

Albus

--

Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot and Chairman of the International Confederation of Wizards

From: Snape

To: Smug git

Subject: Re[2]: Harry

Why don't you just say "I told you so," and be done with it?

Yes, you were right.

Happy?

S.

--

Advocating the end of silly wand waving for fifteen years

From: Albus

To: Severus

Subject: Re[3]: Harry

Yes. Would you care for a lemon drop?

Albus

--

Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot and Chairman of the International Confederation of Wizards

Harry relaxed and watched the clouds rush by. He'd cast a warming charm on himself, so he was quite comfortable despite the altitude. He found himself wishing that Ginny was here, and decided that after this was over, he'd bring her to visit Charlie. It would be nice to actually see dragons in their natural habitat - especially when they weren't standing between him and a golden egg.

"Mission successful," a small Gypsy announced in a voice that could only belong to Tonks.

"Excellent," Harry smiled as she morphed into a tall girl with long blonde hair. "Do you want to come back to Hogwarts with me?"

"Sure."

Harry reached out and touched her back, not bothering to stand up. A second later, they appeared outside Dumbledore's office.

Tonks looked at Harry in complete shock as he opened the door, and walked up, knocking on the door to the office.

"Come in, Harry, Nymphadora," Dumbledore called.

Harry wandered in and took his normal seat. Tonks followed afterwards, visible shock in her eyes.

"So, is everything ready for this evening's entertainment?" the Headmaster asked cheerfully.

"It all seems to be going to plan so far."

"And how are you doing?" he asked Tonks.

"It's impossible to Apparate into Hogwarts," she blurted out, still stunned by what she had just experienced.

Harry laughed softly. "I'll leave you to it," he said as he walked out.

"Not impossible, my dear Nymphadora, just extremely difficult."

Harry sat with Ginny and Hermione, eating dinner. He had a vague nagging feeling that he had forgotten something. He was also very nervous; it was his first major prank after all.

"Relax," Ginny smiled warmly at him. "It will be fine."

"Eeek!" Harry squeaked. "Bugger! I know what I've forgotten: your parents!" He looked at his watch, "I'll be back in two minutes."

He sprinted out of the Great Hall, ignoring the looks from the other students and the teachers, and Apparated as soon as he was out of sight.

He appeared outside the Burrow, and knocked on the door.

"Harry?" Molly asked, looked rather surprised to see him there.

"Is Mr Weasley in?" he smiled reassuringly, showing that nothing was wrong.

"Yes, we've just finished dinner."

"Excellent," Harry smiled at her. "I forgot to warn you that the prank is going to happen in about fifteen minutes. I've come to make sure you are there to see it."

Arthur, who had followed his wife into the kitchen, smiled with anticipation. "Let me get my camera, and we'll go immediately."

"Are you sure we'll make it?" Molly worried, as she pulled on a coat. "It normally takes ten minutes to walk from Hogsmeade."

Harry smiled reassuringly at her. "Who needs to walk?" With Mr Weasley back, camera in hand, Harry grabbed both of their hands and Apparated them to the Entrance Hall.

"It's..." Molly started, only to be stopped by her husband.

"For a normal wizard, my dear, it is; but for our Harry, nothing is impossible."

Molly quieted down, and followed Harry into the Great Hall. All the students turned to watch as Harry led the two parents in.

"Mum, Dad," Ginny shouted with pleasure, jumping out of her chair, and running over to hug them.

Further down the table, Ron suddenly paled as he realised that the only reason that they would be here was if the prank was about to happen.

Harry pulled out his fake wand, and removed the hiding charm from a row of chairs that were placed in front of the Teachers' desk.

"I've prepared some comfortable seats for you," he smiled at the two people who were the closest things to real parents he had.

"Excellent," Arthur announced happily. "I'm so pleased you didn't forget us."

As they sat down, Harry pulled off his robes, revealing a Muggle style tuxedo. He ran his wand through his hair, causing it to look like it was supposed to be a mess, as opposed to its normal casual mess. The clothing made him look a few years older; the tight jacket emphasised his broad shoulders and swept down to his trim hips. The effect on the female population of Hogwarts was the same as if all the males had just seen a Veela. A soft groan echoed around the Hall as Harry noticed his shoelace was undone, and bend to tie it.

"Wow," Hermione said, "he looks good." She said it in the same way a sister would compliment her brother.

"Good enough to eat," Ginny agreed. She licked her lips and looked at him hungrily. She paid no attention to anyone else staring at her boyfriend; she was secure enough now to know that she would be the one he kissed later.

The first of Harry's other guests started to arrive, using the Portkeys he had provided.

"Fleur," Harry smiled happily, reaching up to kiss her on the cheek.

"Arry, It's soo good to see you," the blonde half-Veela gave him a hug.

Harry led her over to the chairs, and suddenly frowned as he noticed the dazed expressions on his male schoolmates' faces.

"Can you turn it off please?" he requested under his breath, referring to her Veela powers. He noticed that the only other two men who weren't affected were Professors Snape and Dumbledore, both of whom were well skilled in Occlumency and the art of protecting their minds.

Fleur blushed prettily. "I'm so sorry," she whispered back. "It's automatic."

Ginny was watching them closely, and smiled broadly as she realised that Harry had not been affected by Fleur's Veela powers.

Hermione was frowning; Ron hadn't been so lucky, and it looked like he needed a napkin.

The next guests to arrive were Sirius, Juanita, and Remus. Harry greeted them with a hug each, and welcomed them. All three were smartly dressed, and had proud looks on their faces. Sirius and Remus looked almost young again. The freedom Sirius now had, and the presence of Juanita, was helping heal the damage of his years of wrongful imprisonment.

"He doesn't do things by half, does he?" Sirius said to Molly with a large grin. His pride in Harry, and his anticipation could be seen by all.

Penelope Clearwater appeared next; she, too, was smartly dressed. She greeted Harry with a hug, and sat down next to Juanita.

Ron was now extremely pale. His mind was running through all sorts of scenarios, and he contemplated trying to escape.

The rest of the student body had heard the rumours about Harry's prank, and had absolutely no intention of moving anywhere.

Tonks appeared next. While she had been in the castle, she had decided that she wanted to appear to arrive like everyone else.

Finally, Katie and Angelina arrived; they waved at a few of the members of the current Gryffindor Quidditch team, and sat down.

Harry nodded to Professor Snape, and together they created a large stage, complete with lights, at one end of the Great Hall. Harry walked to the front, and nervously stood in front of everyone. He used his fake wand to cast a sonorous spell on his throat.

"After having your breakfast interrupted last week, I thought it only fair that I made up for that interruption by providing you with some Saturday evening entertainment," he announced to the patiently waiting students. He looked at his watch, and as it turned to exactly seven pm, Ron vanished with a pop.

Six Weasley brothers all found themselves pulled through space by a Portkey at the same time. They appeared together in the Potions Dungeon in Hogwarts. The door was firmly locked, and they found out a second later that they didn't have their wands.

"What are we doing here?" Charlie asked. He was the most surprised, having been in Romania only a few seconds ago.

They all turned to Ron, who now looked slightly green. "I was in the Great Hall. Mum, Dad, all your partners, and the Marauders have just arrived. This is it. This is Harry's prank."

Fred and George glared at their brothers. "Right, you lot! No more! After this, we are telling Harry and Ginny sorry for interfering, and letting them know they have our blessing to continue their relationship, however they see fit."

"But," Percy said.

"No buts, Perce," Bill interrupted. "I agree with them. It was a laugh to start with, but enough is enough."

Their clothes seemed to blur for a second, as the boys involuntarily changed into the costumes Lavender and Parvati had modified. Looking at themselves and each other, they all groaned as they realised the full extent of Harry's prank.

"I can't go out like this," Charlie moaned. "I'd never live it down if anyone heard about it."

"Did I mention that Dad has his camera?" Ron asked, looking at his own outfit in distaste.

"So, without further ado, let me introduce tonight's main act, Weasley, Weasley, Weasley, Weasley, Weasley, a-n-n-n-n-d Weasley."

Behind him, one by one, the six boys appeared, to laughter and wolf whistles of approval. Colin, who had been appointed official Photographer by Harry, started to take pictures of everything immediately.

Katie and Angelina looked at each other, and licked their lips.

"They look good, don't they?"

Oh yeah! We'll have to thank Harry later."

Ginny turned to Hermione, and whispered, "Have I mentioned that I love that boy?"

"A few times," Hermione smiled at her.

"Well, I do. A lot. This is so much better than the pranks I had in my mind."

The six boys stood there awkwardly till Harry started the music, and the Muggleborns cheered loudly, instantly recognising the disco classic.

Bill moved to the front first, suddenly finding he had no control over himself. He was wearing small black boots, and tight white trousers. He had a large black belt around his waist, with a black plastic Muggle pistol and fake handcuffs. Above that, he had a blue shirt and a white cravat. He had a black jacket, with stars on the lapel on top of that, a black helmet with a white sun visor finished off his outfit.

"*Young man,*" He sang to the disco beat, "*there's no need to feel down. I said, young man, pick yourself off the ground. I said, young man, 'cause you're in a newtown there's no need to be unhappy.*"

Fleur looked at the handcuffs with interest, and licked her lips. She'd always had a thing for men in uniform.

Charlie danced to the fore next, he was wearing brown boots and incredibly tight blue jeans, which were ripped in several revealing places and he was blushing furiously. He had a brown tool belt around his waist, an unbuttoned white shirt showing off his hairless chest, big sunglasses, and a white safety hat, with a single lightning bolt emblem.

"*Young man, there's a place you can go.*" Charlie took a deep breath, and continued, "*I said, young man, when you're short on your dough. You can stay there, and I'm sure you will find many ways to have a good time.*"

Tonks' mouth dropped open, and she made an instant decision that Charlie's exclusion from the bedroom was over.

Together, all six of them lined up at the edge of the stage. The students were completely into the song now, and their partners were having hysterics. Even Minerva McGonagall had a smile on her face.

"*It's fun to stay at the Y-M-C-A,*" they brothers sang in unison. They acted out each of the letters, by first throwing their hands apart in the air, then bringing their hands down to form the M. The jumped to one side, and held out their arms in a half circle, before finishing with their hands above their heads once more. "*They have everything for young men to enjoy. You can hang out with all the boys.*"

"So that's where Draco goes for his holidays," Dean shouted over the music.

Percy danced to the centre next, after they all repeated the chorus. He looked absolutely horrified at his costume. He was wearing tight black leather trousers that left absolutely nothing to the imagination. His leather jacket crossed his bare chest with silver chains, and his leather cap had a biker's emblem on the front. He didn't even notice that he had acquired a large black moustache.

"*Young man, are you listening to me? I said, young man, what do you want to be? I said, young man, you can make real your dreams. But you got to know this one thing!*" he sang, his movements jerky as he tried to fight the magic controlling him.

Penelope was sitting formally on her chair, a slight smile on the edge of her lips. Only the very faintest hint of colour in her cheeks showed how much she was enjoying the sight of her boyfriend in leather.

Fred shimmied his way to the front next. He had looked at George as they started, and they had both shared a laugh. He was more than happy with his costume, and admired the effort and thought Harry had put into the prank. He was already planning on working with his twin to duplicate the effect in a sweet. He leapt into the air and slid on his knees. The leather chaffs of his cowboy outfit meant he slid easily, before he jumped back to his feet and strutted along the edge, playing to the crowd. He tilted his large cowboy hat, pulled apart the leather waistcoat he was wearing, and sang, "*No man does it all by himself. I said, young man, put your pride on the shelf, And just go there, to the Y.M.C.A. I'm sure they can help you today.*"

They all moved together to do the chorus again, before it was George's turn. He spun dramatically on the spot, before falling to his knees, leaning back, and thrusting his crotch forwards. He could hear Katie and Angelina scream, as they had with Fred, and he smiled wildly. He couldn't remember the last time he'd had so much fun. His tight white navy suit glistened in the bright light, while his neckerchief flapped around him. He pulled out the white baton and swung it in tune with beat. "*Young man, I was once in your shoes. I said, I was down and out with the blues. I felt no man cared if I were alive. I felt the whole world was so tight.*"

Ginny stood from her chair; she was half laughing and half beaming with pride. She undid her robes, and placed them on the chair behind her. Beneath them she was wearing jeans and a t-shirt, both of which had been chosen to emphasise some of her more salient features.

"What are you doing?" Hermione whispered.

"Have you ever tried to wrap your legs around a boy when you are wearing robes?"

"Yes." Hermione admitted, as she blushed slightly.

"Then you know that it's difficult," Ginny stated.

"So you're going to be wrapping your legs around Harry?"

“As soon as his prank is over,” Ginny admitted happily.

“Why?”

“Well, partly because it would irritate the snot out of my brothers, but mainly because I really want to kiss him at the moment. He deserves it for managing to do the impossible: getting all my brothers at once, and doing it in a way that they can’t take permanent offence over.” Further conversation was derailed as Hermione suddenly became completely fixated on the stage.

Ron was the last, and he had to admire Harry’s thinking here. It was obvious that Harry was getting revenge for what Ron had done to him. His costume was the most revealing, a full Red Indian, complete with feathered head set. He had a large belt with beads hiding his black underwear, and was wearing thick furred boots. He knew that he would never, ever, live this down while at school. Or at home, as he saw his father taking as many photographs of him as he could. “*That’s when someone came up to me, and said, young man, take a walk up the street. There’s a place there called the Y.M.C.A. They can start you back on your way.*”

The boys moved together, and ended the song with Fred, George, and Ron crouched down at the front, their three older brothers stood behind them, their legs spread wide, and their arms in the air.

The cheer that rocked the Great Hall was deafening, as was the laughter that followed.

Harry stood; tear tracks from his laughter visible down his face. The boys were locked in place, and would be till he released them from the spell. He walked to the front of the stage.

What he was about to say was forgotten, as Ginny ran down the Great Hall and leaped on him. She wrapped her legs tightly around his waist, used them for leverage, grasped his face in her hands and kissed him as hard and as passionately as she could.

Harry’s hand automatically flew around her, supporting her, as he kissed her back, his exultation from the successful prank ensuring that he matched her passion.

Four of the boys winced as one, straining against the magical bonds they were in. Two of the boys, who happened to be twins, laughed softly.

“You think that Gin would be able to teach Katie to kiss like that?” one of them asked.

“Dunno,” the other responded, “but you have to admire her lung capacity.”

“Fred! George!” The others said as loudly as they could. “That’s your sister!”

“Exactly,” Fred snapped. “And she looks incredibly happy! It was all very well, us playing with her life from afar, but take a look at her. Take a long bloody look at her. She’s happy, in a way I haven’t seen in years. In fact, she has the same look in her eyes as when she was younger, before that crap with the diary.”

“They’re right,” Charlie admitted reluctantly. “I guess I was still seeing Ginny as the eleven year old Harry carried out of the Chamber. It’s pretty damn obvious that she has grown up since then. And that is one impressive kiss. I’d still rather not see it, though.”

“Yeah,” Bill sighed audibly. “One second she’s knee high to a grasshopper, bouncing around with so much cuteness it should be illegal, and the next she’s all grown up...and doesn’t she at least have to breathe? Bloody hell, she’s still kissing him. Look, I’ll admit that she seems really happy, but does she have to continue to do that in front of us?”

“This means I can get my sister, girlfriend, and best friend back,” Ron said happily. “Harry really loves her, you know. You should have seen them yesterday in the Common Room; they were so sickly sweet together, I felt nauseous. But, after seeing this, nothing could get any worse, so I guess I can handle it. And damn it, I know they are both fit, what with playing Quidditch, but you’d think his arms would be hurting now, with holding her up. I’m kinda surprised Snape isn’t stopping them.”

Ron glanced up at the teachers, who were watching with amused expressions. The students themselves were still laughing and cheering them on. “As soon as she takes her lips off Harry, we’ll tell her that she’s won, and I can go back to having a great life.”

Harry slowly broke the kiss, and smiled at her, completely ignoring the cheering in the Great Hall. He slid her down the front of his body, twisting her around so that his chest was resting against her back. His hands wound around her small waist and she intertwined their fingers together.

Ginny wiggled slightly, and found one of the problems of having her boyfriend taller than she was – she couldn’t reach her target, and only rubbed herself against his thighs.

“I’d like to thank the ‘Invincible Weasley Boys’ for their entertainment this evening,” Harry announced, after casting another Sonorous charm on himself. “Gentlemen, rather than let this escalate into a full scale prank war, I have a proposal for you: A Quidditch match. The six of you, plus one guest of your choice, against a team that I put together. If you win, I’ll stop dating Ginny. If you lose, you give us your blessing.”

“We agree,” Percy announced instantly, before the others could say a word.

This Means War 7 - Honest Abe

From: Fred & George

To: The Tosser

Cc: The rest of you lot

Subject: What the hell was that?

Percy, you absolute git! What the hell are you playing at?

We thought that we made it absolutely clear. WE LIKE HARRY! WE ALSO LIKE OUR SISTER! IN FACT, WE LIKE BOTH OF THEM TOGETHER!

If Harry hadn't sent us back when you agreed, we would have laid you out!

Fred and George

--
EXTREMELY IRRITATED

From: Back at Dragon Camp

To: All those back home

Subject: Re: What the hell was that?

Fred, George, calm down. Getting your blood pressure up like that isn't going to help.

I'd like an explanation too, but it will have to wait, Tonks has just shown up...and I think I like the look in her eyes.

From: Bill

To: Everyone else

Subject: Quick...

Guys,

Agree with C. Fleur's here and she's got the handcuffs...

Ginny pushed Harry into one of the comfy chairs in the Gryffindor Common Room, and sat down firmly in his lap. She had been waiting to get him alone since her brothers had disappeared as soon as they had accepted his challenge. Once they were gone, he then sent everyone else home, before returning the Great Hall to its normal state, and retired to the Common Room.

"How could you gamble with our future like that?" Ginny demanded, really not liking his high-handedness in proposing a bet that affected both of them.

"Who said I was gambling?" Harry asked with an amused look in his eye.

"You told them that we would stop dating if they win. I call that gambling."

Harry laughed under his breath. "We're not going to lose; I know who I want on our team."

"But how can you be so sure? My brothers are all good at Quidditch; Ron is the best keeper since Oliver Wood, Charlie is probably as good as you are, and Fred and George are legendary as beaters." She was starting to look really worried now.

"I am positive that we are going to win," Harry said softly, his hand reaching up to brush a lock of her hair behind her ear. "Besides, it doesn't matter

"If we win or lose."

"What!?" The petite redhead looked horrified, and slightly betrayed.

Harry moved to his feet from under her again, and lightly leant over to kiss her hair. "I told them I would stop dating you. If, by some freak of nature, we should actually lose, I'll just ask you to marry me early. We won't be dating then, we'll be engaged.

"I'm going to get some sleep; it's been a hectic day. Love you." He kissed the stunned girl one more time, then wandered off to bed, a smirk hidden on his face.

Ginny watched him go, shaking her head in disbelief as she tried to think her way through what he had just said.

She smiled slowly, before starting to laugh.

Harry Potter was going to marry her one day!

She stood and twirled on the spot, her arms out wide, laughing in happiness. First the prank, then a promise of marriage; she wasn't sure that she could be any happier.

She ignored the strange looks she was getting from the other students, as she made an instant decision. There was no way that Harry was getting away with that. She ran up the stairs to Harry's dorm, and pushed open the door.

Neville looked up in shock, as he was in the middle of removing his trousers, and blushed furiously. "Ginny," he croaked. "You're not allowed up here!"

"Oh pish," Ginny said, waving her hand dismissively at his complaint before she dived through the curtains surrounding Harry's bed.

"Hi?" Harry said, looking at her. He'd already undressed, and was lying on his bed, wearing only a pair of white silk boxers - a gift from Sirius.

"Did you mean what you just said?" she asked, crawling over to him.

"Yes."

"You do realise that you don't just tell a girl you are going to marry her, then walk away, don't you?"

Harry shook his head, "Seemed logical to me."

Ginny swung a leg over him, and sat on his stomach, fully dressed. She licked her lips slowly, as she looked down at the chest she had only felt through his clothes before.

"Quidditch really agrees with you," she mumbled, as she slid her hands over him, experimentally.

Harry groaned softly, causing his chest muscles to move under her fingers.

Ginny shook herself mentally. "Ok, Potter, when you tell a girl something like that, you have to give her the chance to respond. You don't just walk off, leaving her in a daze."

"Sorry," Harry said, an obviously fake look of attrition on his face. "What exactly is a proper response from a girl?"

"She gets to snog him senseless," Ginny grinned, as she leant down to do exactly that.

It was some time later that a dishevelled girl climbed out of Harry's bed, still fully dressed, and walked slowly to her dorm room, idly wondering where Ron was.

Harry grinned happily to himself, and yawned. He hoped that next time they could reverse the roles a little, as he was very, very, interested in seeing Ginny topless. He watched as she reluctantly climbed out of his bed, and made her way back to her dorm.

He couldn't help wondering how she would react when he did eventually propose to her.

As a sudden thought hit him, as he remembered just how tight the jeans she had chosen to wear were, so he leaned forwards to peer out of the curtains surrounding his bed. "Neville. Take your eyes off my girlfriend's rear, you prat."

"But she saw me undressing," Neville protested.

Harry glared at him. "I don't really care."

Neville gulped, and closed his curtains quickly, muttering to himself that he should have been able to at least look at her in return.

From: Bill

To: My wonderful brothers

Subject: Harry

Guys,

Have I ever mentioned how much I love Harry? He's the perfect person for Ginny, and would be a really good addition to our family. I think we should have a word with our Gin to make sure she doesn't lose him.

I think that last night, was without a doubt, the best night of my life.

Do you think Harry would tell me where he got the handcuffs?

Bill

From: Exhausted but elated

To: Male siblings

Subject: Re: Harry

I couldn't agree more. Any man who gives us a gift like he did last night has to be admired and accepted.

Tonks wouldn't even allow me to take the hat off...

Do you think we should get our partners to Mmail Gin with tips on how to keep him?

C.

--
Draconis dominium

From: Percy

To: The quintet

Subject: Re: Re: Harry

Well, yet again I seem to have descended into prat hood. I wonder if Mum dropped me on the head as a baby, as I seem to have an almighty gift for saying the wrong thing at the wrong time.

I'm afraid that I was so embarrassed by the prank last night, that I quite forgot that no one else wanted to continue this silly feud.

And after Penelope's rather convincing display of the benefits of working with Harry, not against him, it occurred to me how I have misjudged the situation.

It does seem very obvious, now, that Harry is more than capable of looking after our sister, and that he would be a most welcome addition to our family.

Penelope did mention that Ginny is determined that Harry will become Minister of Magic after defeating Vol...It's very hard to even write his name, but I think we have been afraid for to long. Voldemort.

Having the Minister in the family would be an added benefit. Not to blow my own horn, but I would make an excellent campaign manager, and secretary. I believe that I have the political nous to expedite their campaign.

While I am still uncomfortable with the idea that Ginny is growing up, I do feel that she should be encouraged to continue her relationship.

Perce

--
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From: The youngest

To: Older ones

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Harry

I think I need to go to see Madam Pomfrey, because the only way I'm going to get rid of this smile is with surgery.

I'll be apologising to them today, and telling them that we approve of their relationship.

Damn, it's bloody good to be me.

Ron.

From: Why are we the sensible ones?

To: Sex obsessed hypocrites

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Harry

How wonderful it is to see such a display of family loyalty. Harry gets us all laid, and all of a sudden you lot accept him? And offer to give advice to Gin of a similar nature?

What happened to finding a unicorn? Protecting her virtue at all costs?

You're damn lucky we agree with the result, if not the method, or we'd restart the prank war from when we were ten.

Now that you've all accepted Harry and Ginny going out (and more, if we read the tone of your Mmails) how are we going to handle this Quidditch match?

Forge & Gred

--

Weasley's Wizard Wheezes – coming soon to Diagon Alley.

From: Grinning like a Mummy

To: Other happy chaps

Subject: Quidditch

Guys,

Fred and George raise a valuable point. What are we going to do about this Quidditch match? The last thing we want is for them two to split up over this - Gin would never forgive us.

Bill

From: Grinning like a dragon

To: Dear brothers

Subject: Re: Quidditch

You know, I've heard a lot of people say that Harry is the best Seeker since, well, me. Sure, we've had fun playing at Mum and Dad's, but this is better. I want a shot at Harry.

Come on guys, we need to take this seriously, prove that we are the best, and then we can be magnanimous in victory and tell them that they can continue to date.

That way, not only have we proved that we are the best, we'll have made our sister happy.

Charlie

--

Draconis dominium

From: Grinning like a cauldron bottom

To: The non-political arm of the Weasley Foundation

Subject: Re: Re: Quidditch

Why Charlie, you actually used a word with four syllables. It's a pleasure to see one of my siblings glorifying in the freedom of expression that the English language allows us to utilise.

As for the match, I agree. While my skills are not up to your standard, I feel that I will be able to hold our own.

Who are we going to get for the seventh? It's a pity Gin is on the other side, as I have heard many reports of her skills as a chaser.

Percy

--

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From: Grinning like a chess piece

To: I like the idea of the Weasley Foundation

Subject: Re[3]: Quidditch

Yeah, Gin is a first class chaser. She's also a pretty hot seeker; perfect back up for Harry on the team.

As for the seventh, I guess the girls are all out - they've made their affiliation plain. Pretty much the entire school is on Harry's side, so all my friends are out, too. Dad's out, as well - I've never seen him laugh as much as he did last night. How about Lee Jordan?

Ron

From: Fred

To: George

Subject: Family

Do you think we could ask nicely and join Harry and Ginny's family? I'm sure they have a lot more fun and a lot less testosterone than we have to deal with. These gits just don't seem to get it, do they?

sigh

F.

From: Left hand man

To: Right hand man

Subject: Re: Family

I'm not sure that I'll forgive them for making us be the sensible ones. Here's what we do: we'll play along, then Mmail Harry and Ginny and take them out to dinner. We'll then apologise properly, and explain what is going on to let Harry deal with it.

G.

From: The two with a life

To: Those who need to get one...Grinning like a huh?

Subject: Re: Re[3]: Quidditch

Lee can barely sit upright on a broom, so he's out. We'll beg Alicia, she owes us a favour, and so it might work.

F&G

--

Weasley's Wizard Wheezes – coming soon to Diagon Alley.

From: Fred and George

To: Our benefactor

Cc: Our darling sister

Subject: Tonight

Harry,

Can you please meet us at the Three Broomsticks for dinner? We're guessing that you can easily sneak out (if not, let us know and we'll take care of it) as we really want to talk to the two of you.

George and Fred

--

Weasley's Wizard Wheezes – coming soon to Diagon Alley.

From: Harry Potter

To: D.A. Members

Subject: Meeting

Guys,

Just to confirm, we're having an extra D.A. meeting today @ 2pm in the Room of Requirement. We're going to be working on the new Shield spell that Hermione has found.

Please let me know if you can't make it.

As always, if you want to bring new people, you can, as long as you let me know beforehand.

Harry

From: Harry

To: The girls with magic in their fingers

Subject: Costumes

Lav, Parv,

Can you please turn up early for the D.A. meeting, around 1-ish? I want a private talk with both of you.

Thanks,

Harry

From: Gin

To: The Spy-master general

Subject: Harry

Hermi,

Can you keep an eye on Orla today? If you can suggest that she ask for Harry to get an Assistant Professorship for his reward, I'd be grateful.

I think that it would look great when he runs for Minister, and he might get a private room out of it.

Ginny

From: The Dark Queen of Slytherin

To: Marietta Marionette

Subject: Cho

I want you to persuade Cho that Harry still fancies her, and that his feelings for Ginny are down to the slut putting out. I want you to get Cho to kiss Harry in front of Weasley, ending their relationship.

If you do this, I will consider your debt fully paid.

Ron sat down opposite Harry and Ginny.

“Can we help you?” Ginny asked coldly.

Ron took a deep breath.

“Look, I wanted to say I’m sorry for being a pigheaded jerk,” he blurted. “Harry, you’re my best friend, and I should really have trusted you. Ginny, you’re my only sister, and you did kinda prove last year at the Ministry that you don’t need us trying to run your life.”

“Why did you do it?” Ginny asked.

“Because it was automatic, and as ashamed as I am to admit it, it was fun. We were trying to protect you, partly because, as boys ourselves, we know what boys are like.”

Harry noticed Ron’s eyes flickering over his shoulder, so he shifted to have a look. As he expected, Hermione was standing there, giving Ron the encouragement he needed.

“So you’ve accepted our relationship? Why now?” Ginny looked suspicious, as Harry watched quietly, letting her handle it.

“Last night kinda made me see things a lot clearer. But these past few weeks, with everything you have done, kinda made me feel that I was really missing out. You know, forced introspection. I’m not that good at thinking; I tend to let Hermione do that for me. So, without her, I had to think for myself.

“And, to be honest, I miss being a part of what is happening in the school. For the past few weeks I’ve been like everyone else, watching you three change the school from the sidelines, and I really don’t like it.

“Ginny, I’m sorry for trying to interfere with your relationship with Harry. I won’t apologise for Dean though; he wasn’t good enough for you. I should have realised from that start that Harry is.”

Harry shifted his eyes, looking at his girlfriend. Ron’s lack of trust had hurt him a lot more than he would admit. It wasn’t the first time.

Ginny climbed to her feet and hugged her brother. “Don’t do it again, Ron,” she whispered into his ear. “I don’t think Harry will forgive you next time.”

Ron nodded slowly, “I know, Gin.”

Harry stood, in that instant fashion of his, and stared at Ron for a second. Ron looked slightly nervous, as he became the latest recipient of Harry’s stare. Eventually, Harry held out his hand.

Ron looked at it, then grabbed it and shook it, before pulling Harry in for a brief, but heartfelt, hug.

“You wanted to see us?” Lavender asked, as she entered the Room of Requirement with her friend.

Harry was sitting behind a large desk, working on some paperwork. Both girls noticed how much he looked like a Professor these days.

“Please, take a seat,” he said, casually creating two with a couple of negligible flicks of his wand.

They both sat down, the feeling of facing a Professor increasing geometrically. They both admitted to themselves that it suited him down to the ground. His bright green eyes seemed to glow as he smiled at them.

“Tell me about your plans for when you finish school,” Harry eventually said, after a small pause.

Lavender and Parvati looked at each other, and then turned back to Harry.

“We feel that Madam Malkin’s has become stale,” Parvati said. “The basic robes a wizard wears hasn’t changed in over fifty years. There’s been no innovation for nearly that long. Have you ever wondered why the new heating charms aren’t built into cloaks?”

“It’s the same for Witches,” Lavender continued, taking over from her friend and roommate. “Some of the robes are downright ugly, and yet we are expected to wear them. We feel that there is an opportunity available in the market, right now, for a new range of magically enhanced, fashionable, robes.”

“How are you going to do this? Financially I mean,” Harry asked, his face not giving any clue to what he was thinking.

“We’re not sure,” Lavender admitted in a low voice. “Neither of us is rich, so we’re hoping to get good jobs first, then save our money to open the store, while designing and sewing in our spare time.”

Harry nodded slowly. "That's not the ideal solution, is it?"

"No," Parvati admitted. "But that's the only way we can see to do things right now."

"I have a proposition for you," Harry said, leaning back in his chair.

The two girls looked at each other nervously and leaned forwards, attentive expression on their faces.

"I will give you a thousand galleons to set up the store, in return for ten percent of your company. You will both run the store on your own, with no interference from me. I'll simply be a silent partner."

Lavender gaped at Harry for a second, then leant over and pinched Parvati hard.

"Ouch," Parvati replied, giving her friend an annoyed look while rubbing her arm. "We're not dreaming," she stated, her eyes slowly widening.

"Then Harry really did just offer to make our dreams come true?" Lavender asked, almost in a state of shock.

"Yes," Parvati replied, not much better off herself. Then she turned to face Harry, realising that they were ignoring him. "Why, how?" she stuttered, not sure what she was asking.

Harry laughed under his breath, and settled back in his chair, idly folding his legs in front of him. "I received a thousand galleons from the Ministry as a reward for capturing that rat Pettigrew. I really don't need the money," he confided. "And this isn't the first time I've been in this situation. The last time, I donated the money for another couple of students to fulfil their dream, and it has worked out admirably."

"Fred and George!" Lavender blurted. "We overheard them talking about how they had lost all their money betting on the Quidditch World Cup. You gave them your winnings from the Tri-Wizard tournament."

Harry nodded silently. The memory of those events still gave him the occasional nightmare, and Cedric would always live with him, but he no longer allowed it to affect him.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you," Parvati said, bouncing on her chair. "Thank you."

Harry smiled at them, as he reached down next to his chair, and chucked a heavy moneybag on the desk in front of them.

Both of the girls' eyes went even wider, as they had never seen so many galleons in one place before.

"If you want, we can go to Gringotts and open a business account for you," Harry suggested after a moment, as the girls stared with a combination of shock, happiness, and disbelief at the bag that represented all their dreams. "It should allow you some money to get materials for some stock before you open."

"How can we get to Gringotts before Christmas?" Lavender asked, her mind slowly returning to her.

Harry grinned impishly. "You have a free period tomorrow afternoon, don't you?"

They nodded.

"We'll go then. Don't worry, I'll clear it with Professor Dumbledore."

They nodded in unison, shock still clearly imprinted on their faces.

"Why don't you two go back to the dorms? I'll take you through today's D.A. lesson when you are a bit more focused."

They nodded again, and walked out silently, the money cradled in their hands. It wasn't till later that they realised they hadn't even said goodbye to the boy who had made their dreams come true.

Harry grinned to himself, as he turned back to the paperwork on his desk. He'd started assigning homework in the D.A. to make sure that the concepts were being understood. He was finding it a useful tool to check the levels that each student was on, so he could make sure that no one was falling behind, and if they were, take steps to bring them back up to speed.

He smiled, as he felt someone approach him. "Hi honey," he said quietly.

Ginny walked around the desk, pushed his chair back and climbed into his lap, her knees on either side of his legs. "That was probably the nicest thing I have ever seen anyone do, Harry Potter."

He flushed a little under her praise. "I don't need the money, Gin, and they did an amazing job on your brothers' costumes. Their idea about magically enhanced clothing is a good one. It also shows that they have put some serious thought into it. With that in mind, I'm more than happy to help them out a little."

"Why didn't you just give them the money? Why the sudden interest in running a business?"

Harry looked thoughtful. "I guess I want to earn my way through the world. I don't want to spend my days living off my parents' money. When I gave Fred and George that money, I just wanted to get rid of it. I knew they needed it, and they are family, so I forced them into taking it. I thought that we

would need some laughs during the war, and they are the best at providing that. It wasn't till later that I found out they had made me a partner.

"So when I was thinking about giving away this money, I realised I could give it to Lavender and Parvati, get something back, and have a pretty steady source of income. As much as I like them, they aren't family."

Ginny shook her head slowly. "You are amazing," she said as she leant in and touched her lips to his, "absolutely amazing."

The two didn't move from the spot for several minutes, enjoying the time to kiss without interruption.

Eventually, they separated, smiling lovingly at each other. "So, what's the plan for today, Professor?"

Harry poked Ginny in the arm. "Less of the Professor, please. We're going to cover the Shield spell Hermione came up with. I want you to work with Luna; she seems to be missing the basic concept behind the simple ones we did last week. See if you can bring her up to speed, and help her with today's.

"I'm going to have Hermione working with some of the third years, and Blaise with some of the fifth year Hufflepuffs.

"I'm going to take everyone else, and do a demonstration first, and then go around helping make sure everyone can get it."

Ginny nodded slowly, a playful look in her eyes.

Severus Snape cast the invisibility spell on himself; it was always strange to watch yourself slowly slide out of sight. "How do I look?"

Minerva McGonagall smiled slightly. "Invisible," was her dry comment.

"Indeed," Filius Flitwick agreed. "Excellent work, Severus."

"Are you sure this is necessary?" Albus Dumbledore asked. "I'm sure Harry would welcome you into the D.A. without this subterfuge."

"That's not the point, Albus," Snape said, his voice echoing eerily. "We want to see how he handles it normally, not when he's on display. And as the only person with experience in being a spy, I'm the obvious choice."

"As you wish," Albus said softly, his eyes twinkling with hidden amusement.

Lavender and Parvati turned up late for the meeting to Harry's surprise, and they instantly walked over to Ginny's group.

"Ginny," Lavender said quietly, as she followed Luna's examples and tried to cast the Shield spell. "Is Harry a leg or a breast man?"

"What?" Ginny croaked, suddenly turning the familiar Weasley red.

"You know what Harry did for us, earlier?"

Ginny nodded.

"Well, we're doing your costume for the ball. So we need to know which one he prefers."

"I'm not sure," Ginny replied, almost under her breath.

"Well, doesn't he pay any attention to one more than the other, when you're snogging?" Parvati asked, looking a little surprised.

Ginny blushed furiously, and croaked, "Well, not really, he's an equal opportunity kinda guy. And we haven't really got that far yet anyway."

"We need to know urgently, Ginny. We can only emphasise one for your costume - if we did both, you'd look like a tramp."

"I'll find out for you," Luna announced airily, as she turned on her heel and meandered her way towards Harry. As she walked, she undid the top four buttons of her shirt, absently pulling the material apart. She tapped Harry on the shoulder.

Harry turned and looked at her, "Luna?"

The blonde smiled dreamily at him, and threw back her shoulders. "Did I tell you about my father's trip over the summer?"

The movement caught Harry's eyes, and he looked down, blinked in absolute disbelief, and then slowly flushed bright red.

"Eeerk, no," he squeaked, returning his eyes to hers as quickly as was humanly possible. "Did you know that your shirt is undone?"

Luna looked down, and smiled, completely unconcerned. "I wanted to ask you about this spell, I just can't quite get it right."

Blaise walked over to Ginny, and asked, "Do I want to know why Luna has her blouse undone?"

Ginny shook her head mutely. "You think I should rescue Harry?"

Blaise looked over at the green-eyed boy, and grinned. “He seems to be handling it well. Better than Neville is.”

Ginny followed Blaise’s gaze, and looked at Neville, who looked spell bound for a totally different reason than normal.

“Why is she doing that?”

“Lavender and Parvati wanted to know what Harry’s preference was: legs or breasts; so Luna decided to help out.”

Blaise laughed under her breath. “You know the *Accio* spell?”

“Of course,” Ginny said.

“You can’t expect him to make a decision based on half the facts, can you?”

Ginny looked shocked for a second, before an evil grin formed on her face. “It would be interesting to see how Harry handles it.”

“You’re a true Slytherin, Gin,” Blaise praised with a grin.

“Why, thank you.”

Blaise walked over to Harry, who was valiantly trying to help Luna without looking at her bra-clad chest.

Ginny pulled out her wand, and waited, before whispering, “*Accio* Blaise’s skirt.”

Harry was helping Luna with the spell, and it was only through a rigorous application of willpower, of the sort normally reserved for confrontations with Voldemort, was he able to ignore the fact that Luna was taking every opportunity to show off her chest.

“Hey, Harry,” Blaise called, drawing his attention. He turned, as a stray curse seemed to hit her, removing the school skirt she was wearing.

It was then that Harry realised he was being setup.

It was vaguely possible for Luna to do something so bizarre, but most definitely not possible for a random spell to hit Blaise at the same time, as well. He was acquainted enough with the *Accio* spell to recognise its effects - after all, it had saved his life once.

Harry ignored the newly revealed legs before him, and snarled, “*Accio* Ginny!”

He heard her squeak, before she appeared in his arms. He placed her carefully on the floor.

“Stay,” he growled at her. His wand in his hand, he magically buttoned Luna’s shirt back up, ignoring the protesting groans from some of the boys - who now had a *very* different opinion of the strange Ravenclaw. Next he then conjured a new skirt for Blaise, while he made a mental note to try and get Ginny some of the underwear she was wearing.

“Explain!”

Ginny pouted prettily at him.

“Don’t you pull that face at me, young lady. What are you up to?” Harry tried as hard as he could to look firm, and not let his heart melt as she shot the most amazing pair of puppy-dog eyes at him.

“Nothing,” Ginny whispered, leaning in and lightly nuzzling his chest. “Do you think Blaise has nice legs?”

“I think that you have nice legs,” Harry said, determined not to get himself in any trouble, regardless of what he might feel.

Ginny smiled at him brightly. “That’s all I wanted to know.” She turned and went back to helping Luna with her Shield spell.

“I don’t suppose you’re going to explain, are you?” Harry asked Blaise, after walking over to her.

“Nope,” she grinned at him. “There are some things in life you’re not supposed to understand, Harry. This is one of them.”

Harry nodded, and looked at his watch. He turned and walked to the raised area in front of the enlarged room. The D.A. group had grown, and the room had grown along with it, as more and more students joined in.

“Ok, people,” Harry said, not bothering to shout. As soon as he spoke, the students stopped what they were doing and turned to him. “You’ve done really well today. I’ve seen some great progress from all of you. Lisa, Colin, Kevin, Graham, can you come up here please.”

With some trepidation, the four chosen students joined Harry on the small stage. “I’m going to fire some curses at you, and I want the four of you to work together and stop any of my curses hitting you.”

They nodded with firm looks of determination on their faces. Harry turned and slowly walked to the other side of the stage, giving them time for a whispered conference.

He pulled out his wand and turned to face them. “Ready?”

At their nod, he fired several quick curses, all of them basic and easily defendable. They handled them with ease, causing a look of pride to appear on Harry's face. Steadily, he increased the complexity of the curses he was throwing at them, watching as they gained in confidence, and pooled more of their magic together.

"*Crucio*," Harry hissed suddenly, concentrating hard on the hate he felt for Voldemort. The curse flew out of his wand, and hit the shield before anyone could react to the Unforgivable.

The whole room froze into silence, looking at him in shock.

Harry smiled slowly, turning slightly so he was facing everyone.

"What you have just seen was a demonstration of a student from each of the four houses working together. Between them, they pulled off the most powerful Shield spell known to the Wizarding world. They actually managed to block a Cruciatus curse!

"This is what we have been training for, this is what we have worked day in and day out to achieve. Colin, Lisa, Kevin and Graham have proven what I have been saying all along. If we work together we cannot be beaten, and the Dark Tosser has no power over us. We will face him and we will defeat him.

"Together, Hogwarts is unbeatable!"

The entire group simply stared at him for several seconds, the enormity of what he had just said taking a moment to sink in and actually permeate their stunned thoughts.

Ginny moved first, a look of pride on her face. She slowly clapped her hands together, with Hermione and Blaise joining in instantly. Within seconds, the whole room was awash with noise as they screamed their defiance to Voldemort, and they cheered the people who had managed to block one of the Unforgivables, as hope started to grow inside them.

Harry watched them silently, a slight smile on his face. He raised his arms, silencing them instantly.

"I want a foot of parchment from each of you on today's shield by Wednesday. Dismissed," he informed them.

He then turned to the four students. "You are excused from the homework. You did fantastically well."

Almost in unison, the four of them blushed. Praise from Harry was their greatest desire - worth more than house points.

"Blimey, Harry, that was amazing," Ron cheered excitedly, and then rubbed his ribs where Hermione had elbowed him.

"You took an awful risk," Hermione said softly, as the room emptied.

"I had to," Harry replied, almost whispering. He held out his hand, showing how much it was shaking; and now that he was alone, he gave into the fear and nervousness that had afflicted him.

"I feel like I am going to be sick," he confessed softly. His face had a slight greenish tinge, as the full impact of what he had done bore down on him.

After his failed attempt at the Ministry earlier in the year, he had spent some time researching the Cruciatus spell, and discovered that he had not hated Bellatrix enough to successfully cast the spell. With hate being the key, he had realised that the only person to whom he had that much hate, was Voldemort himself. And as much as he didn't want to delve into the darker side of his psyche, he knew that he would be the only person capable of casting the curse.

"I didn't want to have to cast that curse, but I couldn't see any other way of doing it. The Death Eaters are not going to stop using the Unforgivables just because we are kids, or because it's illegal. If anything happens, they HAVE to know how to help themselves. It's my job to do unpleasant things, so that if it happens in real life they have a chance to live, to escape, to fight, and what ever else that is needed." It seemed as though he were trying to justify his actions to himself, more than the others.

Ginny walked up to him and sat him down on the edge of the stage, then climbed into his lap, pulling his head down onto her shoulder.

"I love you," she whispered into his ear. "You will never be like them! You care too much." She knew him well enough now to know what he was thinking.

Hermione grabbed Ron's hand and pulled him out, leaving the two of them alone.

Harry looked up from Ginny's shoulder. "Have you seen what you wanted to see, Professor?"

Severus had watched the class from the back of the room, hidden and away from the possibility of any chance of being hit by a random spell, or encountering any of the students. From what he could tell, Harry's closest friends acted as assistants, helping deal with the large number of students. He hadn't realised just how popular the D.A. had become.

It soon became obvious to him just how much Harry was appreciated by the other students. As he walked over to a group, they would all stand up straighter; try a little harder to get the spell right.

Time and time again, Harry would offer a few words of encouragement, a joke to help break the tension, or what ever was needed. As he moved on, to go help the next group, the students he had left would stare at him for a second, as if making a mental promise to him, and then get back to work.

The professor had needed to think deeply for several minutes to realise what was happening in the room, why it felt so different.

There was hope - in this room, there was a palpable feeling of hope and belief that Voldemort **would** be stopped, and that they were on the winning side.

He smiled as he overheard the conversation about Harry's preferences, and watched with amusement, first, as that strange Lovegood girl approached him, then, Harry's extremely-wise-for-his-years response to Ginny's question.

He watched as Harry called the students up to the stage, noting that they were from each house and different years.

Snape was also quite impressed at the sheer volume of curses Harry threw at the students. He kept up a constant barrage, each spell slowly increasing in power, showing a mastery of magic that the Professor himself would have been hard pressed to match. He suddenly had a dreadful feeling that he knew where the boy was going.

He fought a mental battle over whether or not to interfere, but eventually decided to trust that Harry knew what he was doing. He let out a breath he didn't know he was holding as the students deflected it.

He then battled the urge to cheer with the students as they responded to Harry's words. He had spent so much time with the Dark Tosser - as he had taken to calling him, not because he was scared, but because he felt it was a suitably derogatory name - that he'd forgotten the power of a charismatic and inspirational leader. One who operated by respect and trust, rather than fear.

He was relieved as he saw just how much casting that curse had cost Harry. The boy had the potential to make Voldemort look like a rank amateur, if he let himself sink into that pit. There was little chance of that, he admitted to himself, while Harry had his friends and his girlfriend.

He felt firmly that people who tried to compare Harry and Ginny to James and Lily were being utterly ridiculous. In James and Lily's sixth year, James had been an arrogant arse, and Lily a silent bookworm. The only leadership James had shown was centred on prank pulling, and he'd demonstrated no desire to help others out - not even Pettigrew, who had been their friend.

Lily would never have had the self-confidence to tease Harry like Ginny had. The most surprising thing was that their unselfconscious acts of affection didn't make him want to retch, not like he had whenever he'd seen James and Lily all over each other.

Somehow, he wasn't surprised when Harry looked directly at him and asked if he'd seen what he wanted. The boy grew more like the Headmaster every day, as more and more pressure was applied onto him, and he dealt with it the best way he could.

Snape swished his wand, cancelling the invisibility spell. He ignored the question, and dealt with the Cruciatus issue instead.

"I agree completely with what you said," he said slowly. "You are doing the right thing. It's the burden of command, Harry; sometimes, you have to do things you don't want to, because you have to. For better or worse, they trust you, as a teacher and as a protector."

Harry nodded slowly. "That doesn't mean I have to like it."

"Indeed," Snape agreed slowly. "Follow me," he said abruptly, turning on his heel as an idea occurred to him.

He strolled out of the Room of Requirement, with his cloak billowing behind him, and Harry and Ginny trailing him, as he walked down to the Headmaster's office.

"Well, Severus?" Albus asked, as his Potions Master sat at the table, joining the other three Heads of Houses. Harry and Ginny sat in their normal position, looking curiously at them.

"I think you need to give Harry Assistant Professor status," Snape said bluntly. "He's got a better command of a large class than most teachers, and his methods, while unique, are highly effective. He has taught the students to work together. And today, he taught four of them to combine their magic and create a shield that blocked a Cruciatus spell."

"Who cast that?" McGonagall demanded, looking upset. "No one should even think of casting that here."

"Grow up, Minnie," Snape snapped, irritated and forgetting that Harry and Ginny were there. "There's a war going on out there, and I have more than enough memories of that damn curse to know that they aren't going to stop using it because it's not very nice. Harry knew exactly what he was doing, and he has already paid a price that you don't even want to think about."

"Certainly, it wasn't a 'Gryffindor' thing to do," the contempt in his voice was thick enough to cut with a knife, "it was more of a Slytherin thing to do, with a Gryffindor's courage, a Ravenclaw's intellect and ability, and a Hufflepuff's caring. He hasn't got the luxury of dealing with things like a pure Gryffindor; he has to make sure these kids survive, and he has proven that he will do whatever is needed to damn well do that."

"So please, drop the Holier-than-thou attitude."

At the end of the table, Harry was blushing bright red from the praise, while Ginny was looking on in shock as the once hated professor showed a remarkable insight to Harry's personality and desires.

"Thank you, Severus," Dumbledore entered the conversation smoothly. "What spell did you teach them to block the curse, Harry?"

"It wasn't really a spell on its own, sir. It was more a combination of the Magic Pooling spell and the *Egregius Protego* spell. If enough people work together, they can block pretty much anything."

The Headmaster nodded slowly, a look of pride on his face.

"Hermione found the idea last week," Harry continued. "I just helped show how it works."

"Why did you set homework?" Snape asked, as he suddenly remembered Harry telling them to do a foot of parchment.

"I've found it's a useful gauge of their comprehension; it allows me to make sure that I get one of the more experienced members to help with the people who are struggling during our meetings. Ginny worked wonders with Luna today."

Besides him, Ginny blushed faintly at his praise.

The Headmaster nodded, and smiled. "Well, Harry, congratulations on becoming an Assistant Professor. You have the power to give and take House Points, among other responsibilities and privileges that I will discuss with you later. I know you won't abuse them."

Harry gaped at him, and then shook his head. "Of course not, sir."

"Run along Harry, I believe you have a dinner date to get to."

Harry nodded, and vanished with his girlfriend.

"You know, he could at least make the effort not to make us look average," Snape said dryly. "He could have stood up before Apparating like someone normal."

"Severus," McGonagall interrupted, her eyes flashing with anger. "I do not appreciate being talked to like that in front of students."

Snape took a deep breath - a month ago, his response would have been a sneer. "I apologise, Min. To be honest, I forgot they were there. You didn't see the effect casting the curse had on Harry, or his honest reasons for doing it. The boy is clearly terrified of making a mistake and losing someone. He hasn't forgotten how he felt during Black's absence, and it's one of the many things driving him."

"Have any of you any idea how big the D.A. is now?"

Minerva, Filius and Ponomas shook their heads in unison. "From what I can tell, he has over half the school in there," Severus informed his fellow staff members. "There are representatives from every year, and every house involved. And they all hang on his every word."

"He's teaching them to survive. It isn't pretty, but it's pretty damn effective."

After the meeting ended, McGonagall waited to have a private talk with the Headmaster.

"What has happened to Severus?" she asked. "I've never seen him so passionate, especially not about a student."

"I think," the Headmaster, said slowly, "that Severus is finally experiencing what we have been experiencing for the past few years. Hope. He has been resigned to an early death since agreeing to spy for me, and for the first time, he can see himself having a future, having a life."

"He is recognising that Harry represents his freedom, and he likes the feeling."

From: *yawning*

To: Old chum

Subject: Last night

Wasn't it wonderful? Never mind the prank itself, but the theatrics involved. None of this working in the shadows from our boy - this was a prank on a far different scale to any we pulled off. I'm not saying it was better, just that the scale was bigger.

Padfoot the delighted

--
doggie yawn

From: Unbelieving

To: The last riser

Subject: Re: Last night

You're just getting up now? The day's nearly gone, what the hell did you do last night?

And yes, it was a lot of fun. I was more impressed that they could actually sing.

I think the big difference between us is that trying to hide from the professors doesn't restrict Harry - he even got Snape to help him last night.

Remus

From: I love the hangover cure

To: The stick in the mud

Subject: Re: Re: Last night

Well, after Harry sent us home, we went into Muggle London to a nightclub, got absolutely wasted, then got a Muggle taxi home, before, erm...well, I'm sure I don't have to draw you a picture.

Anyway, what the hell is Harry doing with that arse? He should keep well away from Snivelus.

S.

From: Has accomplished a lot today

To: Has slept the day away

Subject: Snape

Sirius,

Don't you think it is time that you stopped this ridiculous feud? It's been going on for over twenty years now. You are now a responsible grown up, and as much as you want to appear like you are still a teenager, you are not.

You are now responsible for a Godson, for a girlfriend, and for being an important part of the Order.

Remus

From: I am Sirius

To: Dad

Subject: Re: Snape

I'm very Sirius about my responsibilities; it's in my name.

As for Snape, the guy is a miserable wet blanket with an over inflated opinion of himself. He deserved everything we did to him.

Padfoot

--
woof woof

From: The non-Animagus Marauder

To: Pronglet

Subject: Fwd: Mail From Sirius

Harry, we're going to have to do something about Sirius. Despite repeated warnings from both of us, he still put this in an Mmail.

> I'm very Sirius about my responsibilities; it's in my name.

Remus - James would have been so proud of the prank you played last night!

From: Your ever-loving Godfather.

To: the prank king

Subject: Snape

Harry, Congrats on a very successful prank last night. You made your old Godfather very proud.

But, you need to be a little more careful about your friends - especially with getting close to Snape - the guy cannot be trusted.

Padfoot the proud

--

woof woof

From: Harry

To: My myopic Godfather

Subject: Re: Snape

I'm busy right now, but I will be visiting you tomorrow after classes. Make sure you are in.

H

From: Slightly irritated

To: Grown up wolf-let

Subject: Re: Fwd: Mail From Sirius

Moony,

You're right; we are going to have to do something.

When I was younger, I was occasionally allowed the privilege of watching TV. One of the things I remember would be perfect for Sirius. I'll have to have a word with a few people to get the stuff I need together.

Harry.

From: Padfoot the slightly confused

To: All knowing wise wolf

Subject: Ermm

I just sent Harry an Mmail about trusting Snape, and got this in return...

> I'm busy right now, but I will be visiting you tomorrow after classes. Make sure you are in.

Is it just me, or does that sound like a threat?

Siri

From: The all-knowing wolf

To: The idiot

Subject: Re: Ermm

Sound like a threat? That **IS** a threat!

Seeing as my attempt at education failed, it looks like Harry is going to do it, and I suspect he'll be a lot more direct about it than I was.

If I was you, I'd be afraid. Very afraid.

Remus

Harry and Ginny were walking towards the Three Broomsticks. They'd stopped off in the Gryffindor Common Room to get changed, before giving the appearance of going for a snog session somewhere. Ron's smirk had proved their distraction successful, to everyone bar Hermione, who had shot them a curious look. Harry had sent her a look back promising to explain later.

It was a very pleasant night, as only autumn could be, not too hot, not too cold, perfect for just walking through town at dusk. There were a few other people on the streets, scurrying to and fro as they went about their daily routines.

“Look at it,” Harry whispered, stopping at the top of one of the streets.

“Look at what?” Ginny whispered back, not wanting to defer the mood he was fostering.

“The town. Look how peaceful it is, how the people are acting - look at the quietness.”

Ginny watched, shifting slightly in the hope that he would get the hint. He did, and a second later, she was enfolded in his arms.

“This is it, Gin. This is what we are fighting for.” His words brushed past her hair, stroking over her ear. “These people, this life, this is why we are doing everything we can to stop Voldemort. This is normality; this is people looking for the future, and living in peace. This is what we want for ourselves, for our family, for our friends, for everyone. A safe place to live, to work, to raise children. This is what I have to provide for everyone.”

Ginny felt a single tear drip down her face, as her boyfriend opened his heart to her. She knew that some people wanted his fame, his power, and his wealth. None of them knew the cost associated with it, and the determination needed to be Harry Potter. They couldn't know what drove him, what made him follow the path he was now on. She swore to herself, a pledge etched on her heart, that she would be there every single step of the way, supporting him, helping bear the weight of overwhelming expectations.

They stood in silence for a few minutes, the setting sun silhouetting them.

“Come on,” Harry eventually said. “I'm dying of curiosity.”

Ginny laughed softly, as Harry Potter disappeared again, replaced once more by her Harry.

She took his hand, and skipped along merrily, swinging his hand, revelling in the soft laughter emanating from him. She knew she was acting a little young, but also knew it was exactly what he needed at the moment. She was getting better at reading and understanding him. And it was something that warmed her heart - she now knew him better than anyone else alive.

The Three Broomsticks was crowded, full of people enjoying the last evening of the weekend. Conversations hummed in the smoky atmosphere, as elderly wizards smoked a variety of compounds, while telling anyone who would listen what was wrong with the Wizarding world today.

Younger wizards and witches were gathered around tables, drinking Butterbeer and Firewhiskey, desperately trying to forget that they had work the next morning.

Harry and Ginny walked in together, hand in hand, over to a corner. They were pretty much ignored, because no one expected to see them there. School children were just not normally seen in a pub on a Sunday evening.

“Oh look,” Fred announced, not loud enough to draw attention. “It's our beautiful sister and her boyfriend.”

“Why so it is,” George agreed. “Aren't they cute together?”

“Absolutely! They should probably sit down, though. Who knows what attention they are gathering here?”

The teenagers in question laughed, and sat down. Harry absently waved his wand, creating a silencing spell around them, allowing them to talk without fear of being over heard.

“So,” Harry said, enjoying the fact that his ears were no longer ringing. “What can we do for you?”

Fred and George looked at each other, and then adopted unusually serious expressions. “We wanted to apologise to both of you for the idiotic behaviour that we participated in.”

“As far as we were concerned, after your reaction to our prank, you had passed any test we might have. Unfortunately, our brothers didn't see it that way.”

“Normally, we would be with our brothers till the end - family loyalty is very important to us. But you two are both family as well, and Harry, we like and trust you, and we think that our sister is old enough to look after herself.”

“Especially after what she did to young Malfoy.” The twins were alternating their speaking, easily following on from the other's train of thought.

“But this morning, after what you did last night, they all changed their tunes massively.” Fred and George suddenly stopped talking. They looked at Harry closely, staring hard.

“You knew,” George said, completely awed. “You did it on purpose, didn't you?”

Harry blushed slightly, and tried to look innocent.

“Did what?” Ginny asked, slightly confused.

“Ask your boyfriend,” Fred chortled.

Harry?"

Harry lightly took her hand. "Well, I might have sent the boys home in their costumes, having seen the girls' response to it. And it's possible that I might have then sent all the girls to their respective partners."

"Are you telling me that you got all of my brothers laid? And that's where Ron was last night?"

Harry nodded.

Ginny looked stunned for a few moments, as she tried to gather her thoughts. She turned to face Harry.

"You arranged for it, so that they would change their minds?" She didn't wait for a response to her rhetorical question. "That is such a Slytherin thing to do," she said admiringly. "But," and her tone changed dramatically. "How can you get that lot laid, and not me?"

Harry's face suddenly gained a very scared and worried expression, while Fred and George grinned at each other.

Ginny kept her expression blank for a few more seconds, before she leant in and kissed him gently. "I love you," she whispered against his lips. "Although, at some stage, you are going to have to make it up to me."

Harry's smile stretched massively over his face, suddenly reminding everyone of the young Harry. "I'd love to."

Madam Rosmerta interrupted smoothly, with the experience of many years of bartending, bringing them four tankards of Butterbeer.

"You know," Fred said, sipping at his drink, "when we were young, Butterbeer was the greatest thing in the world. Despite the fact it had no alcohol in it, we loved it. The first time we had it, we acted drunk for the whole day."

"Yeah," George agreed. "So many pranks. Good times, good times. But, now, we're kinda bored with it. It seems all we drink is either this, Firewhiskey, or Pumpkin Juice."

"Did you know that Muggles have hundreds of different drinks?"

Harry nodded, having grown up as one.

"Well, we didn't, but we do now. We're trying to come up with something new; we reckon we'd make a fortune on it. We did some checking out, and it seems that the patent on Butterbeer ran out a few years ago. They had been renewing it whenever it was about to run out, but someone messed up or forgot and they didn't renew the patent a few years ago. From what we could tell, the bribe that Fudge wanted, to change the law again – extending the patent – was too much for the holders to pay, so they let it lapse."

Harry blinked. "Really?"

"Yeah," George replied. "If we could come up with a variation, it would have the brand pre-established, saving us a lot of marketing and the effort of forcing people to try something new."

"So you're looking for something like Butterbeer, but better?" Ginny asked with an expression of excitement on her face.

"Yep," Fred agreed.

Harry and Ginny looked at each other. "Order me something nice, and get the same for my guest."

Ginny nodded and leaned in for a quick kiss. "Hurry back."

"I will," Harry said, as he vanished.

"Harry can Apparate?" Fred asked, looking a little shocked.

"He can dual, and triple Apparate," Ginny said, boasting a little about her love's prowess.

"Where has he gone?"

Ginny grinned happily. "Would you believe that he's gone to fetch the person who made the original Butterbeer, not this crap we are drinking?"

"No," Fred said promptly. "Or we wouldn't, if it was anyone other than Harry."

Ginny laughed. "You seemed to enjoy yourselves last night," she commented with a small look of interest.

George and Fred both had identical grins on their faces. "We were impressed, Gin. Your boyfriend's got a flair for pranks we wish we'd known about when we were at school. He could have helped out with loads of stuff."

"Is Harry really planning on running for Minister?" Fred asked, turning serious again. "Percy mentioned that Penelope had told him last night that he would be running. I think it was the idea of having the Minister in the family that made him change his mind."

Ginny smiled innocently. "I did think that Percy would be the hardest to convince of all of you, so I might have told Penelope, knowing that Percy's political ambitions would be enough to overcome anything else."

Fred turned to George. "Do you ever have the feeling we've been massively outgunned in this?" he asked.

"Yes. It's kind of scary actually. There are six of us, and we've been completely neutralised." He suddenly smiled widely. "But you do realise what it means, don't you?"

"That we're going to win, and that Voldiewart is going down."

"Exactly," George grinned happily. "So," he said as he turned back to Ginny. "Is Harry going to run?"

"I don't think he's realised it yet, but he will. Harry has an overwhelming need to make sure than everyone has what he didn't; a stable and happy home life. The Ministry is standing in the way of that, and after he deals with Voldemort, he will run for office to sort it out."

Fred and George shook their heads in a unified gesture of admiration. "You've got enough ambition for both of you," Fred whistled under his breath.

Ginny smiled again. "Maybe," she admitted modestly.

"Look," George said. "When you do start to run, we will help every way we can -including fundraisers, publicity, and merchandise. We owe Harry more than we can ever repay. Without him our shop, would not be what it is. He dug us out of a huge hole, and didn't ask for anything back."

"Since when did you two grow up?" Ginny asked with a teasing expression on her face.

"When our idiotic brothers didn't want to take our advice, and continued to stand between you and Harry."

Fred nodded in agreement. "Gin, just tell us one thing. You are happy, aren't you?"

Ginny turned to them, letting down all her mental shields, and smiled softly.

"I've got everything I've ever dreamed of. I have a wonderful boyfriend, who is incredibly attentive, amazingly powerful, and completely in love with me. I know that I am safe with him, and that he is letting me set the pace in our relationship. While you were all getting laid last night, I climbed into his bed, where he was already undressed, and spent over an hour snogging him. I never once felt pressured or scared, and to be honest, the only reason I stopped was because it wasn't the right place.

"I trust him, I love him, and I know he loves and trusts me. I'm the luckiest girl in the world."

Fred and George looked at each other. "No matter how much you grow up, you'll always be our little sister, Ginny, and we both love you. We trust you, and we trust him, so what ever you do is up to you. We will support you any way we can."

Ginny smiled brightly at the two of them, and moved around the table to give them both a hug.

"Besides, we think Harry is the lucky one, not you."

Harry appeared outside Abe's hut, and quickly walked down the steps. "Hi Michael, is Aberforth in?"

The goat stopped chewing the grass, and swung his head over to face Harry. "Yes, he is. If you'll just give me a second, I'll see if he is accepting visitors." Michael trotted daintily into the hut, while Harry took a seat on the steps.

A brief moment later, and the goat came trotting out, and said, "He's delighted to see you."

"Thank you," Harry said, bowing formally to the goat. He walked past, and entered the hut.

"Harry," Aberforth said jovially. "What can I do for you?"

Harry smiled and shook Abe's proffered hand. "Did you know that the patent for Butterbeer has expired?"

"No, I didn't." The ancient magician looked surprised.

"How do you fancy going into business? I have a couple of associates that I think you would like. They have been looking for a product to reignite the Wizarding public's interest in Butterbeer."

Aberforth tried to look nonchalant, but his twinkling eyes gave him away. "I could be persuaded," he admitted. "You trust them?"

Harry nodded. "With my life. Besides, I'm a partner in their business."

Aberforth nodded. "Good enough for me."

"Great," Harry looked pleased. "Will you join us for dinner in the Three Broomsticks?"

Abe frowned slightly. "I'm not really welcome there," he admitted. "I might once have accidentally been involved in a brawl that might have occurred there and might possibly have destroyed half of it."

Harry laughed, "It's not a problem. I can take care of that, although I will have to Apparate us both into the place."

Abe turned and pulled on a cloak, before entering the kitchen. He returned with a sealed flagon. "What are we waiting for?" he asked jovially. "I've never been Apparated before, and I'm quite looking forward to it."

Harry smiled and took his hand, and a second later they both reappeared inside the silenced area of the Three Broomsticks. Harry waved his wand idly again, adding a Confundus charm to it. "Anyone looking here now, will not notice you at all."

"Excellent," Abe said happily. "Miss Weasley," he half shouted with pleasure. "It's an honour to see you again so soon."

Ginny smiled and stood up. She took a step closer to him, and dropped a kiss on his cheek. "It's good to see you again, Mr D..."

"Uh-uh," Abe shook his head. "What did I tell you to call me?"

"I thought that was only for that night," Ginny said, a little confused.

"Not at all. All my friends call me by my given name."

Ginny smiled warmly at him. "Fred, George, may I introduce Aberforth Dumbledore. Abe, these two reprobates are two of my darling brothers. Fred and George Weasley."

"Ahh," Aberforth exclaimed, shaking both their hands. "The infamous Weasley Twins. Albus talks about you a lot. Did you really once charm his socks to sing Rule Britannia when ever he said the words, 'Hogwarts', 'Gryffindor', or 'Quidditch'?"

The twins grinned. "Yep."

"Excellent," Abe said, taking the seat Harry conjured for him, and sitting down comfortably. "I've always liked a good prank myself."

"You're the Headmaster's younger brother?" Fred asked.

"Yes. I'm also the better looking one."

Harry and Ginny laughed, along with Fred and George.

"Before we get into prank stories, why don't you pour us all a drink, Abe?"

"Excellent idea," the old man agreed. With a wave of his hand, the remaining Butterbeer vanished, only to reappear on the desk of a certain Headmaster of a nearby school. Unfortunately, the drink was now without tankard, and ran everywhere over the large desk.

He poured out five glasses. Each took one.

"A toast," George cried. "To Harry and Ginny: May they have many years of happiness."

Harry and Ginny looked both embarrassed, and shocked at the words, as Fred and Aberforth echoed them.

The five knocked back the drinks Abe had provided, and Harry, Ginny, and Abe waited to see what the twins would make of it.

"Fred, my dear twin?"

"Yes George?"

"Do you realise what this means?"

"I think I do. But I bet everyone else is wondering."

"True. It's the price they pay for not being a twin, I suppose. Anyway, what this means is that with our new elderly partner, everyone at this table is going to be very, very rich."

"Ahh, yes, absolutely." They grinned at each other, and then turned to face the wizard. Both their faces lost their humour, as they turned into the businessmen they were, at times. "What we suggest is a partnership between us. We form a new company, with each of us owning 30%, with Harry getting the other 10%."

"Guys," Harry interrupted, to tell them that he shouldn't be included.

"Quiet!" Fred, George, and Aberforth ordered at the same time.

As Harry sunk into a surprised silence, Fred continued. "You provide this recipe as your part and your experience in making it. We will provide the raw materials, the factory to make it, as well as the marketing and publicity."

Aberforth nodded slowly. "That seems acceptable." He held out his hand, which the twins promptly shook.

"Now, all we need is a name for it," George said, perfectly happy with making a business deal with a handshake.

"Honest Abe's Original Butterbeer?" Ginny suggested brightly.

The three new partners looked at each other. "Well," Abe said, "Do we have any other problems we need solving?"

Fred and George shook their heads as one. “If we had, we’re sure they could solve it for us.”

Harry and Ginny blushed in unison, causing the other three to laugh.

Madam Rosmerta interrupted them again, bringing in plates of food. She absently placed one in front of three of them, before returning to the bar for the second set of plates. As she moved back into the silenced area, she frowned. “You’re banned from here,” she said, looking at Aberforth.

“Excuse me,” Harry said politely, leaning forwards. He made a surreptitious gesture with his hand. “I believe that your barmaid needs a hand.”

The barmaid in question was currently balancing a few too many empty beer mugs, and was about to drop them. Rosmerta gasped in horror and dashed out. She stopped as soon as she stepped out of the charmed area, and shook herself. She looked back, saw nothing wrong, and continued to help.

“Masterfully done, young Mr Potter,” Abe said, impressed. “I almost missed the magic myself.”

“What magic?” Fred asked, confused.

“Wandless,” Abe explained happily. “Harry is becoming a master at it.”

“What are you planning for Marketing?” Harry asked, desperately trying to redirect the conversation away from him.

His ploy worked, as George replied, “We’ll start with some wireless wizard ads. Build up the brand a little, try and build up some pre launch excitement, and then we’ll invite the press for a private tasting. We’ll knock up some ads for the newspapers, and take it from there.”

Harry took another bite of his food, and looked thoughtful. Internally, he was battling with himself: he felt that if he owned part of the company, then he really should help in some way. And there was one way he could help more than any other.

With an audible sigh, Harry placed his fork down. “I can’t believe I am going to say this, but - I’ll publicly endorse the drink as my favourite.”

If anyone had been able to see through the charms surrounding the table, they would have been shocked at the sight they saw. An octogenarian wizard was dancing on the table, joined by two young men with flaming red hair. Together, they capered around the table in an unholy dance.

Ginny looked at them, and then broke down into hysterical laughter, as the three of them kicked loose.

Harry shook his head, smiling despite himself. He couldn’t remember ever seeing anything quite like this before, and fervently hoped to never see it again.

The three finally returned back to their seats, primarily due to being out of breath. A casual wave from Abe’s hand reset the table and food, restoring it to its pre-trampled state.

“I do want two favours though,” Harry qualified his earlier statement, shaking his head at them.

“Anything,” Fred said, the other two nodding along.

“First off, hire Abe as a consultant for WWW. I guarantee that he has more years of pranking experience than anyone else alive, and that includes Sirius and Remus.”

“We were going to offer that anyway,” George admitted. “Unofficially, Professor Dumbledore has helped us out a time or two. What’s the second thing?”

“I’ve set up a similar deal with Lavender and Parvati, to fund a new clothes shop. I want you to help them out with advice on getting started. Give them the benefit of your experience.”

Fred and George nodded in unison. “Not a problem.”

“Excellent,” Harry grinned. “I’ll give them your Mmail addresses. I might bring them by tomorrow; I’m going to help them open a Gringott’s business account.”

“Harry,” Fred said thoughtfully. “Do you even bother going to classes these days?”

From: Founder of the Harry Potter Fan Club

To: Members (all)

Subject: Harry’s Reward

Ok, people, I need suggestions to give to Professor Dumbledore for Harry’s reward.

I don’t think we should give points, because he normally earns more a year than anyone else anyway, and it’s hardly a reward for him, but more a reward for Gryffindor.

Orla

--
President of the unofficial Harry Potter Fan Club

From: Treasurer, Harry Potter Fan Club

To: All Members

Subject: Re: Harry's Reward

I don't think he should be made a prefect either. He doesn't need the extra work, and besides, everyone respects him more than the Head boy anyway.

Laura

From: Kevin (Secretary)

To: Other Members

Subject: Re[2]: Harry's Reward

> *Ok people, I need suggestions to give to Professor Dumbledore for Harry's reward.*

What about cash?

K.

From: Lavender

To: Fan Club Members

Cc: Hermione

Subject: Re[3]: Harry's Reward

>> *Ok people, I need suggestions to give to Professor Dumbledore for Harry's reward.*

> *What about cash?*

As someone who knows Harry very well, cash is the last thing he would want. He really doesn't like receiving money like that.

I would suggest that you concentrate on something that would mean something to him on a personal level.

Lav

From: Harry's Best Friend

To: Harry's Fan Club

Subject: Reward

I have talked to Ginny about your fan club, and we are going to approach Harry on your behalf. We are going to request giving you some official status, and arrange for some membership badges (similar to the D.A. coins).

As for this reward for Harry, may I propose that you request that Harry be given some official role in the school. He has taught most of you in the D.A.. It would be something that would make Harry very proud.

Hermione

From: Study-girl

To: Slytherdor Girl

Subject: Harry's Reward

Gin,

As always, or so it seems these days, you were right. Orla did ask for help with Harry's reward, and I suggested giving Harry the Assistant Professor status you asked me to.

H.

From: Orla

To: Everyone in the club

Subject: Re: Reward

Any one got a better idea?

O.

--

President of the unofficial Harry Potter Fan Club

From: Orla Quirke

To: Hermione Granger

Cc: Fan Club Members

Subject: Re: Reward

Dear Hermione,

I would like to thank you for interceding on our behalf with Harry. I can say without doubt that every member of the Fan Club is delighted by this news.

I would also like to thank you for your suggestion. No one has been able to come up with anything better, and from a personal perspective, I believe that it is a fitting reward for all of Harry's work.

At breakfast tomorrow, I will request that Harry be given an Assistant Professor's role.

With thanks,

Orla Quirke

--

President of the unofficial Harry Potter Fan Club

From: Bellatrix Lestrange

To: Severus Snape

Subject: Escape

So, I see you have managed to escape and keep your skin intact.

Impressive.

I don't suppose you fancy telling me how, do you?

Bella

From: Sev

To: Belladonna

Subject: Re: Escape

Not really, no.

Why?

S.

--
Working for the downfall of the Dark Tosser for fifteen years

From: Free from Atropine

To: The Potions Master

Subject: Re: Re: Escape

I might be looking myself.

B

From: Free and Mark-less

To: Atropine isn't all that flows through your blood

Subject: Re[3]: Escape

Again. Why?

S.

P.S. Please ensure that you use correct Re syntax in your replies. Nothing irritates me more than seeing endless Re's across a page.

--
Working for the downfall of the Dark Tosser for fifteen years

From: The ex-student

To: The Picky Professor

Subject: Re[4]: Escape

You want to know why? Look at me. I've spent the last twenty years supporting Voldemort. In that time, I've been in Azkaban twice, tortured by him more times than I can count, stepped on, used, abused, forced to marry that idiot to try and produce a bloody heir for him.

And now, I find out that he's a bloody half-blood and has been lying through his snake like teeth all this bloody time.

I have been ***THE*** most loyal of all Death Eaters, and where has it got me? Nowhere! Every bloody time something important needs doing, he turns to Pettigrew or Lucius. Or even Macnair or Crabbe.

Well, I want out, and I'm prepared to do what it takes.

Oh, if you're wondering - I've never slept with Rodolphus, an imperious curse and a permanent Ardour quenching curse took care of that. I am not going to mar my beautiful body by having some brat.

Come on Sev, we used to be so close.

Please, help me. I'm begging you, for old times sake. Please.

Your Bella

And how the hell did you remove that ugly Mark?

From: Shocked Sev

To: Deadly Nightshade

Subject: Re[5]: Escape

For old time's sake? I would never have joined the bloody Death Eaters if it hadn't been for you. I was in love with you. Madly in love with you.

Do you know when I became a spy? The same bloody evening you married that gimp. I realised it had all been a lie. I looked in a mirror, and hated what I had become. I went straight to Albus and confessed all. I hoped for a quick death.

I owe you nothing, Bella. You led me down the path with promises you had no intention of keeping, and like an idiot, I believed every single one.

As for getting out, and removing the Mark, the same person did them both. Harry.

Do you honestly think that he will help the person who tried to kill his Godfather? Who tortured one of his best friends? Who tried to put the curse on his girlfriend?

S.

--

Working for the downfall of the Dark Tosser for fifteen years

From: The intelligent Lestrangle

To: My ex-honey

Subject: Re[6]: Escape

Bugger!

I don't suppose an apology would help, would it?

Look, you owe me one favour. I helped you out with my cousin back in the fifth year, and you said you owed me a favour. I'm calling it in now.

I want you to ask Potter for help for me. Tell him I'll do anything.

Please, Sev. I'm on my knees.

Bella

From: I always keep my promises

To: I preferred you when you weren't a Lestrangle

Subject: Re[7]: Escape

I will ask Harry on your behalf. Don't expect anything though. If you had put the curse on him, I suspect he wouldn't care, but you tried to touch Ginny, and that's something that even the Dark Tosser is scared to do. Anyone who dares to touch a hair of her head would face a wrath that would make Tom seem like a little boy.

Severus

--

Working for the downfall of the Dark Tosser for fifteen years

From: The hopeful Ms Black

To: Mr Snape

Subject: Thank you

Some hope is better than none at all.

B.

It was getting near closing time in the Three Broomsticks, although none of the five gathered around the table showed any sign of leaving. They were all laughing heartily, and having a wonderful time.

"Harry," Fred asked, his voice a little slurred. The three older people had moved onto Firewhiskey to celebrate their new partnership. "What are we going to do about this Quidditch match?"

"Yeah," George agreed, drowning another glass. "Say the word and we'll drop out, leaving that lot alone."

Harry smiled at the two of them. "No need to do that. Trust me when I say I know what I'm doing. Please, turn up and play your best. You'll love your opposition."

"You're being a Slytherin again," Abe interrupted, looking delighted at the prospect.

Harry nodded. "I wouldn't have arranged it if I didn't have both possible results covered."

"This is why we trust you, Harry," Fred said. "With Ginny, and with our lives. We'll be with you in the final battle, won't we, Fred."

"You're Fred," George said, "I'm George."

"Are you sure?" Fred asked.

"I think so," George replied. "Ginny, help?"

Ginny laughed. She had shifted her chair to allow her to rest against Harry's side, and with his arm was locked around her, she was feeling warm, safe, and comfortable. She couldn't remember an evening she had enjoyed so much. Her boyfriend was as wonderful as always, and their guests were amazing. "At the moment, I haven't got a clue, either."

"Oh dear."

"If I was you, I'd sleep on the couch tonight," Harry suggested, a smirk on his face. "You wouldn't want to end up with the wrong girl."

Fred and George paled dramatically. "They would kill us. Literally kill us. You've never seen them in a bad mood. They make mum look sane."

The two suddenly burst back into life. "Did we tell you we've been working on a new song?"

Harry, Ginny, and Abe, shook their heads. Harry and Ginny both looked worried.

"When Gin told us about Voldewart's real name, we couldn't help it." They climbed onto the table once more. With one voice, and a degree of drunken slurring, they sang.

"Oh Tommy boy, the wands, the wands are calling

From lake to lake, and down the old schools side

The summer's gone, and all your Eaters are dying

'Tis you, 'tis you must go and I must bide.

But come ye back when summer's in the meadow

Or when the school's hushed and white with snow

And I'll be there, in sunshine or in shadow

Oh Tommy boy, oh Tommy boy, I hate you so.

And if you come, when all your Eater's are dying

And I'm not dead, as dead you soon will be

I'll come and find the place where you are lying

And kneel and say a curse there from me.

And you shall hear, tho' soft I tread about me

And all my dreams will warm and sweeter be

If you'll not fail to tell me that you hate me

And you'll rot in hell, for all eternity."

Fred and George bowed, as Abe sprung to his feet, applauding wildly. "Oh, I remember singing the original version of that in Ireland back in the fifties."

Harry and Ginny applauded as well, neither bothering to stand up. Harry looked at his watch. "Ok, it's time to get you three home. Abe, stay here with Ginny, I can't let any of you Apparate in that state, you'll splinch yourselves."

"But," Fred complained, wanting more to drink.

"No buts," Harry sighed. As Ginny leant away from him, he reached over the table and grabbed both their hands. They vanished a second later.

"He is remarkably good at that," Abe noted merrily. "Now, young lady, tell me about yourself. You have to be someone pretty special to have Harry so in love with you."

Ginny blushed her traditional Weasley red and reluctantly started to speak.

Harry arrived in the flat above the future home of Weasleys Wizarding Wheezes, and looked around. He waved his hand, enlarging the sofa, and then turned to the twins, who were wrestling each other playfully. "You'll thank me for this in the morning," he muttered. "*Dormio*." The two fell asleep immediately, and only the floating charm stopped them from crashing into the floor.

He moved them over to the couch, and placed them down gently, covering them with a blanket. "Sleep well, guys." A second later, he was gone, and back in the Three Broomsticks.

This time he wrapped one arm around Ginny, and took Abe's proffered hand, Apparating them both back to outside Abe's cottage.

They both said goodbye, before Harry Apparated them away.

"Where are we?" Ginny asked, as they reappeared in front of a large fountain, a Victorian building to the left of them.

"Hyde Park," Harry said quietly. He took her hand, and watched as the fountain suddenly burst into life, spraying water high into the air. Multi coloured lights ran through it, bringing it to life.

Ginny gasped with pleasure, tightening her hand at the magical display. She looked up, as the stars twinkled merrily through the haze created.

Harry slid his arm up around her shoulders, and slowly steered her away, walking her through the leafy glades. Despite how late it was, it seemed almost daylight with the bright full moon. Behind them, the fountain quickly returned to its previous state, as Harry stopped using his magic to power it.

The gates that guarded Kensington Palace Gardens opened up for them as they approached.

"This is beautiful," Ginny gasped, as she looked at the flowers.

Harry smiled softly. He reached out and touched her face, pulling her eyes to his.

"This is a little of me making up for last night," he whispered, before leaning in and kissing her. He used the cushioning charm on the ground, as he laid her down, sliding on top of her.

Ginny smiled against his lips, the smell of the flowers all around her. "You're doing a pretty good job."

That was the last sound they consciously made for some time.

From: Your friend

To: Cho

Subject: Harry and Ginny

Morning Cho,

I was talking to some friends last night, and they said that the only reason Harry is with Ginny is because: A, she got to him first that night, and B, the whore is sleeping with him. He doesn't really love her, but feels trapped - you know how honourable he is. She seduced him, and now he feels that because he's slept with her, he has to stay.

Mari

From: Seeker Girl

To: Gay Mari

Subject: Re: Harry and Ginny

Are you sure? Because that sounds awful for Harry. We all know what those Weasley's are like: dirt poor and desperately trying to get out of poverty. I bet she thinks that she'll have an easy ride for the rest of her life. All she has to do is open her legs a few times, and she'll live a life of luxury.

Oh Merlin, Poor Harry!

What can we do about it though? Harry won't even talk to me at the moment.

Cho

From: Cheerleader

To: The best seeker in the school

Subject: Re[2]: Harry and Ginny

Of course he won't, Ginny's poisoned him against you. If you want him, you're going to have to fight for him.

M

From: A blushing seeker

To: My best cheerleader

Subject: Re[3]: Harry and Ginny

I do want him...how do I get him, though?

Cho

From: The plan master

To: Corporal Cho

Subject: Plan

Oh, here's what I think you should do. It's obvious that Harry doesn't know what love is - look at his past. He's probably trying to convince himself that he loves the slut because of her spreading her legs.

All you have to do is kiss him, show him what real love is. He'll come to his senses and be really grateful to you.

Captain M

From: Unsure Soldier

To: The general

Subject: Re: Plan

Are you sure, Marietta? I don't know...

Cho

From: Omnipotent Commander

To: Unsure trooper

Subject: Re[2]: Plan

Of course, this isn't a normal boy we're talking about - this is Harry.

To help out, I've managed to create a map that will allow us to see where Harry and Ginny are. If we time it right, you'll get him before she even has a chance to interfere.

The question is, do you have the guts to do it? To fight for what you want?

M

From: Corporal Cho

To: Sir

Subject: Re[3]: Plan

Sir, Yes, Sir!

Cho

From: Mari

To: Cho

Subject: Now

Cho,

From the map, it looks like Harry's walking down to breakfast and Ginny's still in the shower. Now's the perfect time!

M

From: Marietta

To: Blackmailer

Subject: It's done

Cho is on the way to kiss Harry now. Ginny is following about a minute behind. This is over!

M

From: Pansy, Queen of Slytherin

To: My little pet

Subject: Re: It's done

It's not done till they have broken up - make sure it happens.

Pansy

--
Purity is Truth

Harry walked down the corridor, smiling at the idea of no longer needing to do classes.

"Hi Harry," Cho Chang said, as she stepped out of a classroom.

"Oh, hi Cho," Harry smiled at her. "How are things?" He decided to try and be nice to her; there was no point in remembering how badly his relationship with her had gone. They had both been in the wrong mental place for it to have worked.

Cho smiled at him, tilting her head slightly, looking up from under her lashes. The look might have devastated a younger Harry, as hormones swamped his body. This Harry had eyes for no one but Ginny, and didn't even notice the flirtatious look Cho gave him.

"We did have a good time, didn't we," Cho said fondly.

"We did," Harry agreed politely, biting down the urge to roll his eyes. He had no idea that his words were all the encouragement Cho needed.

With a strength that surprised him, she reached up quickly, locked her arms around his neck and kissed him as hard as she could.

Marietta smiled as she watched her friend move in for the kill. She felt a little sorry for Cho, but not enough to stop her. All her plans centred on being the best friend of the naive rich girl. She had begged Cho for forgiveness after betraying the D.A. last year, and Cho had believed her. No one else in the school had, but that didn't matter. As soon as they were finished with this dump, she was away, with as much of Cho's money as she could take.

She almost laughed as Cho took everything Harry said as a compliment, even though it was obvious to her that he was just being polite. Then she glanced at the Map, Ginny was due to come around the corner any second now.

The timing was perfect, as Cho grabbed Harry, Ginny turned and saw them.

Marietta saw many expressions cross the young girl's face, shock, horror, and finally, anger.

Ginny marched up to the two pupils, and pulled them apart with an ease that suddenly made Marietta slightly nervous.

"Gin..." Harry started, a shocked look on his face.

Marietta almost clapped, the expression made him look so guilty.

Ginny ignored him. She pulled back her fist, and launched the hardest punch of her life.

This Means War

8 - Manic Monday (part 1)

From: Min

To: Fil

Subject: That dastardly Slytherin

Help!

In case you've missed it, Severus is trying to steal my star pupils. Calling Harry and Ginny Slytherins indeed! Well, I won't stand for it.

I need something to prove that Harry is a Gryffindor, and that I can be as helpful in his training as Mr "Gives spells in Pig Latin."

Any ideas?

M.

--
hiss

From: The Happy Ravenclaw

To: The Disgruntled Gryffindor

Subject: Re: Severus

Well, I do envy you both. I am hoping to spend some time with Harry myself, to see what we can do with his remarkable ability. He has so much potential it gives me goosebumps.

Now, as for your request... You are already going to teach Harry to be an Animagus, why not *really* push the boat out?

F.

From: It's too early for riddles

To: Cryptic Gnome

Subject: Re[2]: Severus

What do you mean?

M

From: Nowt wrong with being cryptic, luv

To: Grumpy kitty

Subject: Re[3]: Severus

Teach him to be a dual Animagus. I'm sure the boy has the talent and ability to pull it off, and he'd be the first ever.

F.

From: Disbelieving

To: The northern genius

Subject: Insanity

Filius my dear fellow, you might be insane, but insanity has always been close to genius. This will really show Severus.

Thanks!

Min

--
purring merrily

As Ginny's right fist flashed through the air, her mind jumped back to the time she had been taught to punch.

"Bill! Charlie!" Ginny cheered loudly, as she came down to breakfast to see her two oldest brothers sitting at the table. "Whatcha doing here?"

"Hey Munchkin," Bill grinned at her. "We came to see you."

"Yeah," Charlie agreed, before shooting a dour look at his brother. "We thought it would be fun to see our little Snapdragon before she goes to school for the first time."

Ginny bounced on her toes, and then ran over to them, hugging them both in turn. She sat down on Bill's lap, and nabbed a sausage from his plate.

"Bill and I are going to take you out for the day, so hurry up and eat," Charlie grinned at her.

Ginny gulped down another sausage, then an egg from the two boys plates in front of her, and then scampered upstairs. She changed clothes quickly, shrugging out of the old t-shirt of Charlie's she slept in, and into the nearest dress she could find. She pulled on some old sandals, and then ran a brush through her hair quickly. With a cursory glance in the mirror, she scampered back downstairs in record time.

Bill and Charlie looked at each other, and then laughed together. "Come on, Snapdragon," Charlie said, holding out his hand. "Let's go."

The day was a lot of fun for the ten-year-old girl. Time spent with her two hysterical oldest brothers, who always argued over which nickname to call her, was her favourite thing in the world - even more than playing pranks with Fred and George. "What are we doing here?" Ginny asked, as they stopped in a large field.

Charlie and Bill looked serious, and sat down with her. "You're going to school in a few weeks, Gin," Bill started.

"And well, with Ron being a friend of Harry Potter, and with everything that is happening at the moment, we wanted to give you some advice before you start school with them."

Ginny blushed at the mention of Harry, and sighed happily.

Bill and Charlie looked at each, and made a mental note to make sure that Harry never got anywhere near their darling sister.

"Okay," Bill said. "Boys are going to be coming after you soon, and we need to show you how to deal with unwanted attention."

"But boys are stinky," Ginny said, mentally excluding Harry from that description. "Why would they come after me?"

"Because you're very pretty, and while boys may be stinky now, they do grow up," Charlie smiled.

"So," Bill said, standing, and unwinding his long legs. He held out a hand to Charlie, pulling him up. "The first thing is to know the vulnerable points. The quickest way to take down a boy is to knee him in the crotch."

Ginny giggled.

Charlie pulled out his wand, and cast a spell on himself. He kneeled down, so he was closer in height to his small sister. "Now," Bill continued, "It's not good enough just trying to kick someone, you have to take them out. If you don't do a good job, they'll just get mad and that won't be any good. So, I want you to knee Charlie."

Charlie nodded in agreement, "It's okay," he encouraged her. "I've cast a protection spell."

Ginny shrugged lightly, took two slow steps forwards and kneed him as hard as she could.

Charlie shot a quick look at Bill, shaking his head, almost imperceptibly.

"Ok, that was a good first try," Bill encouraged. "Now, this time, I want you lean forward as you do it, try and put some of your weight behind it."

Ginny nodded enthusiastically, and kneed Charlie again, this time leaning into it a bit more.

"Better!" Charlie praised, his spell let him know how hard he was being hit.

Ginny bounced on her toes again, "Wouldn't it be better if I did this?" she asked innocently. The cute young girl took two quick steps forward and rammed her knee into her second eldest brother's crotch, using her full momentum.

Charlie and Bill gulped in unison. The size of Charlie's eyes gave mute testament to the fact that she had mastered that particular self-defence act. "Yeah," Bill nodded. "That'll do it, Munchkin."

Charlie rose to his feet, and grinned at Bill. "Your turn."

Bill nodded, pulling out his own wand and cast a spell at his face.

"You can't always use that move, Snapdragon," Charlie explained. "It's considered to be a really low blow. So, we're now going to teach you how to punch someone."

"Cool!" Ginny bounced again, giving her brothers a spontaneous hug.

The two older boys looked at each other over her head, reaffirming their promise to look after Ginny no matter what they had to do.

Charlie held up his right fist. "The first thing is how you hold your hand. I want you to make a fist, and then wrap your thumb across the rest of your fingers, but don't go higher than the first knuckle."

Ginny nodded, biting her lower lip as she did as she was told.

"Now, it's important that you lock your wrist," Charlie continued. "It needs to be in a straight line from your arm, to your wrist, to your fist. It will stop you hurting yourself."

"Ok."

"Now, I want you to draw your hand back as fast as you can, then throw it forward, keeping your arm as loose as possible. As you get near Bill's chin, I want you to snap your fist forward, that's where all the power comes from."

Ginny nodded, and followed the instructions. She grinned happily as her fist impacted, and she felt no pain, thanks to the cushioning charms on her brother's chin.

"Good start, Snapdragon," Charlie said cheerfully. "Now, try it again, but remember to keep your fist in a straight line."

They worked together for several hours, Charlie and Bill taking turns being the punching bag until they were happy with their sister's progress.

Her punch impacted with an audible thump, slamming into Cho Chang's jaw with the force of a pile driver.

The Asian girl went flying backwards, unconscious before she hit the floor.

Ginny pulled out her wand, pointed it at the fallen girl, and snarled, "*Ennervate* ."

Cho opened her eyes slowly, and then glared at Ginny as she remembered what was going on. She touched her hand to her jaw gingerly.

"What the hell do you think you are doing, kissing my boyfriend?" Ginny demanded.

"Harry wanted to kiss me, he just didn't know it," Cho protested.

Ginny rolled her eyes. As if talking to a six year old, she said, "When Harry wants to kiss someone, he puts everything he can in to it. To start with, he likes to have his arms around you, one over your shoulder, and the other around your waist. He pulls you as close as he can get, and during the kiss, his hands caress your back, giving you a feeling of love and warmth. He sure as hell doesn't have his arms in front of him, and he does NOT try and push you away!"

Cho regained her feet slowly. Both girls were unaware of the ever-growing crowd watching them. "Of course you would know that," Cho sneered. "He's only dating you because you spend half your time flat on your back."

"I'll have you know," Ginny said icily, her eyes glowing, refusing to be insulted by the trollop in front of her; "that Harry and I appear to be the only people in our year NOT bloody having sex. And that's not because we don't want to, it's more because we want it to be right, and not doing it just because some Dark Tosser is out for Harry's blood. I happen to love Harry, and I sure as hell know he loves me. Show me one other male in this school that would allow his girlfriend to set the pace like Harry does, even when she climbs into his bed in the middle of the night. He is, and always has been, the picture-book definition of honourable. Harry would cheat on me exactly five minutes after he decides to become a Death Eater and serve the Dark Tosser!"

Cho, looking shocked, blurted out, "But Marietta said..."

Out of the corner of her eye, Ginny saw Marietta's face go white, then turn and run off, sprinting away as fast as she could.

"Stop her," Ginny called, reaching for her wand. Next to her, Harry pulled out his fake wand, but paused, tracking the girl's path with his eyes.

Hermione was walking back from an early morning prefects meeting with Ron, when she heard Ginny's shout. She looked up quickly, her mind analysing the details. She could see the bruise on Cho's face, the look of fury on Ginny's, and the usual blank expression on Harry's. Marietta was running away from them like the devil was behind her. An apt description of Ginny in a bad mood, she mused idly.

Beside her, Ron was pulling out his wand, ready to cast a spell on her.

Hermione didn't bother reaching for her wand, instinct taking over instead. She crouched forwards, her left hand barely brushing the floor for balance. She leant back slightly, and paused, as her target ran closer not seeing her.

With a growl, Hermione pushed forward with her legs, as hard as she could, launching her right shoulder straight into the larger girl's stomach, in

what could only be described as a perfect spear tackle.

Marietta's feet and head continued forwards, while her torso was suddenly stopped, then violently launched into reverse as her body suddenly contorted into a U-shape. Before she had a hope of regaining her bearings, Hermione slammed her into the ground as hard as she could. The bushy-haired girl bounced to her feet, and looked down at her victim, who was by now starting to turn purple through lack of breath.

"That was for last year as well, sneak!" Hermione spat viciously.

Ginny walked up to them, and gave Hermione a quick hug, "Thanks." The red-haired girl turned to the girl on the floor, pulled out her wand, and pointed it at the fallen girl's face. "Unless you want to be wearing a permanent Bat Bogey Hex, you better start talking," she snarled.

"It was Pansy," Marietta blurted, terrified of the evil look on Ginny's face. "She said that if I didn't break up your relationship with Potter, she would tell Cho that I was just using her."

A faint gasp of betrayal echoed from behind her, but the girl couldn't seem to stop talking. "It was easy; I just insulted you a few times and encouraged Cho to believe she could take him from you. I arranged everything, even when she would do it."

"How?"

"With this map Pansy gave me," she said, pulling out a piece of paper.

Harry watched as his girlfriend interrogated the little sneak with a slight smile on his face. He had been pretty sure that Ginny would know that he wasn't cheating on her, but it had really brought home how much he valued their relationship when she had explained exactly why she had known that he wasn't kissing Cho. The truth spell he had surreptitiously cast on Marietta was working perfectly, and he did feel a little sorry for Cho.

As Marietta mentioned a map, Harry yanked it out of her hand. "Mischief Managed," he muttered, dread creeping into his heart. He watched as the map morphed into a piece of paper. "I solemnly swear I am up to no good."

Words appeared on the map, "Marauder's Map version 1, abandoned due to incorrect professor locator spells."

Harry cancelled the truth spell he had cast on the Marietta with a wave of his wand, upset that Pansy had dared try and use one of the Marauder's projects against him. "It looks like I made a mistake with her," Harry muttered, referring to the Slytherin. "I'm..."

"Wait, Harry," Blaise interrupted. "We will take care of Pansy, I promise. Don't get distracted over this."

"Yeah," Lavender followed her up. "This just isn't important. She will pay for trying to ruin your relationship, we promise."

Behind her, Luna, Parvati, and a few other girls nodded in agreement.

Harry took a deep breath, and nodded. "Thanks," he shot them a shy, but nonetheless grateful, smile, and turned back to his girlfriend.

Ginny was looking down at the girl, then up at Cho, who was looking shocked and ready to cry - again.

"Run away," she told Marietta. "Stay away from me, from Harry, and from our friends, or we will come after you."

Marietta scrambled to her feet, and took off, suddenly realising that she would never get what she wanted out of Cho now. Tears poured from her eyes as she ran back to the Ravenclaw Common Room.

"I'm sorry," Cho said simply as she walked up to them. "I thought, well, I don't know what I was thinking." She looked at Ginny directly, "I wanted to believe her so much, that I let it override what little common sense I have. It won't happen again." Cho paused, then turned and started to walk away.

"Cho," Ginny called. She walked up to the longhaired Asian girl, and as Cho turned, she cast a healing charm on her jaw, repairing the damage her punch had done.

"Thank you," Cho said quietly. "I didn't deserve that." She turned and continued her way through the crowd, realising just how much her supposed friend had betrayed her.

"Okay, people," Ron called. "Show's over, everyone get to breakfast."

The crowd dispersed with the girls who had volunteered to take of Pansy walking together, exchanging ideas amongst themselves.

At the same time, Hermione and Ginny said, "I shouldn't have hit her!"

Harry and Ron met each other's eyes for a second, exchanged a wry glance, and then each grabbed their partner's hand, pulling them towards different empty classrooms.

Ginny looked a little worried, Harry seemed to be struggling to keep his emotions in place, and she felt sure that she was going to be yelled at for hitting Cho. Harry pushed open the door to the classroom, and then slammed it shut hard behind them.

He turned to the small girl, and pushed her against the wall, his eyes glowing.

"Harry I'm..." Ginny started.

"Do you know what happens to you when you're passionate about something?" Harry demanded.

"What?" Ginny asked, shaking her head a little as if she had not heard him correctly.

"Your eyes glow."

"Huh?" Ginny replied intelligently.

"Your eyes glow," Harry repeated.

"I'm sorry?" Ginny half said, half asked.

"I wouldn't be," Harry whispered, his voice suddenly going a lot lower, sending chills up Ginny's spine.

"I shouldn't?" she was now getting really confused.

"No. Do you have any idea just how sexy it is?"

Further conversation was muted by the sound of Harry snogging the life out of his girlfriend.

"I shouldn't have done that," Hermione worried as she followed Ron into a classroom. "I'm a prefect; what sort of prefect attacks another girl like that? In full view of the all the students. And my shoulder hurts. I'll probably be expelled, or worse, demoted from being a prefect!"

Ron tried very hard not to laugh, as he shook his head. This morning had been wonderful as far as he could see. He was back involved with the gang, things were happening to him again, instead of bypassing him. He'd even got a friendly look of sympathy from Harry for having to deal with Hermione. He pulled out his wand, and cast a healing spell on Hermione's shoulder, then felt a shot of pride as it worked perfectly.

"Thanks," she looked a little surprised at his proficiency. "But I'm still going to get expelled. And what must you think of me, doing that to another student," she continued to castigate herself.

"Yeah, about that," Ron interrupted. "It was probably the sexiest thing I have ever seen, and I'm going to have to snog you senseless now."

"Wha..." was all Hermione got out, before Ron's lips were on hers.

Ron, Harry, Hermione, and Ginny entered the Great Hall a little late for breakfast. They took their seats, ignoring the grins and knowing glances the girls got. They were looking a little ruffled, and had dreamy looks in their eyes.

"So, what's your plan for today, Harry?" Hermione asked.

"I've got Occlumency first thing," he lied easily, "Then double potions, then I'm going to take Lav and Parv to Gringotts to open a business account, check in and make sure that the twins are alright, and that Abe is still okay for our new project, bring the girls back, then pop over to see Sirius as we need a talk about his attitude."

Ron and Hermione looked at each other for a second, and then smiled slightly. "Harry, would you mind explaining a few things for us."

"Sure."

"Who's Abe, what new project, why the twins, what do Lavender and Parvati need with a business account, and what's wrong with Sirius' attitude?" Ron asked in one breath.

Harry blinked, as he realised his friends had missed quite a lot recently.

He was interrupted by the Headmaster saying in a loud voice, "Ms Quirke?"

The small girl was approaching the main table, a determined look on her face. "Yes sir. We've come up with reward for Harry for organising to save Professor Snape's life."

Harry blinked, and then turned to the headmaster in surprise.

"Excellent," Dumbledore said, a happy smile on his face as his eyes twinkled merrily over his half-moon glasses. "Do tell, my dear."

Orla took a deep breath, then said, "We think that Harry should be given Assistant Professor status, with his own room and everything, and that he be officially given charge of the D.A."

Dumbledore paused for a second, and then smiled. "A capital idea, Ms Quirke." He next turned to face the shocked Harry. "Harry, if you'll meet me after lunch, we'll talk about your new responsibilities, and your new room." He paused again, "and we'll talk about giving the D.A. some official school time as well."

The roar of approval from the members of the club was as deafening as it was spontaneous.

After the noise had died down, Dumbledore smiled at the students. "Oh, Ms Quirke, take twenty points for Ravenclaw."

Orla blushed, and returned to her seat, her housemates congratulating her.

"So," Ron grinned, "Assistant Professor Potter, can you now answer my question, or are such things beneath you."

Harry shot Ron a foul look, then grinned. "Hey, who's the one with his own private room?"

Ron shrugged, "Just means I get to use your bed as storage space."

The two friends laughed, before Harry launched into an explanation of the previous two days' events.

From: Confused

To: Knows everything

Cc: My two favourite Weasleys

Subject: Breakfast

Hermione,

Why exactly was Orla (I think that's her name) asking for a reward for me at breakfast?

H

From: Not quite all knowing (But I'm working on it)

To: Dazed and Confused

Cc: Strangely, my two favourite Weasleys as well

Subject: Re: Breakfast

Actually, Harry, Gin and I wanted to talk to you about that.

It seems that Orla is the leader of the unofficial Harry Potter Fan Club.

Now, before you explode, take a deep breath, and relax. I've been keeping a close eye on them, and they are behaving responsibly.

We think that you should agree to legitimise it. You won't have to do much, well, except maybe pose for a few photos. I know you hate doing that sort of thing, but look at what good it will do.

People who belong to a HP fan club will not be joining the Death Munchers, and it gives them someone to focus on when things look bad.

And, we can give them a membership badge, like the D.A., but make it an unobtrusive Portkey, so that if they get attacked, they can get to safety easily.

Hermione

From: The younger of your two favourite Weasleys

To: The object of my affection

Cc: My favourite couple

Subject: Re[2]: Breakfast

Hermione's right, Harry. We've got a chance here to do some good, and while I would rather they didn't have any access to you (You're mine!) it would make sense. Besides, I can take the pictures of you, so you won't have to worry about being taken advantage of - and any really good pictures I'll be keeping for myself anyway.

Ginny

From: Groaning

To: The persuasive duo

Cc: Ron

Subject: Re[3]: Breakfast

I swear you two could talk me into joining Voldemort.

Yes, it can be official. Yes, we'll create Portkeys for them. Yes, I'll even bloody pose for photos.

But at a price!

I want photos of Ginny in return!

H.

Harry walked into Professor McGonagall's classroom, to find his professor sitting comfortably in an armchair she had conjured for the lesson.

"Hi, professor," Harry said, unsure of whether she had heard him enter or not.

"One of the advantages of being a professor, Harry," McGonagall started in a very friendly voice, "is that you are now a member of staff, and as such, you get to talk to us as normal people in private. Obviously in public we are still formal to everyone. So, you can call me by my given name."

Harry took a seat opposite her, idly creating an identical couch with a flick of his wand. "That will take some getting used to," he admitted ruefully. "I still feel like I've just stepped off the Hogwarts Express every time I see you."

Minerva threw back her head and laughed. "I do work on that, Harry. It's most useful for dealing with rowdy children with no sense of fear - particularly ones that like to fight fully grown mountain trolls."

Harry grinned at her, acknowledging the point.

The professor, smiling a lot more than Harry had ever seen her, curled her legs under and sat in a cat-like position. "Okay Harry, the first thing we are going to do is have a talk so we can try and work out what animals you are going to transform into."

"Animals?" Harry queried, "I thought that you could only turn into one?"

"A common misconception," McGonagall lied calmly. "Turning into an animal takes a lot of practice Harry, and people tend to stop at one, because they have achieved their goal. We are going to work at both from the start."

"Oh, okay," Harry looked interested at the prospect. "So what sort of animals do you think I might turn into?"

McGonagall waved her wand, and a pen and parchment appeared. "Don't worry, it's not a quick quote quill," she smiled, ignoring his question, as the quill spelt out her words on the parchment.

"Close your eyes, Harry; I want you to be relaxed, as I ask you some questions. Just say the first thing that comes to mind."

Harry swung his legs up onto the side of the chair, closing his eyes as instructed and relaxing back against the other arm.

"The questions I am going to ask are rather personal, Harry; please trust me with the answers."

He nodded, rather than reply verbally.

"How do you feel about Ginny?"

"I love her," he said softly.

"Do you see yourself with her in the future?"

"Yes. I can see myself married to her."

"What about other girls?"

"No one will ever match up to Ginny," he replied, mentally agreeing that the questions were more than a little personal.

"How do you feel when you are outside the school with her?"

Harry thought for a second. "Protective. I know she can handle herself, but I want to be there to make sure."

"I know you had an argument with Ron about dating Ginny, why did you forgive him?"

"Because he's a friend. He's been my closest friend since I started school. My first real one and I know that he will be there for me when needed."

"What about Voldemort?"

Harry paused for a second.

"Just say the first thing that comes into your mind Harry, there are no right or wrong answers here."

"I will take him down," Harry whispered. "I will defeat him. I have to."

"Why?"

"He's standing between my friends and a happy, safe life."

"What do you think is the best way of defeating him?"

"By working together; with everyone I trust near me, they can negate his Death Eaters, leaving me to deal with Voldemort."

Minerva looked at the page of writing, and smiled, 'Loyalty, determination, life-long partner, ruthlessness, teamwork.' She was pretty sure she could guess one of the animals already. She was eagerly anticipating the reaction from Voldemort when he found out.

"Apart from Ginny, what do you like doing the most?"

"Flying."

"Why?"

"I feel free, like there is nothing in the world that can touch me. It's just me against the environment, testing my skills and myself. I have no responsibilities."

"What's your favourite move?"

"The dive. I love to fly straight down, and pull up just before the ground. Especially if I'm following the snitch. It reacts like it's alive, and I have to chase it down."

The professor smiled to herself, not really surprised that the questions she had asked had yielded such rich results.

"Harry," her voice was as low and smooth as she could make it now, "I want you to sink deeper into your mind. As you listen to the sound of my voice, I want you to feel more and more relaxed. Each word you hear takes you deeper into yourself."

She paused for a second. "As you go deeper inside yourself, you will see two shapes moving towards you."

"I see them," Harry whispered, awe tingeing his voice.

"What do you see Harry?"

"They are gorgeous," the boy whispered. "The first is so strong, so brave. He's looking out for his pack, taking responsibility, leading from the front. He's noble, deserving of respect and honour.

"The other is so free. He's flying around, diving to the ground, and catching rats with his claws. He's so triumphant and proud."

"What animals are they, Harry?"

"The first is a wolf; he's got a black ruff and my eyes. He's stopped now, and is sniffing me. He likes me!"

"And the other one?"

"It's a hawk. It's all black, apart from green bands around its wings. He's landing on my shoulder. He's got my eyes as well." He paused for a second, and seemed to shudder. "They've gone now," he sounded very sad.

"No they haven't, Harry," McGonagall smiled softly. "They are inside you. You've found your Animagus forms. I want you to listen to my voice Harry, follow it back to the light. Come back to me, and to Ginny."

She continued to talk for another few minutes, pulling Harry out of his trance with practised ease.

"Wow," Harry said softly. "Is that how everyone finds their animals?"

McGonagall nodded. "We often say that the animal chooses us, because no one knows what they are going to find when they search amongst them. I happen to know that your father and Sirius hypnotised each other first, then Pettigrew. How do you feel?"

"I'm kinda tired," Harry admitted, hiding a yawn.

"You've got half an hour to nap, and then you have Potions."

"Thanks," Harry said, as he rolled onto his side and drifted off.

Minerva watched him sleep for a bit, then transfigured a book into a blanket, and laid it on him gently. "You are a remarkable young man Harry," she whispered softly, touching his hair for a second, and wondering what it would have been like if she had raised him.

She walked over to her desk, and pulled out some of her student’s homework, flights of fancy dismissed from her mind.

Thirty minutes later she stood and walked over to the boy, waking him.

Harry jerked into wakefulness, instantly on guard, before relaxing as the smiling face of the professor came into view.

"Time for potions, Harry. We will start to work on the actual transformations next."

They were interrupted by a group of first year students entering the classroom noisily.

"This is not an amusement arcade," McGonagall snapped icily. "Please take your seats quietly, while I finish with Assistant Professor Potter."

Harry, a formal expression on his face, nodded to his teacher. "Thank you for lending me your room today," he said politely.

Minerva, her back to the class, rolled her eyes at him, and then stuck her tongue out. "You are more than welcome, Mr Potter," she replied, keeping up the appearance of Harry having borrowed the classroom for an Occlumency lesson.

Harry struggled to keep a straight face, and bid the teacher goodbye. He walked out, shocked to find that the serious teacher had a mischievous nature - a nature that he found he really liked.

From: Min
To: The wonderful short person
Subject: Idea

Oh Filius!

It worked perfectly! I lied like a Slytherin to him, and it all went according to plan. Once I had disabused him of the notion of only one animal, I took him into the normal trance, and asked him some very non-standard questions.

I got him to think about Ginny, which really relaxed him, then just told him to look for two animals. They came creeping out of his subconscious together, and he accepted them both instantly.

I am so excited; I can't wait to show off to Albus and Severus.

Min

--
purr purr

From: Flippant Fil
To: Magnificent Min
Subject: Re: Idea

That's wonderful! But I notice you failed to inform me what those animals are... You're not going to keep me in suspense are you?

F.

From: Lips sealed
To: The inquisitive one
Subject: Re[2]: Idea

Why yes, I am.

--
puuuuurrr

From: Nervous
To: The moonster
Subject: Tonight

Moony old chum,

I find myself feeling somewhat... nervous about Harry's visit. You don't happen to know what he is going to say do you? I can hardly sleep at the moment - look how early I am up!

Siri

--
pathetic whimper

From: The aptly titled Moonster

To: The searcher of colloquialisms

Subject: Re: Tonight

I'm afraid that only you could call this early, Sirius. Most decent wizards and witches have been up for hours.

As for Harry's visit. Yes, I do have some idea of what he might say. It's something Lils would have said... In fact, imagine one of Lils 'talks' combined with James giving it.

RJL

From: Confused and Bewildered

To: He who suffers from verbal diarrhoea

Subject: Re: Re: Tonight

Okay, I had to look up colloquialism, and yes, Juanita has had an influence there. Did you know that Muggles have hundreds of curse words that we don't? I've never been interested in a new language before.

A Lily talk, given by James? ^gulp^ Can't Harry just use his antlers to hurl me into a tree or something? That was by far my preferred punishment, much better than when James would go quiet and get that serious expression.

Now I'm very worried, and going back to bed - I need a hug!

SB

From: Twin One

To: Twin Two

Subject: Order of business

Well, don't know about you my dear twin, but I feel wonderful. If I didn't know better - which I don't - I'd say that Harry did more than just put us to bed last night. We should talk to him about what he did; imagine the money we would make if we could sell alcohol... and a hangover charm.

Anyway. I'm going hunting for a warehouse, why don't you look into the current Butterbeer. As much as I like competition (not) I'd much rather have a complete monopoly on the market.

Fred

--
Weasley's Wizard Wheezes – coming soon to Diagon Alley.

From: Twin Left

To: Twin Right

Subject: Way ahead of you

I'm already on the case of the Butterbeer - can you believe I'm actually in a library at the moment... voluntarily? What has become of me?

Anyway, I'm pretty sure that we couldn't recreate Harry's magic. I suspect that it was some of that wandless stuff Abe was talking about. I noticed him doing it a few times; it's very casual and discreet.

George

--
Weasley's Wizard Wheezes – coming soon to Diagon Alley.

From: Twin Up

To: Twin Down

Subject: Wandless Magic

I noticed that as well, was very interesting - more so that our darling sister thought it was so commonplace. Good to see, though, as the Dark Tosser, and maybe Albus are the only other two that can do it. I get the feeling that Harry is coming up with a plan to stop him - and we're going to be in the thick of things. Wonderful, isn't it?

Forge

--
Weasley's Wizard Wheezes – coming soon to Diagon Alley.

From: Twin Forwards

To: Twin Back

Subject: Oh Merlin!

Fred, you'll never guess who owns the Butterbeer factories!

This is brilliant!

Gred

--
Weasley's Wizard Wheezes – coming soon to Diagon Alley.

From: Tender hooked Twin

To: Baiting Twin

Subject: Re: Oh Merlin!

Well, judging by your reaction, I would guess it has something to do with the Death Eaters?

F.

--
Weasley's Wizard Wheezes – coming soon to Diagon Alley.

From: The research master

To: Faithful ally

Subject: Re: Re: Oh Merlin!

LUCIUS MALFOY!

Most of the Malfoy fortune's cash income is through Butterbeer. It's a complicated mess of companies, but I managed to get through it.

We need to tell Harry this afternoon; he'll know what to do. Just think, we have a chance here to make a MAJOR hole in the finances of one of the DT's biggest supporters.

An excited G.

--
Weasley's Wizard Wheezes – coming soon to Diagon Alley.

Harry glanced at his watch, and realised he was late for potions. He entered just before Snape started speaking.

Snape raised an eyebrow at him, curious as to the reason for his tardiness.

"My apologies, Professor Snape," Harry apologised. "My Occlumency lesson overran slightly."

Snape nodded once. "Mr Potter, perhaps in future, I might be permitted to assist you once more. I believe that things have changed enough between us to make the experience more beneficial for the both of us."

Harry paused, and then shot the dour professor a sudden smile. "I think I'd like that, sir."

"Take a seat, Harry," Snape said, as he turned to the blackboard behind him, and started writing.

The door to the dungeon opened, and Draco Malfoy walked in arrogantly, his customary five minutes late.

"Ahh, Mr Malfoy," Snape said icily, his friendliness with Harry having disappeared completely. "So good of you to finally join us. However, this class started five minutes ago. I do so hope you have a good explanation for your tardiness."

"But..." Draco started, looking shocked.

"But' is not a good explanation," Snape sneered disdainfully. "What, you had a liaison you couldn't avoid? A Death Eater meeting to attend?"

"No, I--" Draco stopped suddenly, as if he realised that saying that he always turned up late probably wouldn't help him.

"Detention, Mr Malfoy, with Mr Filch tomorrow evening. I hear he has some lavatories that are in urgent need of cleaning."

"But it's Quidditch practice tomorrow night!"

"Ten points from Slytherin for arguing with your professor," Snape snapped instantly. "I suspect that the team will have to do without your much vaunted talents. And considering your success rate over the past five years, I hardly feel that it will be a great loss."

"But I bought them their brooms!"

Snape shook his head sadly. "You do have delusions of grandeur, Mr Malfoy. I believe you will find that your father donated those brooms to the house. And another ten points from Slytherin for continuing to argue. Sit down, Mr Malfoy, before you lose all of Slytherin's house points."

Draco sneered, obviously trying to hide his emotions, and walked towards his normal seat.

"Not there," Snape called. "I believe that Ms Zabini will have to suffer without your, no doubt, excellent assistance. There is a seat at the back. Please take it."

Draco froze, and then moved over to the empty desk. He sat down, and started to sulk.

"Now," Snape turned back to the blackboard. "Who can tell me what potion you create when you add asphodel to an infusion of wormwood?" Snape paused. "Mr Malfoy?"

"What?" Draco asked, not having paid attention to the question.

Snape sighed, and looked to the heavens. "It's not enough that you arrive late, Mr Malfoy, but then you insult your classmates with your inability to answer a first year question. Another ten points from Slytherin. Ms Granger, would you please answer the question."

"The Draught of the Living Death, Professor," Hermione answered readily, then held her tongue, knowing how he hated her rambling on.

"Excellent. Ten points to Gryffindor."

The class continued in the same vein, with the Gryffindors almost unbelieving as they watched the potions master skilfully destroy the young Malfoy.

By the time class had ended, Draco had lost a further 40 points, and ran out of the room, almost in tears.

"Harry, would you mind staying behind for a few minutes?" Snape asked.

Harry nodded, and as the rest of the class walked out, he called, "Blaise."

"Yes, Harry?" the young witch asked.

"Take seventy points for Slytherin. You shouldn't all suffer from him." It was the first time that Harry had given points for anything.

"Thanks," she smiled at him brightly, looking a little relieved. "I'll make sure that everyone knows why you gave them to us," she promised.

"You didn't have to do that," Snape said, closing the door to his dungeon.

Harry shrugged. "Probably not. Are you feeling evil?"

Snape laughed. "After that performance, of course."

Harry pulled out the sheet of parchment earlier. "I pulled this off Marietta earlier, she got it from Pansy." He traced with his finger where Malfoy had

run off to, and pulled out his quill. As Snape looked over his shoulder, Harry wrote the Mmail.

To: Terry

From: Harry

Subject: Draco

Terry, if you're serious about dating Draco, he's in the Astronomy tower alone. And he's pretty upset.

Harry

A second later, a reply appeared.

From: The happy boy who's gonna seduce

To: The boy who match made

Subject: Re: Draco

Thanks Harry, I owe you one - well, a lot more than one.

T.

"Very clever," Snape smirked, impressed.

Harry grinned at Snape. "It might be good for him."

Snape laughed.

Harry was about to ask what his Potions professor wanted, when another Mmail arrived. He glanced at the notification and blinked, before going pale. He opened it up, and looked shocked as he read it.

From: "Big D" <dursley.dudley@students.stonewallhigh.ac.uk> - **WARNING, THIS MMAIL CAME THROUGH THE MUGGLENET GATEWAY!**

To: Harry Potter <Harry.Potter!729856242.UK@gateway.mugglenet.com>

Subject: Please don't delete!

Harry,

I'm sure I'm the last person you expected to Email you - ever. In fact, you're probably surprised that I even know how to email.

I don't know how to write this, I just know that I need to. My future kinda depends on my ability to grow up.

I suppose I should start at the beginning. I was expelled from Smeltings at the beginning of the year. I was caught bullying some of the younger kids. My parents, after threatening a lawsuit at the school - and the school laughing in their faces, accepted it, and enrolled me in Stonewall High.

It was the best thing that ever happened to me. I just didn't know it at the time. I was taught my first lesson very quickly: There are always people bigger than you. And losing my first bout in the boxing ring was a bit of a wake up call.

Shortly after that I met her. She had just transferred from a school near Hampton.

Sheryl Thomas.

You know her half brother, I think, Dean?

Well, I asked her out immediately. She said No, as quickly. Which wasn't a surprise, when you weigh more than the average whale, you get used to rejection.

But, to my shock, she became friends with me, and gave me advice on how to lose weight. I've been running every day since she arrived, and have been watching what I eat properly.

I can't tell you how much my parents have helped.

Really.

I can't.

But more about them later. I have lost a couple of stone. First time I've ever been happy about losing anything. ;-) -- don't know if you have emoticons over there, but that's someone winking and smiling.

So, we've been talking a lot. And she asked me about my family. She told me about Dean, and how proud of him she is, and the special school he goes to for gifted children.

I then mentioned you, in my normal style. Well, let's just say that as soon as she realised who you were, and who I was by reference, I nearly lost my best friend. I have never been yelled at for so long, without that person repeating themselves once. It was scary, and frightening... and extremely impressive.

Well. She told me what she thought of me, and how I had treated you, as well as Mum and Dad. She called them disgusting Muggles, I don't know why, but that really fits them.

She told me to think about what she had said, and stormed off.

Well, I did. This person that I really care about, had just looked at me like I was less than nothing, and I hated the feeling.

Harry, I owe you an apology. A lot more than that. I'm trying to take responsibility for my actions now. I am sorry for the way I treated you.

In my defence, I will say that I didn't know any different. My parents screwed me up as much as they screwed you, but in the opposite direction. Being a fat, unhappy, spoiled brat was not the way good parents raise their children.

I also found out what it was like to be treated like you, when I took Sheryl home, and Mum and Dad spent the evening ordering me to dump her, just because she's black.

I don't know what else to say at the moment. Please email me back. Even if it's to tell me to stick it up my rather large posterior.

Dudley "Not so Big anymore" Dursley

"It's from my cousin," Harry said slowly, finding it hard to believe that Dudley actually had a sense of humour, or that he was even capable of writing.

"You do realise that if you reply, your Mmail will be monitored? The Death Eaters and the Ministry monitor all outbound mail - they don't care about incoming." Snape paused. "And why is it so surprising that your relatives contacted you? You must have had some before - I can't believe that they would not try and keep in touch with their perfect nephew."

Harry looked up from the Mmail, his eyes suddenly pinning Snape's. "What did you just say?"

Snape blinked. "That your Aunt and Uncle must keep in contact with you."

"You really have no idea, do you?"

"Idea about what?"

"Pull out your wand," Harry commanded, removing his glasses.

Snape gulped, suddenly very concerned.

"Cast Legilimens!"

"Why?"

"Just do it," Harry snarled.

Snape did, and a second later, found himself inside Harry's mind. He watched as the young boy sat in the closet, alone and hungry, with only a spider for company, before he was taken on a whirlwind tour of the boy's childhood. The physical abuse, the starvation, the mental abuse, everything. He tried to pull back, but Harry wouldn't let him, he was locked in.

Harry dragged Snape through everything, up to his first meeting with Hagrid.

Snape stumbled back against his desk, while Harry closed his eyes, breathing heavily.

"I didn't know," Snape said quietly. "Harry, meet me here tonight at seven please. I still need to talk to you, but I think I need a word with Albus now."

Harry nodded, and almost smiled as Snape stormed out of the room. He took a deep breath, and then called for the real Marauder's Map, so that he could find Ginny.

After reliving those memories, he really needed a hug.

Terry rushed from his Ancient Runes class, and bounded excitedly through the hallowed halls of Hogwarts. He rushed up the stairs, taking them two or three at a time in his excitement.

He burst through the door to the Astronomy tower, and spotted the blond boy staring out the window.

"Want to talk about it?" he asked.

"No," Draco snarled.

"Talking always helps," Terry replied casually, not intimidated in the slightest. He knew it wasn't going to be easy, but he was going to get what he wanted.

"What would you know?"

Terry looked amused. "I'm the only openly gay student here. I think I know a little about being ridiculed."

"I'm not gay! I dated girls... Pansy."

Terry looked amused. "So? You were just trying to hide it. A lot of boys go through that stage."

"I am not gay, but thanks to that weasel, everyone thinks I am!"

"First off, don't call Ginny that - if anyone hears you, you'd be cursed to Alaska and back. If Harry heard you, well, I don't think there'd be enough pieces of you left to pick up and curse to Alaska and back. Secondly, if you're not gay, why do you care?"

Draco looked up warily. "What do you mean?"

"If you're completely heterosexual, you have nothing to worry about, do you? After all, you're a Malfoy."

"But even my father thinks I am gay. The Dark Lord too. The Dark Lord is probably going to kill me for being a freak, regardless of whether or not I am gay!"

Terry mentally grinned; Draco hadn't insisted that he was definitely heterosexual. "So your only chance of survival is Harry?"

Draco went white, and then banged his head against the window.

"You know," Terry said, "Harry has no problem with me being gay. He's always been friendly."

Draco groaned, "I told you, I AM NOT GAY!"

"How do you know?"

"What?"

Terry leaned into Draco, trapping the blond against the window. "If you've never tried it, how can you tell?" he whispered, his breath lightly brushing against Draco's mouth.

With infinite slowness, Terry closed the gap between the two boys.

Ginny was sitting with Ron and Hermione at the Gryffindor table, eating lunch. She glanced up as she saw the door open and smiled happily as Harry entered. Her smile dimmed immediately, as she realised something had happened. She stood and walked quickly over to her boyfriend, pulling him into a tight hug.

She smiled slightly as she felt him relax a little against her, using her strength to support himself. Without a word, she pulled him to the nearest empty table and sat him down. She sat next to him, and swung her legs over his lap. She moved his arm over her shoulder and snuggled into his chest. She waited quietly for him to begin speaking, knowing he would when he was ready.

She felt her hair move, as Harry inhaled deeply, and her smile changed slightly, to one of contentment, knowing she was giving her love the support he needed.

"Come on," Ron said, standing.

"I think they want to be left alone," Hermione said quietly.

Ron turned and smiled ruefully at her. "I have grown up a little," he replied. "I think I now have the emotional range of a soup spoon. I just wanted to stand guard and make sure no one bothers them. They are on the end of the Slytherin table."

Hermione looked at him, and then smiled with pride. She leant forwards and gave him a firm kiss on the lips. "A lot more than a soup spoon, Mr Weasley," she said softly.

Together, they walked over, keeping just out of earshot. They were joined a few seconds later by some of the other D.A. members.

The Great Hall slowly filled with students having lunch. The noise level remained low, as no one wanted to interrupt what was going on at the bottom of the Slytherin table. Those that might have been tempted, who felt that what was going on didn't concern them, were persuaded to keep quiet by

the glares from Harry's guard.

"I showed Snape my childhood," Harry said quietly. "Everything."

Ginny nodded, "Will you show me?"

Harry stiffened. "Pardon?"

Ginny tilted her head back so she could look at him properly. "I want to understand," she said softly. "I need to understand."

"It's not pretty," he warned her, not really sure why he wasn't saying no instantly.

"Please Harry," she begged, her eyes wide and clear, the expression on her face one of complete sincerity.

With a great reluctance, but also a strange eagerness, Harry picked up his wand and cast the same spell Snape had, entering Ginny's mind then passing all the memories he had shown Snape before. Unlike the Potions professor, however, Ginny's mind remained firm, absorbing everything without flinching; the only sign that it had any effect on her was the single, crystal tear making its lonely way down her pale cheek.

When it was over, she was still for a second, then reached up and kissed him softly.

"You are amazing," she whispered against his lips. "You had a similar upbringing to Tom, yet you are the exact opposite of him. Where he is bent, twisted, decayed, and diseased, you are bright, strong, straight and clean. You didn't let the anger and hate enter your mind, or your soul; you remained true to yourself." She raised herself up, and kissed his scar directly, then knelt on the bench, her legs on either side of his, so she could look directly into his eyes. "I love you, Harry James Potter, in a way that they could never understand or comprehend. You are the centre of my existence - everything revolves around you, and I wouldn't have it any other way. You will never have to see them again, deal with them again on your own. I will be with you every second of the time, I promise."

Harry smiled slowly, and then wrapped his arms around her and buried his face in her neck. They stayed that way for a couple of minutes.

"Better?" Ginny asked as they pulled away slowly.

"Yeah," Harry smiled.

Ginny looked at her watch. "Aren't you meeting Parvati and Lavender shortly?"

Harry nodded, a little reluctant to leave her.

"I have Arithmacy anyway, sweetheart. Have you got your Gringotts' key?"

Harry shook his head, a small smile on his face now.

"Then go get it. I'll tell Fred and George to have something safe ready for you to eat."

"Yes dear," Harry said in mock-serious voice.

"Get," Ginny grinned, swiping him lightly. "I'll see you later."

Harry nodded, stood, dropped a kiss on her hair, and strode out, his bearing a hundred times more positive than when he had walked in.

Ginny watched him go till he was out of the room, then stood, her expression changing to one of thunderous rage, eyes blazing, reaching for her wand.

Hermione and the others watched as Ginny comforted Harry, received the spell, and then cheered him up. They were all relieved to see him walk out of the Great Hall in a much better mood, although Hermione was a little surprised that Ginny was taking it so well - she had seen first the tear roll down her cheek, not to mention Ginny's reaction afterwards, and was pretty sure that it had something to do with Harry's childhood memories.

That observation went out the window a second later, as a look of fury appeared on the girl's face, and she reached for her wand.

"Quick," Hermione snapped loudly. "Ron, Dean, create some targets, now! Everyone else, cast shields, protect the students from debris."

The D.A. moved quickly, following orders as they had been trained. They watched, as Ginny screamed, "Those disgusting, filthy, obnoxious, arrogant, selfish, MUGGLES!" Each word was accompanied by a burst of pure magic that incinerated the targets.

Ginny panted, and then shoved her wand in her pocket. She turned to the D.A. members.

"Ron, I want you to get in touch with our brothers. Tell them that however bad they thought it was for Harry growing up, it was worse, a lot worse. Everyone else, I want ideas on how we can make the rest of the Dursley's," she spat the name violently, "lives a living hell. I want it subtle and long lasting - death would be far too nice for them. No one treats Harry like that and gets away with it."

"How bad was it, Ginny?" Hermione asked quietly, looking into the younger girl's eyes and seeing a smouldering volcano of emotions. She trusted Ginny's judgment totally, but felt a description would help motivate the others - and explain to the watching Professors exactly what was happening.

"They made him sit in a dark closet for two days. No food, no water, not even some light." Ginny seemed to be talking through gritted teeth. "And he had a broken arm at the time, and was only six years old!"

Horried gasps echoed around the students.

Hermione nodded, hiding her own horror. The memories of the polite, shy Harry the first time she had met him crept up on her, and she felt her own anger grow. "We will find some spells Ginny, don't you worry about that."

Next to her, Ron nodded. "I'll send that Mmail immediately. No one messes with one of us."

Hermione looked around. The D.A. members were now in a circle around the three of them, the rest of the students outside them, and the two professors who had been supervising were at the edge.

"That goes for all of you as well," she promised the students gathered around them, not really comfortable with making a speech. "What we do for Harry, we do because we know without any doubt he would do the same for us, if not more. If you haven't already joined the D.A., join now. Every single member is treated like family - we look out for each other first and foremost. We will be there with Harry when he faces Voldemort, making sure he can do his job."

"And we will be there to celebrate with him when he defeats that lowlife," Ginny's voice rang out, her burst of temper over.

There was a second pause, before everyone started cheering wildly.

"Do you ever get the feeling that we're superfluous?" Professor Vector asked, as she watched the students walk out.

"I know what you mean," Professor Sinistra sighed. "Those children would learn so much if they paid as much attention in Astronomy, as they do to anything that involves our new assistant professor.

"What do you think about that, I mean, a student who's not even in his last year being a professor."

"Madness. Well, it would be, if it were anyone else. I often get the feeling that I'm standing in the presence of a legend when I am near him. He's got this hidden drive, this determination, deep inside him, which means he will not give in, no matter what the odds are against him."

"I don't like it," Vector admitted, "I think he should spend his time chasing Ms Weasley like his father chased his mother. Not be caught up in all this death and destruction."

"We'd all like the Dark Tosser to be gone," Sinistra agreed.

"And that's another thing," Vector interrupted, "Since when did we start taking linguistic lessons from the students?"

"It's not just from the students," Sinistra said reproachfully. "Albus said himself that fear of the name increases the fear of the man. Calling him the Dark Tosser eliminates that nicely - it's hard to have as much fear when all you have in mind is the object meaning of the phrase."

"I guess, it's just... Take what happened just now. We had an upset student being cheered up by his girlfriend with some very public displays of affection - that would normally involve us having a quiet word - maybe taking house points. We had a spell cast in the middle of lunch, which should not be known by any student, never mind used in Hogwarts. Then we had a group of students acting as guardians - making sure that two students were not disturbed as they took up a whole table to themselves, and then we had a magic display of the sort not seen in here in decades - including a couple of bursts of pure magic that should not have been possible by ANY of our students, never mind a fifth year. And to top it off, another student uses the opportunity for a recruitment drive for a club that was illegal last year!"

"Feel better? Now that you've got that rant off your chest?"

Vector looked a little embarrassed. "It's just... We're the teachers, but Harry, Ginny, Hermione, and to a slightly lesser extent, Ron, have more control over the rest of the students than we do. I feel sorry for the seventh years, or I would if they weren't part of it. They should be the senior students, but no one even knows who the Head Boy and Girl are - and when I asked them about it, they just shrugged and pointed out that they have it easy. All the problems that they traditionally have to deal with are being dealt with by Harry and his friends."

There was a pause, while Vector looked shocked. "And I'm bloody doing it myself!"

"Doing what?"

"Calling Harry, Harry, and the rest by their names. What happened to the formal relationship between staff and pupil?"

"Harry is staff," Sinistra pointed out with a grin. "You're looking at this from the wrong perspective."

"What do you mean?"

"You should be looking at this as a chance to get to know and influence an exceptional generation of students," she pointed out. "We have been given the opportunity to participate in history. In years to come, they will talk of these students as the saviours of the planet, and we will be the ones who taught them - helped them become what they must. As professional teachers, what more can we ask for? That the ones we teach go on to fulfil their potential. Look at how many kids have died through the Dark Tosser, with all that learning snuffed out because of one megalomaniac Tosser."

Vector slowly smiled. "You're right, and I am a little jealous. Albus, Minerva, Filius, Pomona, and even Severus are so much more involved than we are."

"Think about it," Sinistra said softly, her eyes a little regretful as she picked up a book, and prepared to walk out. "I saw a Muggle film once, great story, but there was a quote that applies here. 'With great power comes great responsibility.' Would you be willing to do what is needed if you had the power? Harry is still young, but has been under the Cruciatus curse many times. Would you be willing to do that?"

Vector slowly shook her head, a little embarrassed.

"That's why we're at the back, helping where we can. It's nothing to be embarrassed about, it just means that we shouldn't resent Harry getting special treatment - and by association, his friends. These extraordinary students are putting their lives on the line for the normal people. The people like us."

Snape stormed towards the Headmaster's office, in a foul mood, his cloak billowing behind him like the wings of an avenging dark angel, on a mission of revenge. Students got out of his way in a hurry, suddenly worrying that the old Snape was back.

He snarled the password to the Gargoyle, and then charged up the moving stairs. He burst into the office, ignoring the other three Heads of Houses who were enjoying lunch with the Headmaster.

"What the hell were you thinking?"

Albus blinked in surprise. "I'm sorry?"

"Leaving Harry with those, those... those... Muggles." The way Snape said the last word made it very clear that he thought of it as a base expletive of the worst kind.

"They're not that bad," Dumbledore said calmly.

"Not that bad!?" Snape shook his head, bitter laughter erupting from him. "I'll show you how 'Not that bad' they were." He pulled his wand, and cast the same spell he had on Harry, this time pushing the memories he had just received onto the others. It was a sign of their trust in him that they let him.

There was complete silence around the table, which was only broken by the shifting of cloth against a chair, as Dumbledore slumped down.

"Give me one good reason why I shouldn't Apparate there and turn both of them into toads," Filius said, as he digested what he had just experienced, so incensed that steam was coming out of his ears.

"Because by the time you get there I shall have already turned them into mushrooms," Sprout replied, on her feet.

"You will do no such thing," Minerva almost roared. "Harry is my student; therefore, I get to transfigure them into new bookcases for my room." She stalked towards the door, determinedly.

"Sit!" Albus' voice cracked across the room, like a whip. He took a deep breath. "All of you, please, sit down."

With a bit of grumbling, they did as asked.

"Do you have any idea how old I am?"

"Around 150," Snape snapped, a little bemused by the non sequitur. "What has this got to do with Harry?"

"Patience, my dear Severus. Actually, I am 162 years old.

"In that time I have seen so much, and I am tired. My bones ache each morning that I get up. All I want is to run this school for a few more years, see Voldemort defeated, and then face my next great adventure with a smile on my face."

His four Head of Houses looked at him with wide eyes, having never seen him so open and vulnerable before.

"When I fought Voldemort at the end of term, it took me two days to get my magical power back up to normal. If he had attacked again, I would have been finished.

"I have made a lot of mistakes in my time, and I am afraid that the decision I made with Harry is one of the worst. I truly thought I was doing the best thing. That Harry would grow up with people who loved him, free from the pressures of being the Boy Who Lived. That he would have a childhood.

"As with a lot of things in life, out of sight was out of mind. I had a busy school to run, people to keep an eye on, the Ministry to guide, Mugwump meetings to attend.

"When Harry first arrived here, I initially thought he was just shy, and didn't think anymore about it. Everything he did, following his arrival, showed me what a remarkable young man he is, and I presumed that his home life was fine. With the benefit of hindsight, I can say that I ignored the signs that he showed. I know he mentioned it a bit later on, but I must confess that I thought it was merely a teenager's exaggeration - that he didn't want to go back to a non-magical environment.

"I told him the truth - that it was the best place for him, because of the strong blood protection his relatives gave him. I didn't tell him that I could have

created the wards pretty much anywhere else - that with the Wizarding world being so inter-related, most families would have been suitable. I didn't tell him because it would have taken more magic, more magic that I was willing to expend, as I knew I wouldn't have time to recover."

The four teachers sat back in their chairs, while Severus pulled out the Firewhiskey and five glasses.

"So much pressure on one so young," Filius said, in a tone of deep regret.

"I'm sorry?" Ponomasova asked, a little surprised by his comment.

"Oh, I jumped ahead in the conversation," the diminutive man sighed. "Albus has been giving Harry a lot of freedom this year. I'd wondered why, when compared to previous years. I'm afraid Albus got a taste of his own mortality that night, and has realised that he needs as much help as is possible.

"With the prophecy stating that Harry is the only who can kill Voldemort, he is the only one who can help.

"If you look at what Harry has done over the past few years, it is nothing short of remarkable. He has a group of incredibly loyal friends. I wasn't going to mention this, but I'm afraid that one of my students tried to interfere with Harry and Ginny's relationship. She will not be doing it again; Hermione gave her an object lesson in living up to one's responsibilities. A small group of girls also promised to take care of the instigator, so that Harry could focus on the important things.

"The D.A., as I now know thanks to Severus and the cheer at breakfast, is fanatically loyal to him. Half of the members of the Order would follow him now, more so if Albus gave him some backing. People recognise that Harry is an Alpha Male. He's a natural leader that will stand at the front in the fight, and do what he believes to be right."

"It's interesting you should say that," Minerva interrupted smoothly. "Harry's Animagus form is a Wolf." She didn't mention his other form on purpose. "Harry has a fierce loyalty to his mate, and to his pack. He sees Voldemort as a threat to his pack's stability and is prepared to deal with the threat."

"You are correct, Filius," Albus re-entered the conversation. "As I recuperated from the fight with Voldemort, I had some time to think, and I decided that I had perhaps kept a too tight reign on Harry. I decided to let him have the freedom he wanted this year, and hoped it would be good for him.

"I believe I can say that my faith has been amply rewarded. My school is one again; students are friends with students from other houses. They are rallying around the one person they know is their chance at a normal life. Harry's magic is increasing in leaps and bounds, as is his reasoning and perception. He is growing up, a lot faster than I would like, but we don't have the luxury of him doing it normally.

"If anything happens to me, he has to be ready to step into my shoes - so we must continue to try and guide him."

"That doesn't explain why I can't go and introduce those *Muggles* to the blunt end of my wand," Snape said quietly. His anger with Albus was now gone, but his anger towards those two disgusting examples of humanity still raged.

Albus smiled faintly. "It doesn't, but do any of you really think that Ms Weasley does not have plans of her own?"

Identical smiles slowly appeared on each of the teacher's faces as they considered the headmaster's words. Smiles that were, maybe, just a little bit feral.

"I think I shall call a full Order meeting for nine pm tonight," Dumbledore mused thoughtfully. "It will be interesting to see how they react to Harry joining."

From: Youngest Male

To: Brothers All

Cc: Mum, Dad, Padfoot, Moony

Subject: Harry

Guys,

At lunch today, Ginny persuaded Harry to show her exactly what went on in his childhood - Hermione said it was a form of Legilimens.

Well, I'm sad to say that however bad we thought it was, Ginny says it was a *lot* worse. Those disgusting Muggles locked Harry in a cupboard for two days, without food, water, or even a light when he was six. And he had a broken arm at the time!

Suffice it to say that our little sister is not amused - in fact, if she ever looked at me that way, I'd be contemplating leaving the planet. Immediately.

Before you go running out, and, yes, I'm looking at you Sirius, Ginny is coordinating the revenge.

Ron

From: Molly

To: Family (extended)

Cc: Ginny

Subject: Re: Harry

Attachment: recipe.pmt

Why those disgusting filthy Muggles, how dare they lock Harry in a cupboard. If I thought it would do any good, I'd send them another Howler!

Ginny, attached is a little potions recipe I cooked up some years ago. It will change their taste buds so that no matter what they eat, it will taste like baked beans. Permanently.

Mum

From: Padfoot and Moony

To: All the Weasleys

Cc: The cute red-head

Subject: Re: Re: Harry

Attachment: truth_tourettes.pmt

It's probably a good thing that Ginny is dealing with this. I'm not exactly renowned for my subtlety or restraint, and well, when Remus gets going, let's just say the hidden wolf comes out to play.

Our contribution is based on the one or two meetings we've had with Petunia. It's a curse that means the victim will blurt out what they are really thinking at random times, no matter who they are talking to.

P&M

--
growing

From: Perce

To: Family & Padfoot and Moony

Cc: Ginny

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Harry

Attachment: anti-ministry.pmt

How dare they! I am tempted to just have them arrested and put into Azkaban! I don't care that no Muggles have ever been there before. However, I shall restrain my original impulse, as in this case, a more fitting punishment is being arranged.

Ginny, attached is a nice little charm for their house - it will mask all the magic emanating from that area, so the Ministry will never know.

Please be careful with this spell, it is a closely guarded secret.

PJW

--
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From: The Twins

To: Percy

Cc: Everyone Else

Attachment: justice.pmt

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Harry

Percy, when we next see you, we're going to give you such a hug! You are quite definitely a Weasley again! Don't worry, we won't abuse your spell - we don't do that to family.

Gin, our curse is a little harder to do, but it's certainly going to be fun. We would LOVE to see their faces when they wake up on odd days of the month... only to find that they have switched bodies. It will last all day, then when they got to sleep, they will switch back.

Mum, we're so impressed with your potion - it's sneaky, underhand. And all those years you claimed not to know where we got our pranking ability from. We bet you were a right prankster when you were young... wasn't she, Dad?

Gred

--

Weasley's Wizard Wheezes – coming soon to Diagon Alley

From: Arthur @ work

To: Revenge seekers

Attachment: hogwarts_effect.pmt

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Harry

I'm very glad to see the family working together over this.

One of the things that we work on here at the office is a way to stop Muggle devices, (some of their toys are very nasty). It recreates the effect that Hogwarts has on elastictrical machines. I tweaked it a little, and once set off, it will disrupt everything in the house for a short period of time, at random intervals.

And as for your mother, why do you think I fell in love with her in the first place?

Arthur

--

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From: Almost feeling sorry for them

To: Family and Friends

Cc: Snapdragon

Attachment: dragon_breath.pmt

Subject: Re[lots]: Harry

I said almost...

Mine, well, let's just say that after this has been cast, you wouldn't want to be down wind ^smirk^

C.

--

Draconis dominium

From: I appear to be last

To: Friends and Family

Cc: Munchkin

Attachment: Egyptian_curses.pmt

Subject: Re: Re[lots]: Harry

This is what I get for taking an early lunch. I come back to find that Mum was a prankster, Percy's a Weasley, and that the Marauders haven't lost their edge, Fred and George have proved that they still are still the masters, and those fricking Muggles deserve everything they are going to get! How in Merlin's name did Harry come out like he has from that?

So, what can I add? This is one of the curses from Ramses the Great. It's a combination of a Cupid spell and a loyalty spell, with the affection part removed. It will mean that the two of them will be stuck with each other for the rest of their lives, never divorcing or separating.

Bill

From: Ginny

To: Family and Marauders

Subject: Revenge

Thanks everyone, I love you all (Yes, even you Padfoot - but watch what you call me in front of Harry, he's a little possessive)

I could list a hundred different things they did to Harry and believe me when I say that we are being restrained. Percy's solution was a very good one! This way though, Harry will never need to know about it, and we can all feel like we have some closure.

I will make it very clear to them that this is punishment for what they have put Harry through - I don't want them thinking it's bad luck or anything.

Fred, George, Harry is on his way to Gringotts now, and then to see you. He's not had lunch, so please make sure he eats something filling at your place (and no pranking him).

A grateful Gin.

From: The dynamic duo

To: Dynamo

Cc: The rest of the participants

Subject: Re: Revenge

No problem Gin, we'll make sure he eats something. And we won't prank him; he was very nice to us yesterday.

Forge

--
Weasley's Wizard Wheezes – coming soon to Diagon Alley.

From: Molly

To: The twins

Subject: Harry's lunch

Can one of you two pop home: I've made a couple of sandwiches.

Love you both,

Be good,

Mum

"Are you ready?" Harry asked, as he approached Lavender and Parvati.

The two girls looked at each other, a little nervously, and smiled. "Yes. How are we going to get there? Portkey?"

Harry shook his head, "Can you keep a secret?"

They both nodded instantly, more than trusting Harry.

He grinned and reached out and took their hands. As he touched them, they all vanished from Hogwarts, and reappeared in the entrance foyer to Gringotts bank.

Harry looked at the two girls, and waited for them to recover.

"You can Apparate!" Lavender blurted, a shocked look appearing on her face.

"Shhh," Harry whispered, holding his finger to his lips. "It's a secret, remember?"

Parvati nodded, her eyes huge as she looked at Harry, a tinge of hero worship in her eyes.

"Come on," Harry smiled, and opened the door to the huge reception area.

Fred and George had arranged an appointment for Lavender and Parvati, so a harried looking Goblin took them off to a side room instantly.

Harry took a seat, and idly conjured a quill and some paper, and started to do his potions homework.

"Mr Potter?" A voice inquired politely, breaking his concentration.

Harry looked up to see a small goblin. The goblin looked like all goblins, with no real discernable features that Harry could recognise, so he took a gamble. "Griphook?"

The goblin showed his teeth in what the boy wizard hoped was a smile. "Indeed. Have you come to see your new vaults?"

Harry blinked. "I wasn't aware that I had new vaults," he admitted.

Griphook's mouth changed shape, into what was now probably a frown. "Most strange, Mr Potter. We did try and contact you.

"Your parents will was most specific. You were to be left a small allowance to pay for school, until you reached seventeen, unless both they and your remaining family had died"

"But my aunt and uncle are still alive," Harry pointed out.

Griphook seemed to sniff disdainfully. "I'm afraid that Muggles do not count when it comes to Wizarding guardians."

"Well, my godfather is alive as well."

"Ahh yes, Mr Black," Griphook agreed. "A will is a magical document, Mr Potter. A contract signed and sealed by powerful wizards in the presence of your parents, and Mr Black. Once your godfather was pronounced dead, the contract came to an end, and your parent's full inheritance was placed in your control."

Harry looked shocked.

"I would suggest that you have a look, Mr Potter," Griphook advised gently. Well, as gently as a goblin could.

Harry nodded, and sent his work back to Hogwarts. "Will you arrange for my friends to be looked after until we get back?"

"With pleasure, Mr Potter."

The ride through the catacombs took Harry back to his first year, when he had ridden the roller coaster for the first time. The effect was a dizzying and confusing as it had been back then.

They rolled to a stop outside a huge door bearing an enormous, medieval crest. The crest's primary colours were red and silver, with a bold black square sitting front and centre. Three silver stars shimmered in the low light, two in the upper right corner and one in the lower left corner, separated by a swath of silver. At the top of the square sat an elegant helm, which made him think of Arthurian legend and the Crusades. It was surrounded by a flurry of red and silver ordinaries – swirling, intricate patterns that looked like ribbons of the finest silks streaming from the helm. Finally, seated atop the helm was a shimmering golden lion, which appeared to be asleep.

At the bottom of the shield, in golden calligraphy were the words 'Audaces fortuna juvat'.

"'Fortune favours the bold'," Griphook translated without being asked. "A somewhat fitting motto for an ancient and royal house."

"Royal?" Harry asked.

Griphook had what could have been a surprised expression on his face. "I would suggest that you look up your family some time, Mr Potter. Sometime the answers to today's problems can be found in the past."

Harry nodded solemnly; no other action seemed to fit. "How do I open it?" he asked, as he realised there was nowhere for his key.

"Approach the door, Mr Potter. Only a true Potter can open it."

As Harry walked towards the door, the lion seemed to wake and fix the approaching wizard with a baleful glance.

The lion reared back on its hind legs, and let out an earth shattering roar.

Harry froze, shaking his head a little to clear his ears.

"Approach," the lion said in a huge voice. "But beware, for only true members of the House of Potter may open my doors."

Harry walked forwards slowly, mentally preparing to Apparate out of the area if anything went wrong.

"Halt," the lion commanded. As Harry obeyed instantly, the lion continued. "Place your hand on the stars."

Harry reached out with his left hand, the sudden words of Alastor Moody in his mind: "*Constant Vigilance*!" His right hand, his stronger hand, remained safe by his side. As he touched the bottom of the shield, the stars started to swirl faster and faster. Before he could react, they had sucked him in.

It was grey. Everywhere was grey. It was an oppressive lack of colour that seemed to steal his breath from his body. Harry looked around cautiously, drawing together his magic.

He heard a coughing sound from behind him, and whirled, his hands up.

"Wouldn't a wand be helpful?" a friendly voice asked curiously. An old man came into focus, wearing a robe that looked to be military in origin. "Oh, a wandless user," the man said, his tone now filled with admiration. "Why, there hasn't been one of them in the family for over a millennia. Excellent. Why don't you take a seat?"

Harry looked around and blinked. The grey was gone, replaced by a log cabin with a roaring fire. Behind him was a comfy looking chair that he sat in.

"Where am I?"

"*Where* is an interesting question," The old man agreed. "However, *when* am I, would be a far more pertinent one."

Harry smiled wryly. "Why is it that everyone new I meet has to talk in riddles for the first ten minutes? Is it some form of law or old charter I'm not aware of?"

The man looked at him for a second, and then burst into laughter.

"It's not nice to ruin an old man's fun. We tend to talk in riddles to make you youngsters admire our intelligence."

"Oh, sorry." Harry smiled. "So, when am I?"

"1323." The man smiled. "I'm the current gatekeeper for the Potter vault. The spell sends your spirit to meet me, so I can... what is it the young people are saying in your days?... Oh yes... check you out. What's your full name?"

"Harry James Potter."

"Ahh, the only son of Lily Evans and James Potter. I take it they are dead?"

"For some time," Harry agreed blandly, his emotions locked up tight.

"Pity," The old man sighed. "Some Potters seem to live forever; others are tragically cut down before their prime. I do so hope you are one of the long ones."

"Yeah, so do I."

The wizard smiled. "Tell me about yourself, Harry, and would you like a cup of tea?"

Harry nodded, and after taking a sip, he began to speak. It was only half way through his conversation that he realised the old man was simply lonely, and with that, he started to go into more details, paying his ancestor all the courtesy he could.

"Thank you," the old man smiled warmly. "You are more than welcome into the Potter family vault. When you get in there, you may want to look in the chest immediately to your left. You may find its contents useful in a few years time."

Harry nodded, and a second later found himself in front of the now open doors. He walked in slowly, slightly awed by the sheer size of the room that seemed to stretch into eternity.

"An illusion, Mr Potter," Griphook said quietly. "The room is large, but not that large."

Harry nodded, and dropped to his knees in front of the first chest, opening it.

Inside, on a purple velvet cushion, were three rings. In gold lettering, of the same style as the crest, were words under each ring.

"I Promise" "I Will" "Forever"

Harry looked down, a little confused, and then saw a piece of paper. He opened it, and gasped softly.

"*Harry*," the letter started, in a flowing elegant script.

"Well, if you're reading this it means that Lils and I are dead. And quite frankly, that is the most maudlin start to a letter I can possibly imagine. I think I'd rather start by saying: If you're reading this, then you've just become Quidditch champion for the Falcons. Owl!"

The writing changed, to one that was smaller and harder to read. *"Ignore your father, Harry, he has very little taste. Anyway, bypassing the fact that we will have to be dead for you to read this, the rings in front of you are a family heirloom."*

The writing changed once more, "Yes, thank you, honey. I can take it from here. She's just jealous because I have better handwriting than her. Ouch, will you stop hitting me? Now look what you made me write. Anyway Harry, a bit of history first.

"Potter men have this habit of finding the girls they are going to fall in love with early in their lives. I met Lils when I was eleven. Unfortunately, Potter men then go about completely ignoring the girl for many years, not waking up till it's almost too late. It was my fifth year before I woke up to Lils, and it was devastating to find she didn't like me. Can you imagine anyone resisting my irresistibility?"

"That's enough of that, James," The writing changed yet again. *"Your father was a little arrogant when he was young, but he grew out of that and actually turned sweet and loving. I wouldn't have married him otherwise."*

"Yes... Thank you once more for ruining my reputation with my son. Anyway, Harry. This does have a point. Honest. Once we Potter men fall for these girls, we make up for our stupidity with a cunning plan. You see, one of our ancestors, a genius in my opinion, had these three rings custom-made.

"The first one is a Promise Ring. It's what we Potters use to a, prove that we are deadly serious about the girl, and b, take them off the market, so to speak.

"The second is the engagement ring, to be given when little details like Wizarding law is no longer an issue. In case you don't know, they won't allow any wizard under the age of majority to propose on his own. Stupid custom if you ask me.

"The final ring is the wedding ring. When your wife wears all three, they will merge into one, and stay with her till her death.

"So, in case you're particularly dense (you are a male Potter, it's in your genes), if you've got a girl, get the first ring on her finger as soon as possible!"

The writing changed again. *"If you haven't got a girl yet Harry, make sure you look at everyone you know as friends first - you can often find your partner hidden in a corner somewhere."*

"And," his father continued. *"Potter men need a woman that can handle us and. Historically, that shows that only a Redhead can tackle the task and succeed.*

"To finish this off, Harry. Your mother and I both love you, but we don't want to see you in the next place for a VERY long time. We know about the prophecy, and everything that is on your shoulders. Don't let it dominate you; make friends, get the girl, and fight for everything you hold dear. Fight to avenge us. But don't get yourself killed. We want to look down and see grandkids!"

"Your father's right Harry. Live life. Live long. Live happy. And when you're ready, we'll be waiting for you and your wife at the gates, where we'll be together for eternity, enjoying the next great adventure.

"Lots of love,

"Mum and Dad"

Harry stayed still for a few minutes, crouched over and looking down. He had a strange expression on his face, as if he was going to laugh and cry at the same time.

He folded the letter up, placing it securely in his pocket and looked at the rings. With a slight smile, he grabbed the promise ring and placed it in his pocket.

"Can I get some money converted into Muggle money?"

"Of course, Mr Potter; you'll find that we have an excellent exchange rate. Only three percent."

Harry nodded absently, and walked out of his vault, the door shutting behind him with a resounding slam. "Thank you for showing me this, Griphook, I appreciate it."

Griphook nodded and managed to look proud. "I was wondering, Mr Potter, if you would have a few minutes spare to have a word with the manager. I assure you that your friends are being well looked after."

"Of course," Harry said politely.

The ride back through the roller coaster was longer than the way in, and they stopped in a strange cave he had never seen before.

"This way, Mr Potter," Griphook said, leading Harry down a red-carpeted corridor flanked by statues of goblins.

"Each one is an former manager," Griphook explained proudly, as they reached the end of the red carpet. He knocked on the door, which opened

Immediately.

Inside the opulent room was a huge mahogany desk. A goblin sat behind it, writing into a huge volume.

"Thank you, Mr Griphook," the goblin nodded at Harry's escort. "It is a delight to meet you, Mr Potter; I am Mackrack, the general manager of this branch. Won't you take a seat?"

Harry nodded, and sat opposite the Goblin. The chair seemed to sigh as he sat down, and then adjusted itself to fit him perfectly.

"We are in a strange position, Mr Potter," the manager began, not really looking at Harry. "We operate through trust. People trust us with their gold. If they did not trust us, it would be disastrous for business. It means that, despite how we may feel, we can not interfere in everyday events."

Harry nodded thoughtfully, slipping his glasses off, and looking directly at the goblin, trying to work out if he was trustworthy.

"War is bad for business. Voldemort --" and the Goblin said the name distastefully, "-- is bad for business. Most wizards seem to be under the impression that we would join him in a second." He looked disgusted at the very notion. "We would lose everything if that was to happen.

"But as much as we might want to help, our promises bind us more securely than our own wants and needs." The goblin seemed to be tapping his quill against the page he had been writing on, while meeting Harry's penetrating stare as directly as he could.

"Excuse me, sir," Griphook interrupted. "I believe you are needed in your private chambers."

"Of course," Mackrack said. "Follow me, Griphook."

The two goblins walked out, leaving Harry alone in the office, the book wide open. Harry smiled to himself, getting the not-so-subtle hint, and walked over to see what the Goblins wanted him to read. He gasped in surprise, and then borrowed a piece of paper and a quill.

To: Percy and Kingsley

From: H

Subject: Interesting Information

Attachment: dates.pmt

Percy, Kingsley,

One of my spies brought this to my attention. It details deposits to a bank account of one Cornelius J Fudge. One of them was for the day that Sirius was freed.

Something smells fishy about this, and I'm not talking about Fudge's aftershave.

Harry

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

From: Shacked up

To: Co-investigator

Subject: Re: Interesting Information

So, how long do you think that Harry has had a spy network?

Fascinating stuff, that document. What do you make with the dates?

KS

From: Percival Weasley (CIO)

To: Kingsley Winston Shacklebolt

Subject: Re: Re: Interesting Information

My dear fellow; those dates are extremely interesting. They correlate exactly to dates of prominent Death Eater trials. As a famous Muggle once wrote: Something may be rotten in the state of Denmark.

As for our young Mr Potter; well, quite frankly I wouldn't put anything past him these days. I am getting constant reports from Ronald regarding

Harry's abilities and progress. When the time comes, I will be hoisting my own petard next to his, and following him onto victory.

P

--

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From: On'tday useway lctorvay

To: Ercivalpay Easleyway

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Interesting information

They correlate? Hmm. I think that a trip to Azkaban may be in order. Something strange is going on, and we're going to need to get to the bottom of it. I'll get a few friends to provide us with an escort.

As for following Harry, I'll be right with you. Albus has been giving him a lot more freedom this year, and I'd bet galleons to sugar quills that the prophecy has something to do with it.

Shack

From: Albus Dumbledore

To: Order Members (All)

Subject: Meeting

Will all members please report to Hogwarts at nine pm tonight?

Albus

--

Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot and Chairman of the International Confederation of Wizards

From: Snape

To: Harry

Subject: Re: Meeting

Harry, it seems like I am not destined to talk to you today. Can we please reschedule for tomorrow at 4pm?

S

From: Harry

To: Potions Professor

Subject: Re[2]: Meeting

No problem.

H

--

Audaces fortuna juvat

Harry moved back into his own chair, and sat comfortably. A few seconds later, the manager reappeared, followed by Griphook who was carrying a tray.

"Cup of tea, Mr Potter?"

"Please," Harry smiled, "call me Harry. And I'd love one."

The manager showed his teeth, and poured Harry and himself a cup.

Harry brought it to his lips, and inhaled the aroma.

"Earl Gray," the manager said softly. "It's a Muggle affection, and I'm rather partial to it."

"I feel that I should warn you," Harry said in between sips of the hot liquid, "That I have had spies watching your counters. They did note a few coincidental transactions ascertaining to a certain Minister of Magic."

Mackrack nodded, still smiling, "Shocking, Harry, shocking. Well, you can rest assured that I will look into this appalling invasion of the sanctity of Gringotts with the utmost urgency. I shall spare no effort with this investigation; in fact I will head it myself. Just as soon as I get some spare time."

"Are you a busy man, sir?"

"You can call me Mackrack, Harry, and yes, extremely busy I'm afraid."

They both grinned at each other. "I shall look forward to the results of your investigation."

"Excellent, I shall send you a copy, just as soon as I can."

Harry finished his tea and stood up. "It has been a most informative visit."

"That it has, Harry," The goblin stood up as well, and offered his hand, which Harry promptly shook.

As Harry walked out, and the doors closed behind him, the goblin turned to a wall and pressed a button. The wall retracted, revealing a huge fireplace.

Mackrack through some powder into the fire, and watched as the heads of the other branches of Gringotts appeared.

"How did it go?"

"Excellently," Mackrack reported. "Mr Potter has the information, and sent an immediate Mmail to the people running the investigation into corruption. Both of which are, according to our spies, very loyal to Mr Potter."

"Mr Potter, or Harry as he allowed me to call him, does not seem to have the prejudices of other wizards. He does, however, posses a most intimidating stare. I do not remember a time when I felt quite so open. Fortunately, I was telling the truth, so I believe I passed his test. I feel that it would be very wise for us to continue to aid him as we can."

The other goblins nodded, and then moved onto other business.

"How much Muggle currency do you want, Mr Potter?" Griphook asked.

"A thousand pounds," Harry said, deciding to be on the safe side.

"That will be... 398 galleons, 4 sickles, and 19 knuts, including our three percent charge."

Harry nodded, and a second later was handed a thick wad of fifty pound notes.

"Thanks for everything you have done today, Griphook," Harry said, smiling at the goblin.

"The pleasure was all mine, Mr Potter."

A giddy looking Parvati and Lavender, who were led over by another goblin, joined them.

"Everything done?" Harry asked.

The two girls nodded enthusiastically.

Harry looked at his watch, and was pleasantly surprised to see that it was only two pm. He led the two girls back into the foyer, and transported them to Weasley's Wizard Wheezes.

As soon as Fred saw them arrive, he closed the store for lunch and called his twin.

"Harry, would you mind if we separated you guys?" Fred asked. "George will take the two lovely ladies through what we have learnt."

Harry shrugged, and followed Fred into the back room, while George took the two girls into their office.

"What's up?" Harry asked.

"Before we talk business," Fred grinned, "you have to eat. There is no way we're risking the wrath of our darling sister by talking business with you on an empty stomach."

Harry laughed, and took a bite of the large sandwich that Fred placed in front of him. "I didn't know you guys could cook."

"We can't. Mum made it for you. George just nipped home and picked it up."

"Ahh," Harry smiled, and demolished the food as he quickly realised he was ravenous.

As soon as he had finished, Fred gave him a glass of Butterbeer and sat down on the table, pulling out a sheaf of parchment.

"George spent the morning in the library, looking at the patent issue for Butterbeer," he began his report. "Now, while the idea of George in a library is about as realistic as me in a nunnery, nevertheless, my twin managed to apply his brilliant mind to the issue, and discovered something quite remarkable.

"The whole Butterbeer industry is controlled, through various shadow companies, by one Lucius Malfoy, and the Malfoy estate."

Harry lost his relaxed pose in a second, sat up straight and began intently reading the paperwork Fred was passing him.

"I had a meeting with our solicitor an hour ago, a truly charming lady," he commented parenthetically, "and it turns out that the patent was a bit of a red herring. But, what is interesting is that the Malfoy family no longer owns the trademark for Butterbeer. It was an asset seized by the Ministry Of Magic some time ago, from one of Lucius' underlings. The Ministry of Magic has a policy of selling off seized assets to bolster public funds. The guy in charge of such transactions is a close friend of Dad's, as it happens. We had a rather interesting Mmail conversation with him this morning, and as a result of the trademark just coincidentally becoming available now, we can buy it."

Harry was looking at Fred in surprise.

Fred smirked as he correctly interpreted the look. "Shocked to see me serious? Well, George and I have found that playing the business game is even more fun than playing tricks on people. In fact, our reputation helps us massively as we are underestimated wherever we go. Everyone knows we were chucked out of Hogwarts early, so they expect us to be bumpkins who got lucky." Fred's smile now had a twinge of evilness to it. "So when we end up taking them to the cleaners, they don't understand it."

Harry laughed under his breath. "Serious Weasley Twins? Merlin! I'm glad you're on our side." He paused a second. "How much?"

Fred winced slightly, deflating as he sat down. "Not everybody at the Ministry is incompetent. And typically, Dad's friend is one of the competent ones. 20,000 galleons. We've not got anywhere near that much."

Harry started to smirk, "If this money was found, exactly what could you do with the trademark?"

Fred sat up again, with another mercurial mood swing. "Well, to start with, it would put a major hole in the Malfoy cash flow. They would not be allowed to market their product under the name Butterbeer anymore, so they would have to rename everything. At the same time, we launch Honest Abe's Original Butterbeer, as a variety on the original name, and overnight, we replace one monopoly with another - ours. We will own the market, literally, overnight."

"Do George and Abe know what is going on?"

"Of course," Fred nodded.

"I propose to lend your new company the sum of 25,000 galleons on an interest-free basis. I expect to be paid back with the profits of selling the Butterbeer. The only caveat I have, is that this is kept in the utmost secrecy. No one is to know where you got the money."

"Do I get to ask where you got the money?"

Harry smiled slightly, "Let's just say Padfoot's trip to Ecuador was more useful than anyone expected at the time."

Fred slammed his hand onto the table, "Your inheritance! Of course, with Padfoot dead, you were officially guardian-less. You've got to love Wizard contracts!" Fred put his arms in front of him, and then moved them in a circular movement, while moving his torso in the opposite direction, in a very strange chair dance. "On behalf of the two other partners, we accept your exceptionally generous offer, as long as it is agreed that the interest rate is 2%."

Harry frowned at that.

"Harry, taking an interest-free loan would cost us more in taxes, Believe me, it's better this way."

"Oh. All right then."

"So how do you want to play the revelation that we have the trademark?"

Harry looked thoughtful. "I'd prefer a devastating blow. How's the search for premises to make the new stuff going?"

"We're looking at a place this afternoon. The materials that Abe needs have been pretty easy to source, we just got in touch with a Muggle distributor. We can get as much as we need as quickly as we need it. If this place is any good, we could order the equipment tonight, probably get it by the end of the week, and be prepared to launch the product on Monday. It won't mean much sleep for us, but believe me we can handle it. This is as much a buzz as making new inventions!"

Harry nodded. "Right then. When you're ready, we'll launch an immediate publicity blitz - adverts in all the papers and magazines. We'll get your solicitors to stop the production of Butterbeer at source, let the word be known that even selling it under the name of Butterbeer is now illegal, then

offer them this new and better product at a ten percent discount. We should be in all major retailers immediately. We'll promise immediate delivery, and offer to buy back any remaining stock of the current Butterbeer at a reduced rate. It will make us look good, and keep the retailers happy as they will at least be getting something for it."

Fred blinked.

He shook his head, then threw back his head and started to laugh hysterically.

"What?" Harry asked, starting to blush, he hadn't thought his ideas were that bad.

Fred tried to control himself, and ended up throwing a glass of water into his face to see if that would help. "Harry, will you make me a promise?"

"What?" Harry asked again, this time suspicious.

"That when you leave school, you won't go into competition against us?"

"Why would I do that?"

"Because you're so bloody ruthless at times, it's scary. Your plan is amazing; it will wipe out Lucius' cash flow in a second, and leave him with massive debts from his suppliers."

This Means War

8 - Manic Monday (part 2)

Harry shrugged and said, "Audaces fortuna juvat. It's the family motto. 'Fortune favours the bold'."

Harry and Fred walked back into the sales floor of the shop, and Fred showed off some of their new inventions with pride.

"There is one other thing, Harry," Fred said, a lot more cautiously than earlier. "But it is kinda personal, not business."

"What?"

"We know that Ginny is completely in love with you. Are you serious about her? I think it would kill her if you weren't."

Harry reached into his pocket, and pulled out the ring. His hand caught as he pulled it out, and he dropped it. He cursed, and dived after the thin piece of metal, catching it by Fred's shoes. On one knee, Harry reached up and offered the ring to Fred.

From: Albus Dumbledore

To: Staff (all)

Subject: Assistant Professor Potter

All,

Please remember that as from this afternoon, Harry will be a member of staff, and as such, should be included in all administrative Mmails.

Albus

--

Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot and Chairman of the International Confederation of Wizards

From: Sev

To: All staff

Subject: Re: Assistant Professor Potter

What he means is, this is your last chance to gossip about him with impunity.

S.

--

Working for the downfall of the Dark Tosser for fifteen years

From: Min

To: Sev and the Others

Subject: Gambling

So, is that still running, or do we all get our money back?

M

From: Hogwart's Resident Bookie

To: All gamblers

Subject: Re: Gambling

Good point actually. I had an idea about that. Why don't we take all the money, pool it, and bet it on Harry's team against the Weasley's. I think we can mostly agree that Harry knows what he is doing. And I'm sure we can find someone stupid enough to give us poor teachers decent odds.

S

--

From: Albus

To: My poor teachers

Subject: Re[2]: Gambling

Poor teachers? Have you seen the latest budget report I had to put in? You poor teachers are some of the best paid in the world.

A.

--

Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot and Chairman of the International Confederation of Wizards

From: Filius

To: Albus and my fellow poverty stricken workers

Subject: Re[3]: Gambling

Sev, the bet is a good idea.

Albus, I hate to point this out, but show me one other job where you are on call to deal with students twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, for ten months a year, with no break? And that's without mentioning a certain Dark Tosser.

F

From: Scrooge

To: A school full of Bob Cratchets

Subject: Re[4]: Gambling

And in our last pay meeting, we discussed this, and despite Ministerial objections, we raised your pay to compensate.

Can we please leave the arguing till your next pay review?

Albus

--

Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot and Chairman of the International Confederation of Wizards

From: Ponomo (Head of Staff Council)

To: Staff, All

Subject: Pay

Albus is right. Very cleverly, he put a clause in our contracts stopping us from asking for more mid-season. But don't worry; we'll make him pay in the summer.

And yes, Sev, go ahead and put the money on Harry. I have no doubt he will triumph now.

P.

From: A slightly bewildered Sev

To: Grumbling Colleagues

Subject: Erm...

Okay, the gambling thing I will do...

And would it help if I said that I was only joking about the money issue?

S.

--
Working for the downfall of the Dark Tosser for fifteen years

George, closely followed by Lavender and Parvati, walked back into the main office and froze in mid-step.

In front of them, Harry Potter was on one knee, offering a ring to George's twin brother.

George's lips twitched. "Should I get some champagne out?"

"Don't you think Ginny will be upset?" Lavender asked.

"Yeah, isn't that the wrong Weasley?" Parvati chimed in.

"Do you think we should give them some privacy?" George asked, laughing hard.

"No, that's what got them into this mess," Lavender replied, before collapsing into laughter herself.

The two boys turned identical shades of bright red, looked at each other and their unfortunate position, then started to laugh as well.

"It's for Ginny," Harry explained when he got his breath back. "It's a promise ring."

George whooped loudly, and then launched himself at Harry. Fred grinned, and then did the same thing, pushing Harry onto the floor, and landing on top of him. "Welcome to the family," they said together.

"Get off me, you overgrown lugs," Harry wheezed, laughing again.

"Yes, brother-ours," Fred and George said in unison, getting to their feet and pulling Harry to his.

"Don't worry, we'll keep it a secret," Lavender said with a large smile on her face, her eyes were slightly damp. "Ginny's a very lucky girl."

"Harry's a lucky bloke," Fred grinned.

"Fred, did you get everything sorted?" George asked.

Harry, correctly guessing what was going to happen next, took two silent steps backwards and to the side.

"More than that. We took it to the right person, and the problems are no longer problems."

George cheered again and turned and threw himself at the spot Harry had been a few seconds before, only to land painfully on the floor. He looked up at Harry's smirking face and laughed.

From: Dean

To: The cousin of Dudley

Subject: Said cousin

Harry, I got a curious email through the Mugglenet gateway. It seems that my half sister kinda likes your cousin. She says that once you get through the bluster (and the large size), there is actually a nice person inside. She's always been one for lame ducks, and can look after herself (she has a temper to rival Ginny's).

Anyway, she wanted to tell you that she knows what you went through, and is working on him...if that makes any sense to you at all? And that he's changed so much that he's dumped his friends and spends the evenings walking in the park with her.

D

From: Harry

To: Deano

Subject: Re: Said cousin

Dean: DO NOT REPLY TO THAT E/MAIL

I'll talk to you as soon as I can to explain why in person - but do not reply!

H

--

"Are we going back to Hogwarts now?" Lavender asked.

"Actually, I was wondering if you might help me out with something?"

"Of course," Parvati said, "What?"

"I need some decent clothes, so I want to go into Muggle London and do some shopping."

The two girls' already bright expressions turned up another notch. "You want us to help you chose new clothes for you?"

"Yeah," Harry agreed, finding their enthusiasm contagious. He held out his hand, "Shall we go?"

"We shall," the girls agreed, grabbing his hand.

The girls literally dragged Harry from shop to shop, once they saw the amount of money he had on him, determined that he would never have to wear the threadbare clothes he normally lounged around in.

"Hey Harry," Lavender called from across the store. "What do you think of this?" She held up a short denim skirt.

"I don't think it's my style," Harry said with a straight face.

Lavender rolled her eyes. "Imagine Ginny in this, with a white t-shirt."

Harry looked at the skirt again, and gulped. A picture of Ginny in the skirt, walking barefoot through grass, with a tight white t-shirt got firmly lodged in his mind. He gulped.

Parvati walked up to Harry. "Harry?" She turned to Lavender, giggling. "I think you broke him."

"He is so much in love with her, it's scary," she said with a tinge of sadness.

"I just hope he doesn't start drooling," Parvati said, trying to break the tension.

"I'm not that bad, am I?" Harry asked, coming out of his trance.

"Yes!" The two girls said at once.

"So you know Ginny's size?" Harry asked, getting back to the point.

"Of course," Lavender replied. "Why?"

"Ginny's going to need some Muggle clothing for tonight," Harry said thoughtfully, as an idea came to him. "We're going to need to look pretty normal."

Lavender and Parvati turned to each other. "One, two, three." On the three, both girls brought their right hands up, Lavender's was flat, Parvati's clenched.

"Paper beats rock," Lavender crowed happily and walked over to Harry.

"Money?"

Harry, a very amused look on his face, offered her everything. She looked, smiled, took a couple of notes, and bounded out of the store.

"Leave her," Parvati laughed. "She'll be back soon. Come on, we need to get you some smart clothes now. You can't live in jeans alone."

They walked through the department store, towards the Suit section. "Do I want to know why Ginny needs Muggle clothing?"

"I need a chat with my cousin, and we can't Mmail because Death Munchers monitor the Mugglenet gateway, and I don't want them being tracked."

"Is your life like today a lot?"

Harry smiled slightly. "Recently, it has been, yeah."

The three arrived back at school just before dinner started. Harry took his and Ginny's purchases up to the Common Room, while Lavender and Parvati walked towards the Great Hall. As soon as Harry was around the corner, they turned and moved towards McGonagall's office.

They knocked on the door nervously, hoping their Head of House was in.

The professor opened the door, and looked slightly surprised to see them.

"Can we talk to you, in private, Professor?"

"Of course," McGonagall moved back, inviting them in, then sat at her desk.

"Is Harry's new room ready?" Lavender blurted.

McGonagall fixed her with a steely look. "What business is that of yours?"

"Well," Parvati said, looking at her friend for support. "You know that Professor Dumbledore allowed us to go with Harry to Gringotts today?"

"Yes," McGonagall replied, her voice not quite as frosty. "How did that go?"

"The goblins were incredibly helpful," Lavender said. "You know how they normally are? Well, they were nothing like that at all. They even smiled at us!"

McGonagall frowned. "Why?"

"We think it's because of Harry; he seemed very friendly with one of the Goblins. Even called him by his name, and all the other Goblins around seemed to look at him with something like awe."

Lavender took over smoothly. "After Gringotts, Harry took us to see Fred and George, so they could give us some business advice."

McGonagall couldn't hide a wince.

"Oh no," Parvati said quickly. "They were on their best behaviour. George took us to one side, and explained about accountants, solicitors, patents, copyright, everything. It was an amazing insight into just what it takes to run a successful business. At the same time, Fred and Harry were talking about something important. Anyway, we asked why the twins were helping us so much. George just said it was because he owed Harry."

"Not only has Harry set us up financially, he's done his best to make sure we have the support we will need," Lavender said with a squeal of excitement. "The goblins even offered us free banking for a year!"

McGonagall barely refrained from rolling her eyes. "This doesn't explain why you want to know about Assistant Professor Potter's new room."

Lavender leaned forwards, looking straight across the desk. "You know how Harry is, Professor. He hates being thanked, especially in public. And while we wanted to jump him and smother him in grateful kisses, we know he'd hate it."

There was a slight pause. "And Ginny would take it personally," Parvati added, remembering that morning. "And that is one witch we don't want to get on the bad side off."

"So, the only chance we have to say thank you is to do things for him before he can stop us. We want to decorate his room for him. We know what his, and Ginny's, tastes are, and we can get pretty much anyone in the school to help with the magic."

McGonagall stared at them across the table silently, mentally ignoring the fact that a fifth year student's tastes were being bought into the discussion about an Assistant Professor's room - and everything that implied. "Come with me," she demanded, as she stood up and walked out of her office. The two girls followed the austere professor out of her office, and across the school. She stopped in front of a large statue, and said "Hogwarts."

The statue saluted, and then slid to one side, revealing a wooden door. McGonagall opened it and stepped inside.

They entered into a small apartment with three main rooms. To the left, was a door, through which they could see a bed. To the right, was another door, which they presumed to be a bathroom area. But the main feature to the room was a humongous desk, facing a window. They looked out the window and were forced to smile. It had a perfect view of the Quidditch pitch.

"Yes," McGonagall said with a slight smile. "We did choose this particular room because of the view. I will trust you with this; please do not let me down."

"We won't, Professor," the two girls chorused their assurance, already itching to get started.

The professor nodded, and walked out. As she left, she heard Lavender say, "We need to get more chairs in here, Harry will want to use this to hold meetings." She couldn't help smiling to herself.

"Ahh, Harry," Professor Dumbledore said, interrupting the boy as he walked towards the Great Hall, "Perhaps we could have that meeting now?"

Harry looked at him, confused, then blushed as he realised he had missed his earlier appointment. "I'm sorry, sir."

"Quite alright, I'm afraid that I to, was a little distracted at lunch. Will you come with me to my office?"

"Of course sir. Can I just send Gin a quick Mmail?"

Dumbledore nodded, offering Harry a piece of paper he conjured.

"Thanks."

From: Harry

To: That girl that I love

Subject: Tonight

Ginny,

Do you fancy coming with me to Little Whinging tonight? I want a talk with Dudley, and I can't use Mmail because Death Munchers monitor the gateway. I'll explain why I want to talk to him in person later, but I think it's important.

Love You.

Harry

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

From: Your Ginny

To: That boy I worship

Subject: Re: Tonight

You don't even have to ask, love, I said I'd be with you every step of the way, and I damn well meant it.

Where are you now?

Love you more,

Ginny

From: Gonna prove he's yours

To: The most beautiful witch in the world

Subject: Re[2]: Tonight

I'm with Professor Dumbledore; we're going to have that chat I missed at lunch.

Oh, I left a surprise for you on your bed ^grin^

Wish I was kissing you,

Harry

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

From: Wishes that as well

To: The boy who's going to get some this evening

Subject: Re[3]: Tonight

I like surprises. I'll have to give you a personal thank you later.

I'll be waiting in the common room for you.

^nuzzle^ Ginny

From: Harry

To: Ginny

Subject: You

Witch! How am I supposed to concentrate now?

H
--
Audaces fortuna juvat

From: Your girlfriend

To: The boy with the cutest bum in existence

Subject: You too

By thinking of kissing me? ^saucy smile^

I like you distracted Potter.

puumrr

Ginny

From: Ginny Weasley

To: Professor Dumbledore

Subject: Meeting

Dear Professor Dumbledore,

Please ensure that Harry eats during your meeting. I don't want him missing any meals.

Thanks,

Ginny

Dumbledore stared at his Mmail in disbelief, and then slowly started to laugh.

"Is there a problem, sir?" Harry asked.

Dumbledore shook his head, still amused. "You have a very forthright girlfriend, Harry, but she does raise a good point." He raised his hands, and suddenly two plates appeared in front of them, full of food. "Tuck in. I wouldn't want Ms Weasley upset at me."

Harry looked quizzically at Dumbledore, then shrugged as he realised he wasn't going to get any answers out of him.

Harry dug into the food; he always forgot just how much Apparating three people - and shopping - took out of him. The lamb chops were as excellent as always, and he found himself finishing the plate a little faster than was probably polite. His professor didn't seem to mind, he just waved his hand and refilled the plate.

The two ate in a comfortable silence, with only the sounds of a Quidditch practice filtering through the thick walls of the castle.

"So, Professor," Harry eventually said, as he finished his slice of apple pie.

"I think the first thing, Harry," Dumbledore interrupted, "is that in private, all of us teachers call each other by our first names. You're going to have to do that as well."

"It was hard enough doing that with Professor Mc... I mean Minerva, what chance have I got with you?"

Dumbledore smiled, leaning back in his chair and peering at Harry through his half moon glasses. "Every chance; Albus isn't that difficult a name and I know that you have no problems calling Abe by his given name."

Harry nodded slowly, "It will still be very strange to call you Albus, sir." He paused, and noticed a frown appearing on his headmaster face. "Si..er, Albus?"

"You wouldn't know why my desk was covered with Butterbeer yesterday, would you?"

Harry blinked. He blinked again, and then suddenly burst into laughter. "That's where he sent it?"

"Abe?" Albus groaned. "I should have known." The headmaster paused for a second, "I think Harry, that I am going to ask you bring us up-to-date on what you know is going on tonight."

Harry nodded.

"You do want to join the Order?" Dumbledore asked suddenly realising he'd been assuming the boy's interest in doing so.

Harry smiled slowly, pleased to have been asked. "I think it would be a good idea," he said simply.

"Excellent," the headmaster said jovially. "Now, the boring stuff. As an Assistant Professor, you will be expected to follow all the rules that the rest of the staff do, and live up to the high standards of Hogwarts. You will be able to give House Points, as I believe you already know, and assign detentions. I trust you will not abuse these privileges. You will have your own suite, as all staff does." He frowned suddenly, and then continued, "Which will be available to you by the end of the week. You will be expected to continue your D.A. classes, and assist our Defence teacher as your schedule permits."

Harry smiled warmly. "None of that is any problem, sir-er-Albus, thank you."

Dumbledore smiled back, marvelling at how relaxed Harry was these days, despite how much more he was actually doing.

"Well, I believe your girlfriend is waiting for you."

Harry nodded and stood, saying a polite goodbye.

Ginny bounced up the stairs to her dorm room, and dived through the curtains onto her bed. There were several bags, with logos she didn't recognise on them. On top, was a piece of parchment, with the word 'Ginny' scrawled on it in Harry's handwriting.

"*Ginny*," The letter began. "*These are for you.*

"I hope you like them,

H."

Ginny opened the first bag, and gasped. She jumped out of bed and casually removed her robes, flinging them to one side. She removed her skirt, and then pulled on the new pair of jeans. As she lost her balance, she laughed at herself and turned to sit on her bed, and pulled the denim up in a more traditional fashion. As it reached her waist, she stood and did it up, and then looked in the mirror.

The material seemed to hug her hips like nothing she had worn before, emphasising that she was quite definitely female.

"You like them?" Lavender asked, watching amused from the doorway.

"Harry chose these?" Ginny looked a little disbelieving.

"Nah, I chose them; Harry just paid."

Ginny's face took on a strange expression for a second, as she realised her boyfriend had probably spent quite a bit of money on her.

"Get used to it, Gin," Lavender said sternly, closing the door behind her. "Your boyfriend is never going to be poor. And he's always going to want to spend money on the one person that means everything to him: You. You know Harry too well to even think that he would try and buy your friendship - or anything else."

Ginny looked at her, a little surprised. "I don't think I'm ever going to get used to flashes of insight from you," she mumbled.

Lavender laughed loudly. "Fred and George were on the best behaviour today, and they did feed Harry."

Ginny nodded, and accepted the conversation change. She reached into another bag, and pulled out a t-shirt. "Did Harry get any clothes?"

Lavender smiled wildly at her. "Consider that a little present from us to you."

Ginny blinked. "You chose Harry's clothes as well?"

"Yep, and you may want to keep your wand handy, and your bat bogey hex primed. Because that boy fills out some of the jeans in a way that should be illegal."

The red-haired girl licked her lips hungrily, and then grinned.

Ron walked into the library, and over to his girlfriend, who was sitting at a desk near the window, writing on some parchment.

"Homework?" Ron asked, looking a little surprised. "I thought you were up to date." He looked at what she was writing, and frowned. "That's not your handwriting!"

"Shh!" Hermione whispered loudly, "and sit down. No, it's not my handwriting, It's Harry's."

"Why are you doing Harry's homework?" Ron asked, as he did as he was told.

"The professors, Harry, and everyone else may feel that it is acceptable for Harry to barely scrape through school, while he is dealing with everything else, but I do not!" She took a deep breath. "Harry should not get bad marks just because he has the fate of the wizarding world on his

shoulders. He is going to graduate from this school with top marks. He hasn't got time for schoolwork at the moment, so I'm doing it for him. As soon as the Dark Tosser is dead, he can catch up normally, and everything will be fine."

"That's cheating," Ron pointed out calmly.

"I don't care!" Hermione stated irrevocably. "He's my friend and I am not going to let his grades suffer."

"How long have you been doing this?"

"This is my first time, now shush!"

Ron opened his mouth, then shut it, as he realised he was falling into old patterns. "Pass me his Care of Magical Creatures," he said mildly, "I finished mine earlier."

Hermione smiled at him, and gave him another quick kiss. "The way you have changed recently, Ron, means I might just have to keep you forever."

Ron blushed furiously, and turned to look at her directly. "Do you mean that?" he asked, his voice suddenly soft.

"If you'll have me," Hermione said, looking down and blushing herself.

Ron reached out and touched her chin, raising her head to meet his. "For eternity, Hermione, for eternity."

She smiled slowly, then lent forwards, closing the gap between them.

Ron felt fireworks explode in his head as his girlfriend poured her heart out to him. His last thought, before he lost himself in the kiss, was that growing up was very cool.

Harry walked into the Gryffindor Common Room, to find it almost empty. He looked at Seamus who was reading in the corner. "If Gin comes in, tell her I'm getting changed, will you?"

"Sure, Harry," Seamus, replied without looking up.

Harry moved to his own dorm room, and stripped quickly, deciding to have a quick shower before they went out.

One hot shower later, Harry pulled on some of the new underwear he had brought, and a pair of the dark blue jeans Parvati had chosen for him. He pulled out a white long sleeved, V-neck jumper, which was supposed to be worn like a t-shirt - with nothing underneath it. He pulled the wool material over his head and stretched his arms into place. The material stuck to him like a second skin, although he hardly paid any attention to it. He grabbed a pair of thick white socks, and put them on, following them with some brown boots, and then looked at himself in the mirror.

The mirror looked at him, wolf whistled, and then suddenly acquired a pink hue.

Harry looked at it, trying to work out if the mirror was really blushing, then put it out of his mind, as he tried to do something with his hair. As it was still wet, he had a modicum of success by pushing it all back straight.

As he walked around, filling his pockets with money, and anything else he might need, he had no idea that his hair was drying, and standing up, giving him a slightly spiky look that suited him down to the ground.

He walked down to the Common Room, which had filled with people after dinner, and paused as everyone went silent and looked at him.

"What?" he asked, suddenly looking a little trapped.

"Ignore them," Ginny said, announcing her presence from a couch.

Harry shrugged and did as she suggested, walking over to her. "Ready?"

"Always," she replied with a smile, uncurling from the couch and following him out. As he stepped through the portrait hole, she turned to the watching house. "Just remember, I don't share!"

Harry turned as Ginny grabbed his shoulder and pushed him against a wall.

"Err, Gin?" Harry asked, looking warily at her.

Ginny had a look in her eye that Harry had never seen before; it was slightly animalistic, as if she was the hunter and he was the prey.

"What did you expect?" Ginny mumbled, as slid her hands down to his hips, then up to his chest. "You walk through the common room, with your hair all spiked up, looking extremely cute, wearing this top that is so white it shines, and shows off every muscle you have?"

"I'm only human Harry," she whispered, and she buried her face in his chest and inhaled deeply, "And then you're wearing these jeans that you must have been poured into," she added with a smirk.

Her hands slid around and grabbed his bum, squeezing, causing Harry to struggle to control a squeak. "And I'm not moving from this spot till I've

examined every square inch of this new clothing."

From: Gryffindor Girls

To: Girls: All years, all houses

Subject: Sweet Bloody Merlin

Girls, drop what ever you are doing, and find a way to hide between here and the Great Hall.

You. Have. To. See. Harry. Potter!

We will pay pretty much ANYTHING for a photo of him in those jeans and that top. Teen Witch Weekly would pay anything for that picture.

Excuse us, while we mop the Gryffindor Common Room floor, there was a little too much drooling.

-T G G

From: Orla Quirke

To: All females

Subject: Re: Sweet Bloody Merlin

Disregard that Mmail. Do you have any idea how hard it was to talk Harry into legitimising our club? He's actually going to pose for some pictures for us, as well as give us membership badges. Hermione and Ginny both spent a VERY long time persuading him it was a good idea. I don't want to lose that status now, or those chances!

And we are DEFINITELY not going to be sending any photos to the *Witch Weekly*.

Any member found looking at Harry tonight will be summarily dismissed from the HP fan club!

Orla

From: Told you so

To: Mr Reluctant

Attachment: Orla_Mmail.mml

Subject: Fwd: Re: Sweet Bloody Merlin

We told you it was a good idea to have an official fan club Harry - she's already protecting you!

H.

Ginny sighed against Harry's lips. "That will have to keep me till I can get you alone later."

Harry laughed under his breath.

"Are we going straight to Little Whinging?"

Harry shook his head, "Nah, going to Padfoot's first. I need a chat with him about his attitude towards Professor Snape."

Ginny smiled as Harry slid his hands down, holding her closely, and Apparated them both straight to his godfather's living room. As they arrived, Harry concentrated hard, and slowed everything down, successfully managing to hide the pop that normally announced the arrival of someone Apparating.

"Where are they?" Sirius half-whined nervously. "I just want him to get it over with. This anticipation is killing me."

"So it should be," Harry said gravely.

Sirius, Juanita, and Remus all jumped as one, and turned to glare at Harry.

"Hi Moony, Juanita," Harry grinned at the two, and then looked at Sirius. "Padfoot."

"Harry," Moony replied cheerfully. "And Ginny, it's good to see you again."

Ginny walked up and gave him a hug, "It's very good to see you again, Moony."

"Okay, Sirius," Harry decided to cut short the pleasantries. "I've got a lot to do before the Order meeting this evening. Sit down."

"But..." Sirius hesitated.

"SIT!" Harry barked, in a voice that was one of absolute command.

Automatically, before he could help himself, Sirius sat. He blinked, and then shot a baleful glance at Harry, then at the sniggering Moony. Ginny and Juanita looked on with amused looks.

"Can I get you anything to drink?" Juanita asked hesitantly, in English that had improved dramatically since Harry had last talked to her.

"Please," Harry nodded. "Some ice water would be great."

"Ginny?"

"The same, please," Ginny replied politely, not liking the fact she had to sit further away from Harry than normal.

Juanita walked out, and came back thirty seconds later with a tray full of glasses. She handed them out, and as she reached Harry, she whispered. "Go easy on him, please, he does love you."

Harry winked at her, and turned to his godfather. "Right. Why do you hate Snape?"

"Because he's an untrustworthy, greasy git."

Harry sighed. "Let's try that again without the meaningless insults. Why do you hate Snape?"

Sirius didn't answer, so Harry leant forwards and looked directly at his godfather over his glasses.

"Because he took my cousin away," Sirius suddenly yelled. "It was down to him!"

"Bellatrix?" Harry asked, looking very surprised.

"Yeah!"

Harry lent back in his chair and took a sip of water. From what he knew of the Death Eater, it was very unlikely that she would let anyone lead her astray. Without warning, he Apparated away.

"Where did he go?" Sirius asked, looking bewildered.

"It's pretty obvious," Ginny said serenely. She kicked off her shoes and tucked her feet under her. "How are you enjoying the country, Juanita?"

"It's very different. Good different. I think I am going to get a job though; I don't like not doing anything."

Harry arrived back in Hogwarts, and called for the Marauder's Map. Locating Snape, he walked to Dumbledore's office, said the password, and walked up the escalator.

"Ahh, Harry," Dumbledore said, "What can we do for you?"

"Can I borrow Professor Snape for half an hour?"

Dumbledore stared hard at Harry, and Harry felt a light brushing against his Occlumency shields. Harry lowered them slightly, showing what he had in mind.

"Of course you can, Harry," the Headmaster said jovially. "In fact," he turned to his surprised potions Professor, and said, "Severus, I must insist that you accompany Mr Potter immediately."

"All right," Snape said, looking very wary, as Harry approached him and placed a hand on his shoulder. The two vanished.

Albus' smile turned into a full-blown laugh. "I would pay money to be able to watch this conversation," he said.

"What are they doing?" Minerva asked, her eyebrow raised.

"Harry is going to force Sirius and Severus to get over their differences."

"You're kidding?"

"No, not at all."

"What am I doing here?" Snape growled as he realised where he was.

"What the hell is he doing here?" Sirius demanded, rising to his feet.

"Sit down, both of you," Harry growled. "I haven't got time for childish displays of temper."

He was the instant recipient of two powerful glares. Not that he cared; he'd decided he would rather have them both angry with him, than each other.

"I said, sit down." To emphasise his point he concentrated hard, and let loose his true power.

The feeling in the room turned electric, and both grown men gulped and reluctantly sat down, as far away from each other as possible.

"Thank you," Harry said, turning his power back down.

Behind him, Remus took out his wand and silently conjured some popcorn, and settled down to watch the show. He offered some to Juanita and Ginny.

"I need both of you to be able to work together," Harry explained pleasantly. "So we're going to talk about what you have against each other --" He held up his hand to stall the protests both of them were about to make. "-- and deal with it. This enmity has gone on for far too long." He paused for a second. "Right, Sirius, let's start again. Why do you hate Snape?" Harry decided to drop the honorific professor title for the duration of this conversation.

Sirius opened his mouth to speak, to find he had no voice. "No insults," Harry said warningly, before he returned his godfather's voice.

"It was because of him Bella became a Death Eater - he corrupted my cousin!"

"Are you insane?" Snape sneered. "Spent too much time as the flea-bitten mong..."

"That's quite enough," Harry interposed smoothly. "You'll get your chance in a second. Now, why do you hate Sirius, and remember no insults!"

Snape growled and fixed Harry with his most intimidating glare. Unfortunately, it seemed to have no effect at all. "Because he, and his friends," Snape suddenly decided that discretion was the better part of valour, and decided not to mention James in a negative manner, "made my life hell, and tried to kill me."

"You deserve..." was all Sirius managed to get out before Harry cut off his speech.

"Look, every time either of you starts to spout pointless rubbish I'm going to stop you talking; so give up now. Now, Severus, you may respond to Sirius' point about that witch."

"I did not lead Bella away," Snape ground through his teeth. "If anything, you're bloody cousin led me astray. I was in love with her, and joined the Death Eaters because she was in it."

Harry blinked in surprise. "Right, Sirius, your turn to respond."

"I did not mean to kill him. Scare him a little, yeah, but kill him, no." Sirius went quiet for a moment. It was very difficult for him to remain angry when Harry literally shut him up every time he tried to explode. Reluctantly, he did something he never thought he would do. "I'm sorry about that," he apologised. "It was a stupid and thoughtless thing to do."

Harry smiled at him, nodding. "And the pranking?"

"That was more of a war, with both sides participating."

"Severus?"

The teacher shifted uncomfortably. "I *did* play a few pranks back," he admitted reluctantly.

"Excellent," Harry said brightly. "So, let's talk about the wicked witch of the west."

"She told me that it was fun to act like an innocent around Sirius," Snape said quietly. "That she'd pretend to be good whenever he was around. It amused her how you clung to her as the only other person in your household who wasn't dark."

"But," Sirius roared.

"Let's not forget who pushed you through the veil," Harry interrupted again. "And came close to putting the Cruciatus on Ginny."

"Fine," Sirius said grouchy, "Maybe she was acting."

"I can feel us all becoming friends as we speak."

Again, the two men glared at the boy; and again, Harry was singularly unaffected. "Now, let's talk about something else the two of you have in common."

"I have no..." The both started at the same time, standing up.

"Sit!" Harry roared, suddenly losing his temper with the two of them. The two men in question sat so quickly no one was quite sure if it had been through their own volition, or if Harry had magically forced them to. "I have a limited amount of patience tonight," he whispered.

"Apart from a penchant for long hair, you both spent way too many years of your life in hell. Severus spying for the Order, and Sirius innocent in Azkaban. One suffering regular Cruciatus curses, the other the nightmares of betrayal. You two have a lot more in common than either of you are prepared to admit."

The two men, in a strange synchronisation, tossed their heads and looked away, ignoring the point.

Harry turned so his back was to them, and winked at Ginny.

"I guess I'll have to find other people to be on my Quidditch team," he said mournfully.

Snape was the first to break. "What?"

"Oh," Harry said, now smirking at his girlfriend. "You wouldn't be interested in the chance to get revenge on Fred and George, and to remind everyone just who one of the best chasers of his time was - equal to my dad. And Sirius certainly wouldn't care about pairing up with Moony against the next generation of pranksters." He paused for a second, to let it sink in, and then continued. "I guess I could get Neville to help out, he's an okay chaser when he wants to be. And I'm sure that Kingsley would work well with Moony."

"And neither of you would want to be seen working together in front of thousands of people, cheering you on. Never mind that you could prove yourselves in public, or get revenge for seven years of pranks, like dying dungeons pink. I'm sure such petty things are far beneath you and that you would much rather continue your childish hatred of each other, while we play without you."

There was a complete silence in the room.

"Let's not be hasty, Harry," Sirius said in a thin voice.

"Absolutely," Snape agreed. "Perhaps it is time we grew up a little." His voice sounded like he was being dragged through stinging nettles.

"Then you'd be able to shake hands, wouldn't you?"

The two men turned to face each other, with palpable reluctance. Harry silently moved, so that he was standing behind Sirius' back, while Juanita did the same thing behind Snape's.

Harry pulled down his glasses and glared at Snape, till he started to move, vaguely aware that Juanita was doing the same to Sirius.

Slowly, the two men reached out their hands, and shook them.

Ginny and Remus both started to clap at the same time.

Harry laughed, and walked over to his girlfriend, picking her up so he could sit under her, with her on his lap. He glanced at his watch and sighed. He pulled the popcorn bag Ginny was holding from her hand, and concentrated hard.

"Here," he said, passing it to Remus. "This is a Portkey set to work at five minutes to eight. It will take you straight to Hogwarts, so you won't have to walk." He turned his head towards the difficult pair, "I suggest you spend some time now seriously talking through your differences. And I really don't want to hear about any insulting from either of you. Moony and Juanita will be reporting to me, so don't even try it."

"Where are you going?" Sirius asked, a little surprised.

"To see my cousin," Harry said. "He made a gesture of friendship today for the first time, and because of the Mugglenet gateway being monitored, I can't reply via Mmail. So I thought we'd go and have a chat."

"And as we're running a little behind schedule, we'll see you at eight." He didn't seem to do anything, but a second later Harry and Ginny were gone.

"How the bloody hell does he do that?" Sirius demanded.

"He doesn't know he can't," Snape replied, a slight smile on his face.

"Oh," Sirius said. "Imagine if we had been like that in school."

Snape laughed suddenly. "If we had been like that, there wouldn't be a school now."

Sirius walked over to a counter and pulled out a bottle of Firewhiskey. "Drink?"

"Please."

Sirius poured out four glasses, and passed one to each occupant of the room. "You seem to have lost your antagonism towards Harry."

Snape nodded and rolled back his sleeve. "Harry found a way of removing my Dark Mark, after rescuing me from Voldemort."

Sirius laughed suddenly, a short sharp bark of laughter. "That would do it," he agreed. "How's Harry doing in school?"

"Assistant Professor Potter is doing fine," Snape said with a smirk.

Sirius spluttered into his glass, narrowly avoiding spraying the room. "He's a what?"

"An assistant professor. You know he runs the D.A.?"

"Yeah?"

"Well, he taught them to block the Cruciatus curse, by working together, with a spell that Hermione found. I was spying at the time, as I wanted to see how well he was doing, and even I was surprised. It occurred to me that I was starting to refer to Harry as Harry, and I felt that he had earned my respect enough to be allowed to call me by my name. So I asked for him to become an Assistant Professor so that it wouldn't interfere with school discipline - and because I felt he deserved it."

Remus and Sirius were both smiling broadly now. "That's our boy."

While not friends, Severus and Sirius slowly started to repair the damage of several decades of mutual hatred.

The slowly setting sun cast long shadows over the well-kept grass as Harry and Ginny appeared next to a small clump of trees.

"It's pretty," Ginny said, looking around her.

Harry smiled, and wrapped an arm around her, walking off towards the play area. "I have no idea if Dudley is even going to be here," he admitted. "Dean mentioned that his half-sister, who is half-dating Dudders, said that they like to spend their evenings walking around the park." He paused, and waved his hand idly, "This is the email Dudley sent me."

"Email?"

"Like Mmail, but it's what the Muggles use. Based on computers."

Ginny nodded, reading the message.

"Wow, that's quite a large change from what I saw from your memories."

"Yeah," Harry agreed. "But his point about my aunt and uncle was valid. They mucked him up as well as me, just in the opposite direction."

Dudley and Sheryl were walking slowly through the park, heading towards the swings, where they liked to spend the evenings talking.

"Dudley," Sheryl said quietly. "Look up the hill."

Dudley squinted at the two figures in the distance. "What about them?"

"I'd bet my history book that those two are your cousin and his girlfriend."

Dudley blinked. "What?"

"Look at them, and half close your eyes."

Dudley did, and frowned.

"Can you feel it?"

"I can feel something," he admitted nervously. He hadn't expected his cousin to come so soon. "It does kinda look like him, although he's bigger than when I last saw him."

The two were rapidly closing the distance between them, allowing Dudley to watch them. The first thing that struck him was the grace that they both moved with. It seemed almost innate to them, like every movement had been examined and adjusted to provide the most economical way of making them. He gulped, as his mind flashed back to a display he had seen at his previous school. Members of the Royal Marines had come on a recruitment drive; a couple of them had put on a demonstration of hand-to-hand combat. They had walked in the same way that these two walking towards him were. It was much like the way a predator walked.

He turned to the small girl, whom Harry had his arm around. She had deep red hair, which looked like an impossible colour for a normal human. It was long and thick, and hung down her back in a wave. Large brown eyes dominated her face, eyes that he could feel digging into him, even over the distance.

"If I wasn't looking at him the same way you are looking at her, I'd be very annoyed with you, Dudley Dursley," Sheryl said quietly.

Dudley laughed and switched his attention to his cousin, the boy he had last seen depressed during the summer. While the boy in front of him had only grown a couple of inches up, he had certainly put on a lot of weight. And none of it looked like fat.

For the first time Dudley felt ordinary. He had heard about Voldemort from Sheryl, who had heard all about it from Dean, and had heard that everyone was convinced that his cousin would be the one who would have to fight him. He remembered the abject fear and terror he had felt when the Dementors had attacked them the year before.

He looked at Harry and smiled slightly, if the world was going to have to be saved by someone, it probably couldn't find a nicer hero.

Dudley could feel Harry's gaze piercing him, and he gulped, and then bravely met the gaze.

"Dudley," Harry said, offering his hand. Dudley grasped it gratefully, and shook it, squeezing a little, curious to find Harry's strength.

He felt no reaction, apart from a slightly amused look in his cousin's eyes.

"This is my girlfriend, Ginny Weasley," Harry said with a smile.

"It's nice to meet you," Ginny said, offering her hand; her voice was incredibly smooth, and seemed to speak of maturity far beyond her years. A second later, he realised Harry had the same undertone to his voice. It was as if they had both seen things he would never ever want to, and survived.

Dudley took the proffered hand, and looked into her eyes, and gulped slightly. He suddenly got the feeling that if he tried anything with Harry, it wouldn't be him that would respond, it would be her - and he didn't get the feeling that she would be anywhere near as forgiving as his cousin might be.

"This is Sheryl, my good friend," Dudley introduced the slightly plump girl next to him. Harry and Ginny shook her hand, ignoring the slight look of hero-worship in her eyes as she looked at the Wizarding legend.

There was a second of uncomfortable silence.

"Gin," Harry said quietly, "would you mind going with Sheryl while I have a talk with Dudley?"

"Of course not," she smiled cheerfully. "Let's go on the swings," she said, grabbing the other girl's hand. "It's been ages since I've been to a Muggle park. And we can compare notes on the cousins."

Sheryl laughed, and allowed herself to be dragged off.

"Is she always like that?" Dudley asked.

"Yep," Harry said, proudly. "She's amazing."

"She must be, to put up with you," Dudley said, then gulped again as Harry turned his head to stare at him. "I was teasing," Dudley said quickly.

Harry smiled slightly. "I didn't even know you had a sense of humour."

Dudley winced. "You probably didn't, but hey, fat kid here, when dealing with people bigger or harder than me, comedy was my only defence. I just never needed it at home."

"So," Harry started, "Dean said that you are no longer friends with Piers?"

"Yeah," Dudley agreed. "Piers objected to me hanging out with Sheryl, and made his objections quite strenuous." He grinned suddenly, "And I'm afraid that I took objection to his objections, and we decided to end it like men." He paused, "Well, I ended it like a man, he ended it like the snivelling coward he is." He looked at his hands, "My wrists still hurt from where I hit him."

Harry sat on the edge of a bench, and looked out at the setting sun. "Look, the reason I came tonight was partly to see if this transformation was for real, and partly because I can't email you. Death Munchers working for the Dark Tosser monitor the email/magimail gateway."

"Err, I thought they were called Death Eaters?"

Harry smirked. "I renamed them, makes them seem a little more human and a little less intimidating. Same with the Dark Tosser."

"Battlefield psychology?"

"Something like that."

Dudley took a deep breath, and then exhaled slowly. "Look, I said it in the email, but I'm sorry. I was a selfish, fat git who was so self-obsessed I would have married myself in an instant. I treated you, well, worse than anyone would treat a rabid dog. I can't say that I still don't get the occasional urges to pig out, or to let someone pass without pushing them, but Sheryl and I are working on that. I've even seen a shrink. Who has given me some good advice, after lot of psycho-babble."

Harry removed his glasses, and turned, staring hard at his cousin.

Dudley gulped and paled. "My God, Harry," he whispered. "You're the real deal, aren't you?"

"What do you mean?" Harry asked, putting his glasses back on.

"You're the one who is going to save the world."

Harry shrugged, "Yeah."

"So, did I pass?"

Harry paused for a second, and then held out his hand.

Dudley grabbed it, and shook it in a manner a lot friendlier than he had earlier. "Hi," he said slowly. "I'm Dudley Dursley."

"Harry Potter," Harry said with a smile.

"So Harry," Dudley said with a grin, "when you're not defeating evil wizards and spending time with your princess, what do you do for fun?"

"Let me tell you about Quidditch," Harry said. "It's a bit like basketball played on broomsticks at a hundred miles-per-hour, fifty feet off the ground."

"Ahh, insanity runs in your blood?"

Harry's reply was interrupted by the faint sounds of shouting.

"That's Sheryl," Dudley said, moving to his feet, a worried look on his face. He turned and stared back down the hill, towards the playground.

"Harry, that's Piers and his gang of tossers. We need to get there now." The not-as-fat-as-he-once-was boy started running.

"Dudley!" Harry's voice cracked like a whip, stopping the boy in his tracks. "First off, you don't look fit enough to run all the way there. It is pointless to arrive at a battle and not be physically able to fight. Much better to arrive a second or two later, and be able to help. Secondly, you can relax; they're making a big mistake."

"What do you mean?" Dudley asks, as Harry stood and started walking towards the playground. He trotted next to his cousin, wanting to get going.

"Ginny's there," Harry said, his smile turning a little evil.

"But there are six of them!"

"One day, Dudley, I'll tell you about her family. Believe me; she can handle the lot of them."

"What if she can't? They don't fight fair."

Dudley suddenly felt the hair on the back of his neck stand on edge, and the temperature around him drop several degrees. He gulped, and reluctantly turned his head to face Harry.

Harry was smiling in a way that Dudley was very pleased was not aimed at him.

"If they touch one hair on her head, they will regret it for the rest of their lives." His voice was low, and seemed to cut straight through Dudley like a blast of cold air.

"You're downright terrifying at times," Dudley noted.

The feeling vanished as suddenly as it had arrived. "Do you trust me?"

"Not really," Dudley grinned. "You're one of those freaks Mumsy keeps warning me about. You might steal my lunch." He paused for a second, "Yeah, I do Harry."

"Don't scream," Harry said as he grabbed Dudley's arm and Apparated them both to the playground.

"We're invisible," Harry whispered. "So don't say anything."

"So, you're Dean's ex-girlfriend?"

"Yeah," Ginny smiled lightly.

"Why the hell did he dump you? You're gorgeous."

"Thank you. It wasn't really Dean's fault. I've always been in love with Harry; I was just passing time with Dean till I turned 16. Dean knew it, deep down. When my brothers - I've got six of them, all older - threatened him, he decided what we felt for each other wasn't really worth fighting for. I don't blame him at all. Besides, it allowed me to move my plans forward and get Harry now."

"So I shouldn't hit him for being an idiot?"

"Nah, probably not. So, what's the story with you and Dudley?"

Sheryl laughed, "Well, normally I wouldn't have had anything to do with him, but when he asked me out, he was so sweet. He knew he was going to be rejected, but asked anyway. I felt that showed a bit of courage, so I decided to see if I could at least like him as a friend. It turned out that he is one screwed-up puppy. His parents are awful. I gave him some advice, and when he took it, I realised that there was a decent person somewhere inside there."

"So, when are you going to tell him you're falling for him?"

Sheryl blushed, and then grinned. "Soon, I kinda like him being attentive like he is at the moment."

"Good for you," Ginny praised as she sat in the swing and pushed off. "I've not done this for years!"

"Aren't you a little old?"

"Not at all, you're never too old to swing. I should get Harry to do this at times, it's impossible to be in a bad mood when you're swinging around."

The two girls swung for a few minutes in a companionable silence.

"Well, what do we have here?" A voice sneered behind them.

Sheryl took one look at the boys, and shouted, "DUDLEY!"

One of the boys darted forwards and grabbed the chains, stopping the two girls from swinging.

"I'm afraid that Dudley's not gonna get here in time," the lead said with a snigger. "We're gonna teach you a little lesson about what happens to bitches like you, and teach 'Big D' a lesson for leaving us."

"Piss off, Piers," Sheryl spat. "I thought Dudley taught you a lesson last time."

Piers shook his head mockingly, and pulled an army knife from his coat pocket. "I'm prepared for him this time," he smirked. "I'll take him down like the fat, squealing piggy he is." Piers turned and ran his eyes over Ginny, taking in the t-shirt and tight jeans. "What do we have here?"

Ginny smirked at him. "Ginny Weasley, girlfriend of Harry Potter."

Piers swore contemptuously, "There is no way that that little freak could get a girl like you. Besides, he's locked up in that stupid school for criminals. Why don't you come with me, see what a real man is like."

Ginny threw back her head and laughed loudly. "You think that a little boy playing with knives a real man? I'll tell you what. Come back when you've fought a running battle to save your godfather against some maniacs' intent on killing you. Then I'll turn you down nicely. Until then," Ginny finished with some advice that, while practical and informative, probably wasn't physically possible.

Piers growled. "Shut up!" he demanded of his sniggering counterparts. "Think ya funny, do ya? Well, we'll see how funny you are."

"I wouldn't do that," Ginny advised.

"Why not?" Piers said, swaggering forward, waving his knife in front of him.

Ginny moved suddenly, exploding out of the swing. Her left arm slid up, knocking Piers knife-holding arm to one side, while her right shot up, the palm of her hand catching him square on the chin, throwing him off his feet and on to the floor. "Because my boyfriend's been teaching me how to fight for over a year now."

Piers rolled to one side, and grabbed his fallen knife. He got to his feet unsteadily.

"You hit me!" he sound shocked. He turned to the others, "Well, what are you waiting for, get her!"

The five boys shrugged, facing one small girl wasn't exactly going to be difficult.

"Want a hand, Gin?" Harry asked, lowering the spell that hid him and Dudley.

"Sure," Ginny smiled. "I don't want to break a nail, and you haven't practised today, have you?"

Harry shot her a full-blown smirk. "Nope, been a little busy. And I could do with releasing some tension."

"Just remember not to kill any of them," Ginny advised cheerfully. "You know how much paperwork that creates."

Harry looked sad. "Gin-n-ny," he whined. "Can't I just kill one?"

Ginny seemed to consider it for a minute. "Okay, but just one."

"Thanks," Harry said brightly. He turned to face the boys in front of him, his smile dropping. As before, the temperature seemed to drop a few degrees as Harry faced them.

Taking in Harry's ultra-confident stance and demeanour, the boys suddenly looked a little reluctant to approach him.

"The first one of you that attacks, I will kill," Harry whispered, his voice reaching them easily, as if little things like the laws of physics were a mild irrelevance.

There was an absolute silence, broken only by the rusty sound of one of the swings swaying in the breeze.

Harry remained motionless, even as the setting sun turned his face into a shadow, leaving only his gleaming eyes on show. Eyes that promised no remorse.

"Screw this," one of the boys said, "I didn't come here to attack a psycho!" He turned, and started to run, the others following him.

"Come back you cowards!" Piers yelled, looking after his former followers. "He's bluffing, you idiots!"

Showing a remarkable lack of intelligence, Piers then ran straight at Harry, his knife in front of him.

Harry seemed to blur, as he started to move. He swayed past the attempted stab and grabbed Piers wrist, twisting it violently.

Piers screamed, the knife flying into the air.

Harry pulled the wrist down and back hard, causing the boy to lose his balance and tumble over. As he fell, Harry grabbed the knife from mid air and slammed it down into the ground, so that the flat, dull, side of the blade was touching the boy's cheek, and at the same time, ramming his knee into Piers chest, and kneeling on him.

"If I ever hear of you doing anything like this again, I will come after you, and next time, I won't deliberately miss," Harry snarled, his eyes now emerald-hard.

Piers looked terrified, and then nodded quickly, showing his understanding.

Harry moved backwards. "Run away. Fast."

Piers scrambled to his feet, and started to run, ignoring the large, wet stain on the front of his jeans.

"My hero!" Ginny cried dramatically, and jumped on Harry, wrapping her legs around his waist and kissing him solidly.

Dudley, in the mean time, was kneeling next to Sheryl, hugging her tightly.

"Harry?" Dudley asked warily. "Were you serious about killing one of them?"

"Of course not!" Ginny said for him, looking very amused by the question. "He was using basic psychology. A mob needs a leader to attack first, so they can follow. Harry made it so those boys had no one to lead. No one wanted to be the first because they were scared of the consequences. Once one of them cracked, the others would follow."

"It was a bluff!?" Sheryl sounded awed.

"Yeah," Harry grinned.

"Dean told me that you two were amazing together, but I thought he exaggerated!"

Harry blushed slightly, and shrugged it off. "Dudley, you got any coins on you?"

Dudley reached in his pocket and pulled out a handful of loose change. Harry took two pound coins and closed his hand over them. He concentrated hard, and his hand started to glow.

"You know what Portkeys are?" Ginny asked Sheryl.

She nodded, "Dean explained them."

Harry released his fist. On his palm were two gold necklaces. "If anything happens, grab your family, then grab the necklace, and say 'Hogwarts,' you'll be safe."

"Thank you," Sheryl said, her eyes wide again.

"Yeah," Dudley agreed. "What will they do?"

"Transport you to safety," Ginny explained succinctly. "Harry, do you mind if I have a word with your cousin before we go?"

"Of course not," Harry said, and smiled at Sheryl. He sat next to her on the swings, and watched as his girlfriend and cousin walked away.

"I think you should know," Ginny said quietly, "that your parents are going to pay for what they did to Harry." She turned and looked at him directly.

"And you would be as well if you hadn't changed."

Dudley swallowed nervously. "That's fine by me. When they started insulting Sheryl, that was the last straw for me. We live in a state where I ignore them, and they ignore me. As soon as I am eighteen I'll be moving out. What are you going to do to them? You're not going to kill them are you?"

"No!"

"Pity," Dudley grinned suddenly, breaking the mood.

Ginny laughed. "Harry has a lot of powerful wizards and witches who consider him family, and who really dislike what they did to him. They all sent me some excellent suggestions to make their lives extremely unpleasant."

"You're in love with him, aren't you?"

"I've been in love with him my entire life. Even though he didn't know me, he risked his life to save mine a few years ago - he fought a sixty-foot long snake for me. It's only recently that I've been able to act on it."

Dudley nodded, not really sure if he should say anything else. His view of his cousin had changed so dramatically over the past hour. The overriding impression he was left with was almost his first one: that the world couldn't ask for a better person to be responsible for saving it.

"Look after him, will you," Dudley said suddenly. "I've just found I've got a cousin, and I'd quite like to keep him."

Ginny smiled brilliantly, the expression changing her face from very pretty, to radiantly beautiful.

"He is one lucky git!"

"Ready?" Ginny asked, as they walked back to the playground.

"Yep, I explained about the Email issue. We can use Hedwig to send messages if we need to."

"Are we going back to Hogwarts?"

"Yep, but how do you feel about coming to an Order meeting?"

"Was I invited?"

"Ginny, would you come to tonight's Order meeting," Harry invited with a grin.

"Sure."

"Dudley, I'm beginning to like you," Harry said as he looked at his cousin. "Sheryl, it was a pleasure."

Sheryl moved towards Dudley, and whispered, "Maybe a boyfriend wouldn't be too bad." She turned and waved at Harry and Ginny, who were now laughing at Dudley's stunned expression. A second later, they were gone.

They appeared in the Headmaster's office. A note on the table told him to come through the door at the back, to the meeting area. He looked at his watch, and saw that he still had a minute. "Wait here for a second; I'm going to get Ron and Hermione. No reason they should miss this."

Ginny nodded, as Harry took the Marauder's Map out of his pocket, checked his friends' location, and vanished again.

He returned a few seconds later with an excited looking couple.

"Are you sure you can do this, Harry?" Hermione fretted.

Harry shrugged. "I'd bet each of you against any one of them any time. I want you there, just follow my lead."

They nodded, and followed Harry as he strolled through the doors. The room was lit by torches around the outside, and several lamps on the large table that the members of the Order of the Phoenix were sitting around.

The noise dropped as Harry and his friends entered, but he ignored them. There was only one space at the end of the table, so Harry pulled out his wand and elongated it, creating three more chairs at the same time. As all four sat down, Harry turned to his headmaster, and said in low voice that still managed to reach everyone in the room, "Sorry we're late; I got held up in Little Whinging."

"Quite all right Harry," Dumbledore said, his eyes twinkling merrily. "We were just about to start."

"Why are these children here?" Elphias Doge demanded, interrupting the Headmaster.

"Those children," Kingsley Shacklebolt replied caustically, "have fought Voldemort more times than you have."

That was the sign for an argument to start between Harry's supporters, and members who thought they shouldn't belong.

Molly and Arthur Weasley were silent, although they did look like they would have preferred their children, and Harry and Hermione not to be there.

Dumbledore opened his mouth, but closed it again when Harry shook his. 'Let them argue' he mouthed across the table.

"Harry," Ginny leaned across and whispered. "Can I stop this?"

Harry turned his head, "I was going to, but be my guest."

"I need to get a message to Fred and George though."

Harry reached across and pulled a piece of parchment near them. He slid his hand over it. "Write on this, it will appear on the piece in front of them."

Severus Snape watched the argument with a slight smile on his face. He had been prepared to enter the discussion as well, but had spotted Harry's message to Dumbledore. At the moment, the people wanting Harry and the others excluded were making up for their lack of numbers by being extremely vocal. He thought they were all idiots for arguing from a position of weakness. The ones for, including half the teachers and the Weasleys, were trying to use logic, but it was all getting shouted out. He looked over at Harry and Ginny, and then elbowed Sirius sharply.

Sirius jumped, and turned to glare at Snape.

"Harry and Ginny are planning something," he whispered.

Sirius stared down the table, and then slowly smiled. He grasped his wand and created some popcorn. "Severus?" he offered.

Fred and George were getting quite annoyed by the argument. They actually felt it would be better for them to walk out, with Harry and the others. They'd probably get more done. The interminable meetings had destroyed their fantasies of how exciting it would be to be a full member.

They were contemplating some distractions, when the paper in front of the suddenly flashed.

'Fred, George, do you remember our show from when I was ten?'

The two looked at each other, and grinned wildly. They nodded down to Ginny, then pulled out their wands and held them under the table.

The lights suddenly started to flicker, as a cold wind rushed through the room. Above the table small flames of fire appeared, and started to circle the table.

As everyone noticed, they slowly stopped shouting and sat down, watching it.

The flames started to join together, expanding in size.

The Weasley's smiled to themselves and settled back, obviously recognising what was going on.

Sirius shared his popcorn with Remus as well as Snape.

The rest of the lights in the room suddenly extinguished themselves, shutting the room into darkness, before the fire cast a beam of pure, white light straight above Ginny.

The girl had her eyes closed, and she slowly spread her arms. Gracefully she was lifted up from her chair, till she was floating in mid-air. The wind seemed to rush towards her, lifting her hair till it stood straight, like a halo. The white light emphasised her pale skin, causing her eyes to appear bigger than they were.

She opened her eyes slowly, and looked serenely around the room. She opened her mouth, and started to speak in a voice that echoed of madness. *"The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches...born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies...and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not...and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives...the one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies..."*

She paused, and looked around the room again, meeting the eyes of all those who had protested. "Who among you dares to deny prophecy?"

There was absolute silence in the room.

"Who else among you has been marked by Voldemort? Who else has faced him and lived? Who else has fought his possession, and won?"

Again, there was silence, while some of the members refused to meet her eyes this time.

"So I thought," she whispered. She closed her arms so they were crossed across her chest, and slowly sunk back down into her chair. As she did, the lights in the room returned to normal.

"Now that's out of the way," Harry said, "Perhaps we can start this meeting. I've had a long day."

"Yes," Albus agreed, a smile on his face. He paused, to see if anyone would object, before continuing, "If you could start Harry?"

Harry nodded. "The goblins know that something strange is happening with our beloved minister. I had a very interesting talk with Mackrack today, he's the manager of Gringotts London."

"You've talked to Mackrack?" Albus said, surprise visible on his - and nearly everyone else's - face.

"Yeah," Harry said, "Nice guy. Is that a problem?"

Hermione smiled slightly. "Harry, the Goblin society is based around their banks. The managers of their banks are the members of the World Council. Mackrack is the current president - you had a chat with the current ruler of all the goblins."

"Oh, thanks," he shot a grin at Hermione. "This is why I wanted you here," he muttered, just loud enough to be heard. "Anyway, officially they are going to remain neutral during this war. But, I have very firm assurances that they will NOT be joining Voldemort." He paused at the exciting chatter that broke out, then continued, "It would be bad for business."

There was a small roll of laughter that crossed the room. "I'd like Percy and Kingsley to continue now," Harry said, as he sat back down.

Percy stood instantly, his dress robes immaculate. "Our report into Government corruption hasn't found much. Too many important documents have been destroyed, paper trails erased. In itself, that is enough circumstantial evidence to make us very suspicious."

Kingsley snorted in agreement.

"However, with the information that Harry provided today, we have several avenues of approach, which should see us able to tie Fudge into the Death Eaters, even if he is not one himself."

"Thank you, Percy," Harry said, not actually realising that he had taken full control of the meeting. "Fred and George, how's our plan going?"

The twins stood, to the amazement of some of the members who had considered them irrelevant jokesters.

"We purchased the trademark this afternoon, as you instructed. The premises we found are perfect, and we managed to get immediate egress. Abe is there working at the moment."

"Wait a second," Hestia Jones interrupted. "Abe, as in Aberforth Dumbledore?"

"Yes," Fred agreed.

"He's back working with the Order?" she asked, sounding excited.

"Not really," Albus interposed smoothly. "He's agreed to help via Harry, and reports directly to him as a special agent of the Order."

"How is this relevant to fighting Death Eaters?" Alastor Moody said grumpily. He had not taken part in the earlier argument.

Harry smiled faintly.

"This morning, Fred and George discovered that the Butterbeer trademark had been seized by the Ministry a couple of years ago, and was available for sale. At the same time, they managed to work their way through a convoluted mess of interconnected companies to find the people responsible for the production of Butterbeer.

"One Lucius Malfoy, and the Malfoy family."

There were numerous gasps from around the table.

"These businesses represent the major source of cash income to the Malfoy family. Most of their fortune is tied up in property and other assets it would be difficult to liquidate on short notice - especially without us knowing about it before hand. Aberforth, Fred, George, and I have been working very closely, and hope to be able to completely destroy a major source of income for the Death Eaters."

"We should be ready by the weekend. The materials for the new Butterbeer are arriving over the next few days, and production should start on Thursday. By working around the clock, we should be ready for Launch on Saturday," Fred said.

"Using Harry's plan, we expect to deliver a fatal blow to Lucius that day, by using the law to shut down his production of the current Butterbeer, buying up any remaining stock from the distributors, and selling them the new Butterbeer at a ten percent discount. We are more than confident that we will have a monopoly almost immediately." George took a deep breath. "This represents a massive investment by the partners of the new company."

Harry looked around the table, and laughed quietly to himself. The funniest thing was the look on the faces of the other Weasleys, except for Ginny, as they showed complete shock that their two prankster twins could be so business-orientated.

"Hey," Fred grinned. "Playing business is as much fun as playing pranks."

"Excellent," Dumbledore applauded with a bright light in his eyes. "I must confess to never having thought about delivering a blow to them that way."

Fred and George flushed slightly, and sat back down.

Albus Dumbledore watched Harry take control of the meeting with a smile on his face. As the boy asked Percy for his update and listened attentively to the response, he made a decision. Using the same spell Harry had a few minutes before, he waved his hand at the parchment in front of him, and started to write.

He paused, to say, "Not really. He's agreed to help via Harry, and reports directly to him as a special agent of the Order," before continuing with his writing. He finished with Fred and George, and sent the text to Harry's sheet.

Harry glanced down at the sheet that was suddenly full of information, and looked at his headmaster, a question clearly visible in his eyes. At Dumbledore's slow nod, Harry turned to his godfather. "Sirius, could you give us an update on your progress with trying to find the Death Eaters' headquarters?"

"Of course, Harry," Sirius said, as he stood and launched into his report.

Harry managed the rest of the meeting, gaining in confidence as he did. Dumbledore's notes allowed him to get all the pertinent information into the meeting. The impression given to the rest of the members, especially to the naysayers from earlier, was that Harry must have had a conversation with Dumbledore beforehand, and had his implicit permission to run the meeting.

Throughout the meeting, Harry relied on Hermione, Ron, and Ginny for ideas and interpretation of data - showing the benefits of a fresh set of minds.

After the meeting, Molly and Arthur walked up to Harry, Molly hugging him automatically.

"I still think you're all too young," she said softly, a sad smile on her face. "But not even I can argue with destiny. Just look after yourself, and Ginny, please."

"I will," Harry said softly, hugging her back.

"And you," Molly said, pulling her daughter into a hug. "I can hardly believe you used that act from your little play at an Order meeting. I swear that Fred and George had too much influence over you."

Ginny laughed, "It worked didn't it?"

Molly shook her head and laughed.

"What have you done with Fred and George?" Arthur asked Harry, a smile on his face.

"Nothing at all, they've just found something that they enjoy as much as pranks and they've got a way of keeping score. It's just a different game for them."

They said goodbye, and the four students walked back to the Gryffindor Common Room.

"What's this, Mrs Norris?" Argus Filch interrupted them. "Students out late at night. Detention it will be, for all of you." He laughed happily.

"Excuse me?" Harry asked, moving in front of them.

Filch froze, and then his face dropped. "Oh, I didn't see you there, Assistant Professor. My apologies."

"Quite alright," Harry said dismissively, and then walked off, the other three following him.

"That was so cool," Ron said, as soon as Filch was out of site. "No more getting into trouble!"

Harry just laughed, and said the password to the Fat Lady. They sat down on the couches in front of the fire; Harry yawned, and slid his feet up, resting his head on Ginny's lap. "This has been a long day," he yawned, again. "I'll just tell you about my cousin, and we can go to bed."

He yawned again, and closed his eyes for a second.

Ginny lightly ran her fingers through Harry's hair, and then looked down in disbelief. "He's asleep!"

Ron and Hermione looked at each other, then laughed.

"Why are you looking mad?" Ron asked.

"Because I was hoping for a decent snogging session. He's been looking so gorgeous today, and with everything we had to do, we didn't really get a chance."

Ron went white, and then said slowly in a strangled voice. "Look, how about I make sure the Room of Requirement is free tomorrow night?"

Ginny and Hermione turned and looked at Ron in shock.

He held up his hands. "I know, but this is Harry, and well, I know I feel better after spending time with Hermione. I just don't want to know any details."

Hermione leaned over and dropped a kiss on Ron's cheek. "You're going to get very lucky shortly," she promised.

Ron's smile grew, as did the blush on his cheek, as Ginny laughed under her breath.

"What are we going to do about Sleeping Beauty here?" Ron asked.

"Let him sleep here for a bit, I'll tell you what happened earlier. We'll float him to bed afterwards."

True to her word, they let Harry sleep there, on Ginny's lap, before the three of them cast the spells to get Harry into bed. Ginny slowly removed his clothing, while Ron and Hermione said a more personal goodnight to each other behind a silencing charm.

"Sleep tight, my love," Ginny whispered softly, kissing Harry on his scar. She left silently, letting her brother and his girlfriend have their privacy.

Harry woke with a start, and wondered how the hell he had ended up in bed. He looked down, and found that he was naked apart from his boxer shorts and smiled. Only one person he knew would have removed his jeans - last time Ron had put him to bed, he had been left to sleep in his clothes.

He glanced at his watch. It was four am, and apart from the soft snoring from Seamus' direction, the room was quiet. He swung his legs out of bed, and noticed some clothing on the floor near Ron's bed that wasn't normally found in a boys' bedroom. He walked over and poked his head through Ron's curtains. He pulled back fast, stumbling backwards till the back of his legs hit his own bed.

"Well," Harry muttered softly to himself. "That's something I never want to see again. I'll wake them later, before the rest of the school wakes up - Hermione would be mortified if the rest of the school knew she had spent the night in Ron's bed."

He laughed to himself, and walked over to his chest. He dressed quickly in a pair of shorts, a t-shirt, and tried on his new trainers for the first time.

It was so much easier for him to walk through the school now that he was an assistant professor - he no longer had to hide behind an invisibility cloak. He arrived at the Quidditch pitch, which was still shrouded in darkness, dawn not due for several hours, and started to jog around it. Ten laps later, he stopped, and had a quick drink. With his warm up done, he walked into the training room, next to the dressing rooms and moved over to the weight equipment.

His routine had been put together by Kingsley and Tonks, at his request, and was concentrating on building him up from the skinny boy he had been. His daily workouts were supplemented by a huge breakfast, personally cooked by the deliriously happy-to-be-of-assistance, Dobby.

He started with the leg press, moving into a sitting position, as he adjusted the weights, adding an extra ten pounds to his normal amount. He removed his glasses, and placed them on one of the school towels, before waving his hand idly. The radio in the corner blared into life, and Harry started to move.

From there, Harry moved around the room, alternating between working his legs and torso, pushing himself as hard as he could. He found the mindless repetitive movements were great for clearing his mind, and for helping him think things through. It amused him every time he heard the phrase that Quidditch agreed with him. Sitting on a broom and flying, while a lot of fun, did not make muscles. Endless mornings in the gym were much more appropriate for that particular activity. He never slept much anyway, and this was a much more practical way of handling that, as opposed to lying in bed worrying and feeling guilty.

And, besides, Ginny's reaction was a definite plus.

After finishing his workout, and cooling down, he walked back to the Gryffindor Common Room and straight into the shower. As he had the night before, he tried to make his hair spike up a little, as Ginny seemed to like it that way but soon gave up as it stubbornly refused to do what he asked of it. He glanced at his watch again, and saw that it was quarter past six in the morning now. He pulled on a fresh pair of jeans, and another t-shirt - green this time - and walked over to Ron's bed again. He paused to pick up his invisibility cloak, and climbed onto the foot of the bed, sitting cross-legged.

He waved his hand at the curtains, creating a much stronger silencing charm, and smirked wickedly.

"I wonder what the punishment is for a professor finding two students sleeping together?" he sneered loudly, in a pretty reasonable imitation of Snape's voice.

Ron and Hermione both seemed to awake at once, and looked at each other sleepily, till the words percolated into their brains.

Hermione tried to sit up, fast, then realised she was naked under the covers and collapsed back down before she revealed anything. They both struggled; trying to find a way to turn and face what they thought was the professor, accidentally hitting each other in the process.

"Professor," Hermione said, her mind trying to come up with some form of explanation, as she pulled the under sheet and wrapped it around her, still lying flat on her back.

"Actually, it's Assistant Professor," Harry corrected in his own voice, sounding very amused.

Both of the struggling students froze, and then turned to face the smirking face of their friend. "Damn it, Harry, you just knocked five years off my life," Hermione said, while Ron grabbed the nearest pillow and chucked it at him.

"Is that the thanks I get?" Harry asked plaintively, his voice now tragic. "I risk life and limb to wake you up before the rest of the house; I even provide a way of Hermione getting to her room without being discovered, I break the rules, and you shout at me and hit me with a pillow."

"No, the pillow and the shouting were for impersonating Snape," Ron grouched. "I was having a great dream as well."

"I'm not surprised," Harry said dryly, "Considering you're sleeping with Hermione. So, is there anything you two want to tell me about your relationship?"

They both blushed brightly. "Ahhh," Harry grinned. "I see."

"At least I was awake to fulfil my obligations," Ron said, teasing Harry back.

"What do you mean?"

You were supposed to have spent some time snogging Ginny last night," Hermione entered the conversation, having arranged the pillow so she could look at him comfortably.

"I was?"

"Yeah, last night, before you fell asleep on her lap. I hate to say this Harry, but we Weasleys are a passionate lot. You really don't want Gin to think you don't fancy her."

Harry frowned, fighting his own blush. "This is turning into the weirdest conversation I've ever had," he muttered. "Talking about my lack of sex life with my girlfriend's naked brother and his equally naked girlfriend, who's about as close to a sister as I could possibly get."

Ron smirked at him. "You think that's weird, you didn't have to promise to arrange for your sister to get the Room of Requirement tonight so she could allow you to make up for your lack of attention last night."

"You don't need to do that," Harry said, the blush still on his face, "I can run the Marauder's Map in Amorous mode. Padfoot said it would be useful."

"What does it do?" Hermione asked, the chance for learning not to be missed.

"I dunno," Harry admitted. "Not done it yet, but when you consider that my godfather was a tomcat, and that Moony was pretty wild himself (it's always the quiet ones) - and the amount of work that went into the normal mode, you can bet it will be good. Padfoot seemed pretty proud of it."

Hermione and Ron looked at each other.

"Yes," Harry interposed, "I will show you how to use it."

"Thanks," they said in unison.

Harry looked at his watch again. "Seriously though," he said, "You guys do need to be more careful. Imagine if Neville had found Hermione's bra on the floor next your bed."

They both blushed furiously again, as Harry climbed out of bed. "My Invisibility cloak is where I was sitting, and Lavender and Parvati's alarm will go off in five minutes."

From: Harry

To: Remus

Subject: Sirius

Morning Moony,

Just thought I'd let you know that I haven't forgotten about pranking our dear friend for continuous bad Sirius/serious jokes. I've changed my mind about what I was going to do, wouldn't want to get in a rut at a young age.

Harry - who had a great night's sleep

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

From: The intelligent Marauder

To: Son of Prongs

Subject: Re: Sirius

I almost thought that getting him to get along with Snape was your prank ^grin^.

But it's good to know, Sirius will have no idea... any clues for your favourite ex-professor?

Remus

From: Just don't call me Bambi

To: Selenophobic

Subject: Re[2]: Sirius

Maybe one... Snuffles would be an apt name.

From: Cliotus Hearst
To: Daily Prophet Subscribers
Subject: Ministry braces itself for a damaging 'Shacklebolt-Weasley' Report

Ministry of Magic braces for a damning report into its actions during the first dark-wizard war, and its current actions.

The Shacklebolt-Weasley report, a wide ranging dossier into suspected corruption at the heart of the ministry is due to be published in the next ten days, and early reports suggest that it will make uneasy reading for key figures.

Minister of Magic, Cornelius Fudge has claimed many times that the Ministry has acted in the best interests of the Wizarding population at all times. He is quoted as saying that it is "Beyond doubt that Ministry personnel have proven their honesty and ability."

It is reported that Shacklebolt-Weasley will find that this claim was false. Senior Aurors have now admitted that certain information used was falsified, and that established Ministry procedures were bypassed, on the direct order of senior Ministry officials.

It is believed that the report will question the actions of Fudge and his predecessor, Millicent Bagnold.

The report was started after the dramatic clearance of Sirius Black, wrongfully imprisoned for mass murder. Black, once the Wizarding World's most wanted man, has since been trying hard to recover from his ordeal.

Cliotus Hearst is the Daily Prophet's political columnist. You can Mmail him at Cliotus.Hearst!685231564.UK or use Muggle Email at thedreporting@yahoo.com.

Ginny's first lesson the next morning was Double Potions. Once a hated period, recently it had actually become pleasurable.

"Right," Snape said, as he entered the dungeon, his cloak billowing behind him. "We're going to look at the Dreamfilled Sleep potion today."

Stuart Bradley raised his hand.

"Yes, Mr Bradley?"

"Aren't we supposed to be studying the Aging Potion?"

Snape rolled his eyes. "Probably," he grunted. "However, as I am still in charge of this class, we will be studying what I say. Now, who can tell me what the Dream-filled Sleep potion is? Ms Lovegood?"

"It gives you pretty dreams," Luna said dreamily. "It's like the Dreamless sleep potion, only more pleasurable."

"Ten points to Ravenclaw," Snape announced. "Excellent response. Now, for twenty points, who can tell me what would happen if you added Romanian Longhorn dragon horn to it?"

There was silence as everyone mentally went through what they knew about potions. Ginny slowly raised her hand.

"Ms Weasley, or should I call you the future Mrs Potter?" In the past, the question would have been cutting and sneering. This time, it was lightly teasing.

Ginny blushed, while the rest of the class laughed. "Ms Weasley will do," she replied, and then paused. "For now."

Snape smiled.

"It would turn the dreams into nightmares?" she half-stated, half-asked.

"Twenty points to Gryffindor," Snape said cheerfully. "Now, the instructions are on the board, please follow them precisely." He then waved his wand and the previously blank board was filled with small, edgy scribe.

He sat down at his desk, and started to mark some of the essays from the sixth year students. He was amused when he came to Hermione's, to find that it was the exact length. She had finally learnt to follow his instructions, and as a result, was getting better grades.

Halfway through the class he walked around examining everyone's work, offering advice as he went. He paused by Ginny's table. She was working alone, as Colin, her regular partner, was in the Infirmary with Wizarding Flu.

"A strange property of this potion," Snape mused absently. "Is that if it is given to Muggles, it only works on certain days of the month. It's influenced by the moon."

He walked back to his desk, ignoring the puzzled look on her face.

At the end of the class, he told everyone to bring a vial to his desk and leave quietly.

"Ms Weasley," he called, bringing her back into his class. He stood, and walked around his desk so he was standing next to her.

"I'm afraid I'm going to have to dock twenty points from Gryffindor."

"What for, professor?" Ginny asked, looking confused.

Snape picked up her vial of potion, and reached forwards, placing it firmly in her bag.

"Dropping your potion vial on the floor."

Ginny blinked, then suddenly put together Harry telling her yesterday that he had shown the professor his childhood, the strange potion they had made, and Snape's cryptic comment from earlier. "You know professor," Ginny said, as she looked up at the tall thin man. "You're getting dangerously close to earning a hug."

Snape looked at her, his face showing mild shock, as she walked out. He shook his head and slowly put away the other potions, making careful note that one bottle of potion had been split on the floor - and that the student had been punished with a deduction of twenty house points.

As he prepared for the next class, he suddenly stopped, and said, "Twenty points to Gryffindor for Ms Weasley's excellent acting ability last night."

From: Seeker

To: Opponents

Bcc: Teammates

Subject: Match

Gentlemen, I have reserved the Hogwarts Quidditch pitch for a week Saturday, (twelve days time)

I believe that two pm will be an excellent time to start, Madam Hooch has agreed to referee for us.

Hope to see you there,

Harry

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

From: Charlie

To: Teammate siblings

Subject: Re: Quidditch

WooHoo, guys, this is it!

I can't wait for us to get on that pitch and kick some Potter ass. We'll show 'em who the first family of Quidditch is!

Charlie

--
Draconis dominium

From: Ron

To: The boys

Subject: Re[2]: Quidditch

Yeah, I'm looking forward to it. Any chance of you guys getting to Hogwarts before that? We really ought to have a practice session.

Besides, Ginny and I would love to see you all.

Ron

From: Extremely busy

To: Siblings + Alicia

Subject: Quidditch Practice

Alicia, as our brothers seem to have forgotten we need seven to make a team, we thought we should bring you up to speed.

Harry's got the match booked for a week Saturday @ 2pm, and the boys would like to meet up one night for a practice.

Transportations not an issue, we can get Hogwarts Portkeys pretty easily, but we're going to be busy all this week, so how about next Tuesday?

F&G

--

Weasley's Wizard Wheezes – coming soon to Diagon Alley.

From: Alicia

To: Weasley Twits

Subject: Re: Quidditch Practice

Yeah, I can make that.

But just so you know, I am only helping because I owe Fred and George, not because I agree with your stance!

A.

From: Bill

To: Alicia

Cc: Siblings

Subject: Re: Quidditch Practice

Alicia,

Thanks for helping us out, but we feel you ought to know that we don't agree with our stance anymore. We're just playing because we think it would be fun. We won't be asking them to split up when we win!

Bill - the dates are fine by me.

From: P

To: Team mates

Subject: Re[2]: Quidditch Practice

Sorry to be so brief, but I'm rather busy at the moment. With any luck, the dates should be fine.

Percy

--

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From: Charlie

To: Everyone

Subject: Re[3]: Quidditch Practice

Not a problem for me either.

C.

--
Draconis dominium

From: Ron

To: The winning team

Subject: Re[4]: Quidditch Practice

Ok guys, I'll book the pitch and tell Harry the dates are fine.

Looking forward to see you guys!

Ron.

Tuesday was a bit of a strange day, Harry mused to himself as he walked down to the dungeons. He'd actually been in classes all day, and had very little time to do anything else. Still, he guessed it was good to have the occasional down day every now and again - even if it was a bit boring.

"Ahh, Harry," Professor Snape greeted him, as he entered the dungeon. "Come with me."

They walked together, down a corridor, near the Slytherin Common Room, and paused next to a portrait of Salazar Slytherin. "Open Up," Snape hissed, in a Parseltongue.

"I didn't know you could speak Parseltongue," Harry said, surprised.

"I can't," Snape grunted. "But Salazar set the password for these quarters, and we can't change it. It took me two weeks to work out how to say it properly."

Harry laughed, and looked around as he entered the room.

"Welcome to my private quarters," Snape said, bowing slightly.

"This is not what I expected!"

"You thought it would be green and silver, perhaps with a built in torture chamber?"

"And a ready supply of blood," Harry added with a grin.

The room was painted in a warm deep blue, and had matching furniture. To one side, a large potions cabinet gave mute testament to the experiences Shape had undergone as a spy for the Order.

"Take a seat, Harry, do you want a drink?"

"No thanks, Professor," Harry said, as he sat down comfortably.

"You managed to call me Severus last night."

"I did," Harry agreed. "But I was trying to get you both mad at me, as opposed to each other."

"It worked," Snape grunted. "As with the other teachers, you can call me Severus, or Sev, in private."

Harry nodded, then looked surprised as Snape passed him a shot glass of Firewhiskey.

"You'll probably need it later. Let me tell you a story.

"In our fifth year, towards the end of the school year, your father, Sirius, Remus, and Pettigrew were at the height of their pranking powers, and were pulling of some spectacular stuff. It was that year that they managed to paint the Slytherin Common Room pink. I was a particular target - Sirius' favourite.

"Well, one night, Bellatrix came to me, and offered her help with pranking him back. Well, I jumped at the chance. We worked together, and created a beautiful potion. We waited for the perfect time, and when Gryffindor won the Quidditch Cup, we moved. We managed to doctor the Butterbeer he was drinking, so that it affected his judgement. We hid in the corner, under Bella's invisibility cloak, and watched the Gryffindors party all night, waiting for it to affect him.

"It worked better than we could have hoped for. They were the last ones up, and Minerva came in to send them to bed. Sirius was in his Animagus form at the time, and walked up to her, and started to hump her leg." Snape reached out and handed Harry a moving photograph.

The photo captured the look of abject shock and horror on McGonagall's face with absolute perfection, and the slight crazed look on Sirius' Animagus form as he moved his hips backwards and forwards.

"To this day," Snape just thinks he drunk too much Butterbeer. And I've never dared to confess to Min." He looked over at Harry, to see his reaction, to find that the boy was no longer sitting in his chair. He was rolling on the floor, struggling to breathe he was laughing so hard, as tears ran down his face.

"Can I have a copy of this, please?" Harry begged, wheezing his request out.

Snape grinned, "Sure. Anyway, she told me the next morning that I owed her one, and she would collect later. I agreed, and it was then I fell in love with her."

Harry nodded, turning the picture over so he wouldn't look at it and laugh again.

Severus took a deep breath. "Well, she collected the other day. Harry, Bellatrix has asked me to ask you if you will help her escape from the Dark Tossler."

Harry blinked, and then shook his head. He opened his mouth, turned to his professor, and then shut it again, quickly. Almost blindly, he reached out, grabbed the shot glass of Firewhiskey, and downed it in one. "That's not gonna do it," he muttered, holding the glass out for Severus to fill again.

"Is she insane? Wait, I know she is, why the hell does she think I will help her?" Harry stood, and started to pace around the floor. "She tried to kill Sirius, she tortured Neville's parents to insanity, she tried to put the Cruciatus on Ginny, and she's lied, stolen, killed, many, many times. Why on earth would I give her anything other than the business end of my wand?"

Harry suddenly froze, slowly; a horrified look appeared on his face. He dashed into the bathroom, and knelt by the porcelain, his stomach rebelling.

Snape sat in his chair, a sad look on his face.

Harry returned, drying his face on a towel, and sat down. "This how Albus felt?"

"What do you mean?" Snape asked, confused.

"When he had to make a deal with the devil."

"I don't understand."

Harry put his head in his hands, and explained in a low voice. "With you no longer a Death Eater, we don't have a spy in the Inner Circle anymore. Much as I hate her, I need her information more." He turned his head, and stared at Snape. "Are you vouching for her?"

Snape thought for a second. A myriad of emotions passed over his face, as though fighting an internal battle. "Yes," he said simply.

"Tell her I want to meet her; I'll give her an answer when I can see her face."

Snape nodded, and stood. He walked over to his potions cabinet and pulled out a yellow vial. "Here, it will settle your stomach."

"Thanks," Harry said weakly, collapsing back in to the chair. "Sometimes I really wish I could just be normal, have my parents, and spend my time trying to work out ways to snog Ginny in private. Not have to make decisions that affect so many people."

"You don't have to," Snape said softly. "You can still take your problems to Albus and get him to do so."

Harry shook his head reluctantly. "I can't hide behind him forever. The prophecy said that I have to kill Voldemort. If that's the case, then I'm going to damn well make sure I've done everything I can to ensure that everyone lives through this."

Harry reached for the bottle of Firewhiskey, and took a long swig. "I was thinking, that night we got rid of your Dark Mark, we managed to work together and threw Voldemort out of your mind."

"Yes?"

"Do you think we could try and do it again, join our minds, and see if we can get into Voldemort's mind?"

Snape seemed frozen in his chair; his eyes then seemed to go very wide. "That might just work," he breathed. He burst out of his chair, and paced furiously around the room.

"You know that your reputation as a vampire comes from your cloak?"

Snape threw Harry a quick grin. "Of course, it was a present from Minerva."

"I think it could work," Snape said, now looking excited. He pulled up his chair closer to Harry.

"My mind or yours?" Harry asked.

"Mine I think," Snape said slowly. "No offence, but I have more practise than you."

Harry nodded and cast Legilimens, entering Snape's mind.

"Ready?" Snape asked mentally.

Harry nodded, trying to remember how they had joined their power before. They tried it a few times, and got it wrong, before they stumbled across the answer.

"Let's go find Tommy Boy," they said as one, and flew into the darkness.

As they flew through the formless void, shapes started to appear beneath them, like paving stones. The shapes kept pace with them for a bit, before accelerating ahead. The paving suddenly seemed to split, forming a tube around them. They slammed to a halt when the pavement reared up in front of them, blocking their progress. They looked around, suddenly fearful, to find they were trapped.

"Ahhh Severus, my faithful potions master, and young Mr Potter, what a pleasant surprise," the sibilant voice of Voldemort dragged their attention towards the approaching figure. "My two favourite people in the world together. Tell me, did you think that it would be that easy? That you'd simply find me, and overwhelm me with your power?"

"Yes," they replied, seeing no reason to lie.

"Fools!" Voldemort hissed. "You will pay for your betrayal, Severus, and you Potter, for being a constant thorn in my side. With you out of the way, that old fool will be easy to defeat." He whipped his wand out, cast a spell neither of them recognised at the two of them.

They tried to move, to cast a spell, anything, but couldn't. Nothing seemed to work for them.

"As you look on from the next life, as I take complete control, remember that you could have stopped this. I knew you would try something so foolish, so heroic," he mocked, "So I prepared for it, found spells that you never dreamed off. And now, it's time to say goodbye."

With deliberate slowness, Voldemort pointed his wand at the two, and said, "*Avada Kedavra* ."

The green light shot out of his wands and hit the combined mind of the Professor and the Student.

In the Great Hall, Ginny suddenly grabbed her necklace. "Nooooo!" she screamed, her voice sounding like she had just had her heart ripped out, before she fainted into blissful oblivion.

This Means War

9 - Harry Potter's Day Off (part 1)

From: Siri

To: Remi

Subject: Snape

Maybe he isn't quite that bad. Likes popcorn.

S.

--

woof

From: The disbelieving werewolf

To: The masticating mutt

Subject: Re: Snape

Of course – popcorn being the best judge of a person, right?

I was more interested in last night's Prophecy than your relationship with Snape – and calling him Snape is much easier to read than Snivellus.

You have worked out what the Prophecy means, right?

R

From: You've used that one before

To: Him with a bad memory

Subject: Re: Re: Snape

It's easier to type; I'll grant you that.

The Prophecy? Yeah – Harry fights Voldemort, Harry wins, Harry and Ginny get married, and I get a whole new breed of Potters to corrupt.

Padfoot

--

woof

From: the forgetful one

To: the forgettable one

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Snape

Moving on swiftly.

As for the Prophecy, it means that Harry is the *ONLY* one who can kill Voldemort. That no matter what we do, we can't stop Harry having to take a life.

Sighing Remus

From: The embarrassed one

To: The learned one

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Snape

Bugger.

Bugger, bugger, bugger, bugger.

Bugger!

Siri

--

Bugger

From: The amused one

To: The amusing one

Subject: Re[lots]: Snape

My feelings exactly. Well, I guess we have to make sure we're there to help him deal with it. A word with Ginny might be a good idea. I'm sure it hasn't passed her notice either.

And speaking of her, that was a hell of a performance last night. I got goosebumps when she floated up and spoke in that unearthly voice. Of course, I happened to see Fred and George casting the spells to help, but all the same...

R

From: He who misses details

To: He who sees details

Subject: Re: Re[lots]: Snape

Actually, it was after that little performance that got me going. Seeing Harry standing there looking so mature, taking command of the Order, well, it kinda made me a little upset.

I'm not comparing him to James again, but last night, I couldn't help but think what if? If James had lived, he would have been the next head of the Order, not Harry. James was destined for greatness, and Voldemort killed him.

Sirius.

--

wagging tail

From: Remus

To: Sirius

Subject: James

I know what you mean, especially in the dim light last night. He could have been James, and Ginny could have been Lily, but the illusion was only for a second. I'm not convinced that James would have ended up the leader, much as I loved him. Haven't you noticed that Harry and Dumbledore share something incredibly deep in their magic, and James, as powerful as he was, didn't have it?

Moony

From: Let's not be serious

To: Other Marauder

Subject: Re: James

You could be right. Still, let's not get dragged down. Last night we found out we had hope – we found that Harry really can be a leader. I'd follow him to hell and back, and we found that when he picks friends, he picks the best.

We should see if we can meet him for dinner tomorrow.

S.

--

See, still no more Sirius jokes

From: Disbelieving

To: Padfoot

Subject: Jokes

Really?

Then Harry really has pulled off the impossible...

Should I point out that his forcing you to overcome your enmity with Severus wasn't his prank?

You want to Mmail him about meeting up tomorrow?

Moony

From: Disbelieving as well

To: He-who-knows-too-much

Subject: Re: Jokes

Okay, now I'm groaning.

Yeah, I'll Mmail him.

I'd had such a good day as well.

S.

--
whining pitifully

From: Uncle Sirius

To: Harry

Subject: Tomorrow

Harry old boy,

Hope you had a good day – and that you didn't spend too much time snogging Ginny.

Anyway, Remus and I thought we'd pop by tomorrow and join you and Ginny for dinner.

Oh, and if I promise on Moony's grave never to do a Sirius/serious joke again, will you drop the prank?

The Adorable Padfoot

--
Hopeful woof

From: Fred (or is it George)

To: The Boy-Who's-Snogging-Our-Sister

Subject: HAOBb.

Harry, when you get a second, can you pop down to the shop, we need to give you an update on our progress.

George (Or Fred)

--
Weasley's Wizard Wheezes – coming soon to Diagon Alley

Minerva McGonagall picked up a cup of tea and surveyed the Great Hall in front of her. As they often did, her eyes rested on the Gryffindor table. Hermione, Ron, and Ginny were deep in conversation, while the children around them were talking in low voices, trying not to interfere.

It was obvious from looking at them that the three, when Harry was not around, spoke in his voice. Even the seventh years cast the occasional glance at them, making sure that their attention wasn't needed.

She lowered the cup, and moved her eyes to the Hufflepuff table, when a scream that tried to shatter her soul erupted into the Hall. Her eyes flew back to the source of the sound – Ginny Weasley – and she watched in horror as the girl grabbed her necklace before fainting.

The scream echoed around the hall, imprinting itself on her brain, in a way she would never forget. It sounded like someone had ripped her heart out.

She turned to Albus to see him appear next to the girl. She wasn't quite sure how he had moved, and she wondered if it was the same way that she had heard Ginny describe Harry's sudden movement.

Albus bent and then turned. A fire appeared in front of him, and with a great voice, shouted, "Aberforth Dumbledore!"

"Albus?" Another head appeared in the fire, the family resemblance obvious.

"What do those necklaces you gave Harry and Ginny do?" Albus demanded, power – and worry – emanating from him.

"They link the two together on a magical level. Why?"

"Ginny has just fainted after screaming and grabbing her necklace."

The head in the fire paused for a second, and then seemed to pale. "Find Harry. Now. I'm on my way."

Albus turned, the fire dying behind him, and Minerva, accompanied by some of the other members of staff, joined him on the floor. Madam Pomfrey was already on her knees next to the girl, checking her out – Hermione was kneeling next to her, acting as a nurse.

"Harry is in Hogwarts," Dumbledore stated in an incontrovertible voice. "Unfortunately, I don't know where."

"I want this school searched from top to bottom. Prefects..." Albus' voice faded as he turned to face Hermione. "What have I forgotten?" he asked with a sigh.

Hermione, who had been looking at him with a confused expression, clapped her hands together. "Dobby."

"Yes, Miss Grangy?" Dobby asked, as the house-elf appeared with a pop.

"Listen carefully, Dobby," Hermione said, still on her knees. "We think that Harry is in trouble. We know he is in school but don't know where. We need to find him urgently."

Dobby's eyes grew wide, and a look of horror appeared on his face. He turned and clapped his hands urgently. Two dozen house-elves appeared in a series of quick pops.

"Harry Potter sir is in trouble," Dobby told them, his voice firm. "Find Harry Potter sir now and report directly to Dobby!"

The house-elves seemed to nod in unison, and vanished with a pop.

"The house-elves find Harry Potter quickly," Dobby said. "Dobby will look too." With that, the house-elf vanished as well.

"Does Hermione make you feel inferior at times as well?" McGonagall asked Professor Sprout next to her in a soft whisper.

"All the time."

"Thank Merlin," McGonagall replied in relief. "I thought it was just me."

"The house-elves have found Harry Potter, sir," Dobby said, popping back into the great hall. "Unconscious in Severus Snape's dungeon. Professor Snape is out as well."

"Thank you, Dobby," Dumbledore said.

Hermione and Ron didn't wait; they were already running out of the door, heading toward the Professor's Room near the Slytherin common room.

Minerva checked that Ginny was being looked after with a glance and began to follow them until she realised that she could simply Apparate there. She tried, vanished, and reappeared outside Snape's door. Albus appearing a second later.

"All the professors' quarters have wards," Dumbledore explained, as Hermione and Ron appeared, slightly out of breath. "I can get in but can't get them out without opening the door."

"What are you waiting for?" Ron asked.

Dumbledore frowned softly, "I have problems opening Severus' door," he admitted a little embarrassedly.

He hissed at the door and waited. He sighed and tried again.

"It's in Parseltongue?" Hermione asked.

Dumbledore nodded, and tried for a third time.

“The professors’ quarters are the most secure in the castle,” McGonagall explained quietly. “They have to be to keep out the pranksters.”

With another try, the door opened, and Albus ran in.

Harry and Severus were on the floor completely inert.

Hermione moved over to Harry and with a trembling hand touched his neck. “There’s a pulse,” she whispered, closing her eyes in relief. “It’s faint, but it’s there.”

“Right,” Dumbledore said, picking up Severus. “Min, pick up Harry, Apparate him to the Hospital Wing.”

“We’ll see you there,” Hermione said. “Come on, Ron.”

The two students sprinted out of the room as Minerva waved her wand at Harry, levitating him out of the room.

Albus followed her, not using his own wand.

As soon as she was clear of the wards, she wrapped her arms around the boy and took a deep breath. She’d never been good at dual Apparating. She closed her eyes and pushed them both to their destination.

They arrived a second later with a pop.

“Put him here, Min,” Pomfrey ordered, pointing to a bed next to the one Ginny was already lying in.

“How is she?”

“Unconscious, but fine. Put Snape next to Harry, Albus.”

“What can you tell us?” Albus asked.

“Shh,” The school nurse responded, casting spells. “Hermione,” she said, as the girl arrived through the door. “Can you please look after Ginny?”

Hermione nodded, and Minerva moved out of the way as the younger witch went back to casting monitoring spells at the girl.

“What happened?” Ron asked, his voice sounding worried.

“We don’t know any more, yet,” Albus said with a sigh. “I will go and reassure the students that Harry is alive. Min, I presume you’re staying?”

“Indeed.”

She watched Albus walk out the door and sat across the room out of the way. She was a little surprised when Ron joined her a second later.

“I feel so helpless,” he whispered.

“I understand, Mr Weasley,” Minerva replied, just as quietly.

“He’s Harry, you know – he’s the hero. He’s not supposed to spend half his life unconscious. And my sister, she’s supposed to be happy with him, not cry out like her soul was ripped in two. It scares me, you know, that they are so close, that they are so vulnerable to each other.”

“You seem to have accepted their relationship now,” McGonagall prompted gently. She’d not really had Ron open up to her before and was curious to see if she could find something deeper than just the Gryffindor exterior that had been most obvious.

“Once I got over my reflex reaction, yeah. It makes sense – they’ve both been through a lot, both been possessed by Voldemort. When I stopped and took the time to really look at them, they are different when they’re together. He loses that wariness and distance, and he smiles. She’s the same; it’s like she’s finally found the peace she’s been searching for since her first year.”

“You said Voldemort.”

“I did,” Ron agreed. “He’s responsible for everything, you know? It’s his fault my best friend is unconscious again; it’s his fault my sister is lying there like a corpse.”

“How do you know that?”

“Because no one else can touch Harry.”

“It could have been something to do with Professor Snape.” She knew that it wasn’t but wanted to see how he would respond.

Ron sighed softly and turned to look at her directly. “No, it isn’t. Harry trusts the Professor, and that’s good enough for me.”

“Is it?”

"It is now. I'm not going to doubt him again. I've been in the cold, and I won't go back there."

"That almost sounds like you are growing up."

"I'm trying," Ron agreed with a sigh. "You know the Quidditch match doesn't matter? We're not going to make them break up when we win."

"You seem very convinced that you will win."

Ron laughed softly, and looked around. "I'm not," he admitted. "Not at all. This year especially, Harry's been thinking ahead and planning things through. He wouldn't have put himself in a situation where he might lose. At least, not without a back up plan."

McGonagall smiled and nodded slowly.

They both turned as Hermione said, "She's waking up."

The door to the infirmary opened, and Aberforth Dumbledore entered, looking slightly out of breath. "It is times like this that I wish I had young Mr Potter's power," he complained. "So, what do we have here?"

"I have no idea what is wrong with Severus and Harry," Madam Pomfrey said with a sigh. "They are alive, but I can't get any sort of reaction from them. And Ginny's waking up."

Abe nodded and moved next to the pale girl.

Ginny opened her eyes and gasped, "Harry!" before breaking into hysterical tears.

Next to Minerva, Ron moved forward, brushing past the older man, and hugged his sister tightly. "It's okay, Ginny, he's alive," he reassured her.

Ginny froze and then slowly leant back to look at her brother. "Alive?" she whispered, tears still streaming down her cheeks.

"See?" Ron said, nodding to the left.

Ginny scrambled out of Ron's arms, and stumbled over to Harry's bed, checking for herself that he was still breathing.

"We don't know what's wrong with him," Ron said softly, moving next to her and putting his hand on her shoulder.

"I can't feel him," Ginny said, lowering her head so that it was resting on his chest. "He's gone."

"There's still hope, Ginny," Aberforth said softly. "He still breathes."

"But he's gone."

"You mean you can't feel him anymore?"

Ginny nodded slightly. "Since you gave us these necklaces, I could always feel him, you know? He was always there in the back of my mind, so I hardly noticed him. Then suddenly, it was gone." Her voice grew louder and louder as her emotions began to fray. "He wasn't there anymore! I couldn't feel him anymore!"

"Sleep," Abe said softly, resting his hand on the girl's head. Ginny dropped into sleep without a further sound.

Abe walked over to Harry and placed his hand on his forehead. "His mind is there," he said slowly. "That's a good sign."

"Any idea why he is unconscious?" Hermione asked.

"No idea at all," Abe sighed. "Do we know what they were doing?"

"Not a thing. I know that Snape wanted to talk to Harry about something, but I have no idea what. Harry was planning on meeting us later."

"Well," Albus said slowly. "I guess the only thing we can do is wait." He absently conjured a comfortable chair and sat down in it.

From: Remus

To: Sirius

Subject: Where the hell are you?

There's an emergency. Where the bloody hell are you?

R.

From: Sirius

To: Remus

Subject: Re: Where the hell am I?

London. I'll meet you at the Shack immediately.

--
growing

From: Fred

To: George

Subject: Bugger

Well, old boy, I take it you've heard the news?

F.

--
Weasley's Wizard Wheezes – coming soon to Diagon Alley

From: George

To: Fred

Subject: Re: Bugger

I have indeed. I really hope they find out what is wrong with him, quickly.

Do you think we should delay the plans for the Butterbeer?

G

--
Weasley's Wizard Wheezes – coming soon to Diagon Alley

From: Freddie

To: Georgie

Subject: Plans

Actually, no, I don't think we should postpone them at all. Harry wouldn't want us to, and we have to presume that he is going to live through this.

F

--
Weasley's Wizard Wheezes – coming soon to Diagon Alley

From: George P Wildebeast

To: Frederick Von Sexheimer

Subject: Re: Plans

And if he doesn't?

G

--
Weasley's Wizard Wheezes – coming soon to Diagon Alley

From: Baron Von Sexheimer

To: Count Wildebeast

Subject: If he doesn't...

Then we dust off the old plan and take care of business ourselves.

F.

--

Weasley's Wizard Wheezes – coming soon to Diagon Alley

From: Slightly nervous

To: The brave one

Subject: Taking care of business

Well, I think you're right. The prophecy might state that only Harry can kill him, but I'm not sure if I really believe that. I've yet to see a problem that can't be solved by a few hundred pounds of explosives.

So, we use that spell that turns our blood into nitro-glycerine, get "caught" by the Death Eaters, and when we're taken to Voldemort for questioning, we set ourselves off, take out as many of them as possible, and leave a humongous plume of smoke and fire as our epitaph.

G

--

Weasley's Wizard Wheezes – coming soon to Diagon Alley

From: You ain't the only one

To: The only person I could do this with

Subject: Improvements

Okay, that plan was good last year, but we're better now. Let's throw in some improvements. There's got to be a way we can use this to promote WWW. Obviously, we're leaving the shop to the girls, so we have to make sure that they will be set for life.

Perhaps we could add some charges so that, when the explosion goes off, we have a huge sign saying, "This Death Eater annihilation was bought to you by WWW."

What do you think?

Fred.

--

Weasley's Wizard Wheezes – coming soon to Diagon Alley

From: Co-genius

To: Co-genius

Subject: Re: Improvements

That's a cool idea. It wouldn't be too hard. If we tie the explosions into our magical cores, we should be able to do what ever the hell we want, as we're dying anyway. Lightning would be good – as some sort of tribute to Harry.

All the same, I still rather hope that we don't have to go through with this, that Harry gets better, marries Ginny, and provides us with a whole new brood of powerful youngsters we can corrupt.

George.

--

Weasley's Wizard Wheezes – coming soon to Diagon Alley

From: Awe-filled

To: Awe inspiring

Subject: Kids

What a wonderful idea. The kids of the two most powerful people we know should be wonderful in their own right. Think of the pranks we can teach them.

It will take some work on our part, but if we act a little more grown-up around Harry and Ginny, we should be able to persuade them to let us baby sit. And once we do, then we'll be able to show them the light at a young age – mold their young minds into the proper framework to carry on the proud Weasley tradition.

I've got a few ideas for the sort of pranks a three year old can pull; I'll see what I can put together.

Frederick Von Sexheimer

--

Weasley's Wizard Wheezes – coming soon to Diagon Alley

From: Lady Nightshade

To: The serpent keeper

Subject: Voldemort

Snape,

I've got no idea what Potter did last night, but Voldemort is in a right state. He almost looks like some sort of Wraith. All Lucius has told me is that he cried out 'Potter!' before collapsing.

You know, I'm actually excited for the first time in years.

Bella.

From: Pansy Parkinson

To: Mum

Subject: News

I've got to make this quick... Just overheard Dean Thomas talk... It seems that Potter's cousin is dating Thomas' Muggle sister, and that they are both in a place called Little Whinging. If our Lord captures them, then Potter will come crawling to him – you know how Gryffindors are.

Pansy

--

Purity is truth

"*Stupefy*," Parvati Patil, Padma Patil, Luna Lovegood, Blaise Zabini, Lavender Brown, and Susan Bones said together.

Pansy barely had time to let out a strangled 'eep' before she was hurled into a wall and then collapsed into unconsciousness.

"Come on," Blaise said cheerfully. "We need to get her out of the way before anyone sees us."

"Does it matter?" Lavender asked. "I mean, everyone knows that we're doing this for Harry, and that she's a Death Nibbler."

Blaise paused and then grinned embarrassedly. "Sorry," she apologised, "it's a Slytherin habit. If you're doing something, you sneak around."

Padma cast a levitation spell on the fallen girl. "Right, let's get her to the Astronomy Tower."

The six girls surrounded the floating unconscious girl and escorted her through the school. The few students that saw them instantly decided that they really didn't need to know what was going on and vanished out of sight, their eyes studiously focused on the ceiling or the floor as they moved away.

Upstairs, on the roof, they tied Pansy to a hastily-constructed wooden framework, so that she was looking over the parapet and placed her wand just out of reach.

"*Enervate*," Blaise said, casting the spell at Pansy.

"What...?" Pansy moaned, before looking up.

"Hello, Pansy," Blaise said. "It's come to our attention that you've been a naughty girl, and we really can't have naughty girls interfering in things that have nothing to do with them."

What the hell are you talking about, Zabini?" Pansy demanded, her face going white.

Padma walked up and slapped the tied girl hard across the face with the back of her knuckles. "No swearing," she said calmly.

Pansy's tongue flicked out, tasting the blood that was creeping out of her nose. "You hit me," she said in a shocked, disbelieving voice.

"I did," Padma nodded. "You are scum. You are a vile racist, and I hate you and everything you stand for."

"Okay, sis," Parvati said, pulling her sister back slowly. "Let's not lose it here."

"But—" Padma complained.

"—I know, sis, I know. I want to smack her around for a bit as well. But we can't do that; it would make us as bad as her."

"Semantics," Padma sniffed. "Treating someone as they deserve does not make us as bad as her."

Parvati sighed. "We both know that I'm not going to win a logical argument with you. So instead of that, ask yourself if this is what Harry would do."

"No," she sighed regretfully. "He wouldn't."

"When I get out of here, you'll be expelled for hitting me," Pansy shouted.

"Well, in that case, I can't let Padma go down on her own," Susan said calmly, as she walked up to Pansy and slapped her.

"Typical Hufflepuff," Pansy sneered. "Happy to hit someone when they can't fight back."

"That's right, I am a typical Hufflepuff," Susan replied. "You deserved it, and I'm being loyal to Harry. Just and Loyal, remember?"

"Anyway," Blaise interrupted. "We're getting a little fed up with you spying on us, so we invited you up here to have a go at persuading you to stop."

"I'm not going to stop, and when the Dark Lord wins, I'll make sure you spend the rest of your lives as servant girls to the Death Eaters," Pansy snarled at her captors.

Blaise took a step forward and slapped Pansy hard. "That is fun," she said with a smile. "I've wanted to do that for years." She looked back at Pansy. "You really are stupid, aren't you? Voldemort's not going to win. Harry is going to win."

Pansy sniffed. "Potter? Please."

"You don't get it, do you?" Blaise said. "Look at us here; we have two Gryffindors, two Ravenclaws, a Hufflepuff and a Slytherin, all working together, all doing something for a friend. All punishing you for trying to interfere with Harry's relationship with Ginny."

"Who can Voldemort trust to do things like that? No one. Because all the Death Munchers are doing it for the wrong reasons."

"Drop dead, Zabini," Pansy snapped.

Luna pushed past Blaise and stared hard at the bound girl. She leaned forward, 'till she was eye to eye with the Slytherin.

Pansy spat straight in her face; Luna didn't flinch the slightest bit.

"Excuse me a second," Lavender said, moving Luna back, and slapping Pansy hard across the face. "I couldn't let a Ravenclaw, a Slytherin, and a Hufflepuff have all the fun," she said cheerfully. "Luna, please feel free to continue," she said, as she moved out of the way.

"It's no use," Luna said dreamily. "She believes in her petty heart that she will spend the rest of her life on her knees serving Voldemort personally." She reached out and lightly caressed Pansy's face. "You're looking forward to it, aren't you?"

"What the hell are you talking about, you weirdo?"

Luna leaned in closer and whispered conspiratorially. "The narbuckles. They tell me everything. They tell me that you won't change," she confided to the horrified Slytherin. "They tell me that you have to die."

"What?" Pansy screeched.

"Can't you hear them?" Luna sighed happily. "They talk to me. They want you to die so that they can dance in your blood. It makes them so happy."

"Err, Luna?" Parvati asked. "We're not going to kill her."

"Of course we are," Luna replied innocently. "That's why we got her up here. Why, look, all I have to do is cut the rope."

"You said we'd bring her up here so that we could scare her," Susan protested. "Not commit murder."

"But her soul is already dead," Luna said happily. "It's all black and tar-like. No sign of life at all."

"But — " Padma started and then shook her head. "I knew you were a nut-job. If you're doing this, then I'm not hanging around to see it."

Me neither," Parvati and Lavender agreed in unison.

"And count me out as well," Susan said.

"Wait!" Pansy shouted, as they turned and started to walk away. "You can't leave me alone with her!"

"We're not," Susan replied. "You'll have Blaise for company as well."

"I have to make sure Luna has an alibi," Blaise shrugged. "You know me, Pansy dear, like a good Slytherin, death doesn't scare me."

"But..." Pansy said, tears running down her cheek. "You, you can't do this."

"We're not doing anything," Padma agreed affably. "Loony is. We're just choosing not to help stop her."

"They want blood, the narbuckles do," Luna sang, as she danced merrily. "They're so happy they're going to get it." She stopped suddenly and placed her face in front of Pansy's again. "They don't like you," she announced in an eerie whisper.

The four girls moved out of sight, leaving only Luna, Blaise, and Pansy.

Luna waltzed around in front of Pansy, before grabbing a rope and using it to pull Pansy to the edge of the parapet. "You know," she said to Blaise dreamily. "Killing someone is a lot better than chocolate."

"Wait!" Pansy screamed. "Please, for the love of all that is good, please wait."

"What would you know about good?" Blaise spat. "You interfered with Harry and Ginny; you passed on secrets to the Death Eaters."

"I'll never do it again!" Pansy screamed.

"Shhh," Luna said comfortingly. "Screaming will only make your blood taste worse for the narbuckles, all bitter and sour. And then they'd be unhappy. And you don't want that, do you?"

"It will be a quick death. Only two seconds of fear as you fall toward the ground, before you hit it. You should die instantly. But then again, you might not; the ground is a little soft. But don't worry, the narbuckles don't mind if you're not all the way dead. A little dead is just as good for them."

"You're insane," Pansy whispered.

"No, I'm not," Luna said, climbing onto the parapet so she could look into the girl's eyes. "I'm the only person who sees the world properly. It's everyone else who is insane."

"Help!" Pansy yelled.

"*Quietus*," Luna giggled, pulling her wand from behind her ear. "There," she sang. "Now you can only talk silently. Isn't that better? If you beg nicely, I'll remove it before I push you over the edge. You do want everyone to hear your screams as you fall, right?"

"Keep her away from me," Pansy said in a harsh whisper, as if she was trying to shout. "Please."

"Sorry," Blaise said. "But we can't risk you telling your parents what is happening around here, and as we can't trust you, I'll have to let Luna kill you."

"But I won't tell anyone, I swear."

"I don't believe you," Blaise said indifferently.

"I swear, on my magic, that I will never tell anyone anything that is going on at Hogwarts!"

A bright glow came out of the wooden framework to Pansy's left, as her wand emitted a dazzling white light.

"Did that do it?" Susan asked.

"It sure did," Padma said, walking up from her position behind Pansy. She pulled another rope, pulling Pansy back from the parapet.

"W-w-what's going on?" asked a bewildered Pansy as loudly as she could. She was ignored.

"Luna, that was brilliant," Blaise said, hugging the smaller blonde. "You were amazing."

"She's right," Parvati agreed, as she walked over to join in the hug. "You gave me goosebumps."

"I'm not really crazy," Luna said, looking down.

"We know," Lavender said gently. "We're your friends now – you're one of us."

"Really?" Luna asked, as tears of relief ran down her face.

"Really," Susan said firmly, taking over the hug. The Hufflepuff looked around, and smiled slightly. "We are what Harry wants; friends from each

house, working together to help him defeat Voldemort.”

“What’s going on!?” Pansy tried to yell.

The six girls turned to face her, smug smiles on their faces.

“You see,” the Slytherin started, “Harry said that when the houses work together, there’s nothing we can’t do. Parvati and Blaise came up with the plan, Susan, Lavender and Padma came up with the spells. And Luna pulled it off to perfection.

“You, my dear,” Blaise continued, “have just been completely had.”

“But,” Pansy said with a frown. “Why? I mean, apart from scaring the life out me.”

“Oh, we didn’t just scare you,” Susan said smugly. “We got you to cast a spell on yourself.”

“What!?”

“I swear, on my magic, that I will never tell anyone anything that is going on at Hogwarts’,” Susan quoted. “The spell we came up with allowed us to make the wooden frame an extension of your wand. We preloaded it with a binding oath spell, and let you do the rest.”

“I almost want you to say something,” Blaise said. “I’d love to see how you handle life being a Squib.”

“What!?”

“She’s not good with words when she’s stressed, is she?” Padma smirked. “Or that bright either. What it means, Parkinson, is that if you try and break your oath, your magic will vanish, leaving you a Squib.”

Pansy looked at them, her mouth hanging open.

Lavender walked around the back and cut her free. Pansy dropped painfully to her knees.

“I’d suggest you run along now, little girl,” Parvati said coldly. “And just so you know, we did think of killing you, but decided that Harry wouldn’t like it. Next time, we’ll kill you on principle.”

Pansy nodded and stumbled to her feet, running away.

They waited in silence for a few minutes, listening to the sound of Pansy’s frantically retreating footsteps.

“That was really cold, Parv,” Padma said with an admiring smile.

“I know,” she grinned. “I borrowed the voice from Harry. Still, I don’t think she’ll be a problem.”

“So she brought it, then?”

Blaise smiled and wrapped an arm around Luna. “Thanks to our wonderful actress here, she fell for it hook, line, and stinker.”

“Don’t you mean sinker?”

Blaise sniffed the air and then pointed to a puddle on the floor. “I said what I meant,” she grinned.

“It’s a pity that the oath spell doesn’t exist,” Padma said. “I might have a word with Hermione later to see if we really can find one. Because it would be a very good way for us to be able to prove that others are as loyal to Harry as we are.”

“It doesn’t matter if the spell exists,” Luna said quietly. “Pansy believes it exists, so others will.”

“She’s right,” Lavender said cheerfully. “So, let’s go see if Harry’s awake yet. Then we can go to lunch.”

The scene inside the Hospital Wing was quiet.

Ron and Hermione were working at a desk, Ginny was sitting next to Harry, reading from a schoolbook, and Sirius, in his Padfoot form, was curled up, asleep at Harry’s feet.

“A boy and his dog,” Remus said with a slight smile.

“Sirius wouldn’t sleep last night,” Ginny said with a shrug. “He wouldn’t till I woke up.”

“I think that Sirius only really trusts you with Harry,” Remus said with a shrug of his own. “It’s nothing conscious on his part. But he’s devoted to Harry and knows that you are as well.”

Ginny lent forward and lightly scratched Sirius’ head. “I hate this waiting,” she sighed.

“We all do,” Hermione agreed. “But while he’s breathing, there’s hope. And we’ll find something, Gin, I promise.”

Ginny nodded and smiled wryly. She reached out and stroked Harry's hair back softly. "I hate seeing him like this," she whispered. "I hate seeing him so still. He's Harry. He should be smiling and laughing. He should be looking at me like I'm his world, not lying in a hospital ward."

Sirius opened one eye and woofed his agreement softly.

The Brothers Dumbledore entered the room together. "I do have some news," Albus said, as he took a seat. "It seems that what ever happened to Severus and Harry, happened to Voldemort as well. From what one of my spies tells me, Voldemort seems to have reverted to how he was just after he was resurrected. So I can only presume that there was some form of magical conflict between the three of them."

"So we have some time for Harry to get better?" Ron asked.

"I hadn't thought of it that way, Mr Weasley," Dumbledore said slowly. "But you are quite right. Voldemort will be in no shape to attack."

Sirius growled softly.

"Abe," Ginny asked softly. "How do our necklaces work?"

Abe shrugged lightly. "They use your magic to communicate with each other, why?"

Ginny froze, a frown appearing on her face at the words. "They are not magical themselves?" she asked. "They use our magic?"

"Exactly."

Ginny jumped off the bed accidentally kicking Sirius, who barked and jumped to his feet, changing forms, and looked at Ginny.

The red-haired witch pulled out her wand and pointed it at Harry.

"Ginny?" Hermione asked slowly.

"Not now," Ginny said. She closed her eyes and reached for the memories she had of Harry growing up. She let them fuel her temper, as she pulled her magic together. She pointed her wand at Harry and cast a bolt of pure magic at him.

Harry jerked, before going still again. Ginny growled under her breath, and cast the same spell, again. Twice more. Suddenly, she dropped to her knees and burst into tears. She clutched the necklace and smiled at the others. "He's back," she whispered, before fainting from exhaustion.

Sirius moved first, catching her before she hit the floor. He carried her to Harry's bed and placed her next to him. He quickly removed her shoes and gently tucked her under the covers.

"What?" he asked, as everyone looked at him. "They both need this," he said, his tone challenging anyone to disagree.

"What just happened?" Ron asked.

"Your sister is very insightful," Hermione said with a smile. "She puts things together quicker than I do."

"Put what together?" Remus asked.

"Ginny couldn't feel Harry. We just found out that Harry was in a fight with Voldemort, and that Voldemort was in a bad state. Ginny then found out that the necklaces use their magic. The logical conclusion is that Harry used all his magic in the fight, and there was nothing left to power the necklaces. So Ginny used her own magic to give some to Harry," Hermione explained

"Oh," Ron said slowly. "And she's unconscious because, knowing Harry, he needed a lot of magic? So why isn't he awake?"

"I'd suggest," Abe said slowly, "that Ginny merely kick-started Harry's magic, gave it enough to start building on, rather than giving him enough to function normally."

"Like restarting a heart after a heart attack?" Hermione asked.

Abe walked over and waved his hands above Harry. "Exactly. And when they wake, I owe them both an apology. I'm afraid I didn't think about the fact that I couldn't feel Harry's magic – I thought he was just unconscious."

"Should we do Snape as well?" Ron asked.

"I'll do it," Dumbledore said with a smile. "I suspect that if Ginny had just told us, we could all have helped, and she wouldn't be unconscious."

"Oh please," Ron snorted. "Tell my sister not to give Harry something? You'd have better luck persuading Voldemort to become a brush salesman."

Sirius sniggered. "Can I interest you in a broom?" he asked, his voice sibilant. "It comes with a free 'I-hate-everyone' charm."

Albus pointed his hand out at Snape, and bolts of light flew into the professor's chest.

"That should do it, Albus," Abe said with a smile. "And as we can now expect them to wake up later, I'm going to see the twins. I need to make sure everything's on track for our launch."

"Abe, thanks for helping," Albus said sincerely.

“It’s people like Harry and Ginny that give me hope for the future,” Abe said softly. “This time we’ll win, and we will end this mess permanently.” He nodded at the others and walked out.

“I think I like him,” Ron said. “But does anyone in your family ever say what they mean?”

Albus roared with laughter. “Not if we can help it, Mr Weasley,” he said cheerfully. “Might I suggest that you all go and get something to eat? I’ll stay here for a while.”

Hermione nodded and stretched. “We’re sure about Harry?”

“If Ginny is, I am,” Albus said with a smile.

Hermione nodded. “Come on, Ron.”

Ginny stretched and smiled. She could feel Harry’s heart beat against her chest and feel his magic through her necklace. It was faint, but it was definitely there. She just wished that for once, just once, she could wake up with him and NOT be fully dressed.

It didn’t seem fair that Ron and Hermione got to sleep together, and she still hadn’t had more than a serious snog.

She sat up gently and brushed her hair back from her eyes.

“Good morning, Ginny,” Snape said from across the room.

“Professor Snape!” Ginny cried, climbing out of bed. “You’re awake.”

“I am,” he said, his teeth showing in the darkness as he gave a little smile.

“I’ll call Professor Dumbledore,” she said, searching for her shoes.

“Don’t, please, Ginny,” he said. “I’d like to talk to you alone for a bit first.”

“Okay,” Ginny said agreeably, moving to a chair next to him and curling up comfortably. “What do you want to talk about, Professor Snape?”

“Severus,” he said.

“Excuse me?”

“My name is Severus, Ginny. I’d quite like it if you used it when we’re not around the other students. Harry has my permission, as well.”

“Why me?”

“Partly because I owe you an apology,” he said slowly. “And partly because I know you a lot better now.”

“What do you owe me an apology for?”

“I’m afraid I made a rather rash decision that helped to cause this. Yesterday, I invited Harry to my quarters because I had a problem that I needed help with.”

Ginny nodded.

“When I was younger, I was very much in love with Bellatrix Black. She was one of the reasons I joined the Death Eaters. When she married Rodolphus, I became a spy for Albus.

“Bella contacted me last week, after Harry managed to remove my Dark Mark, and asked if she could switch sides.”

Ginny gasped.

“As Harry is the only person who can remove the Dark Mark, I asked for his advice. I’m afraid that Harry realised very quickly that he needs Bella.”

“As a spy?” Ginny asked.

“Exactly. He wasn’t happy about it but agreed to help me. After a drink, he asked me an interesting question. Did I think that we could use the same spell that joined our minds when we got rid of the Dark Mark to defeat Voldemort?”

Ginny nodded slowly. “The idea of defeating Voldemort like that would be very attractive to Harry.”

“And to me,” Snape agreed. “So I agreed, and we went, in my mind, to find Voldemort. Unfortunately, he was waiting for us and trapped us. He gloated for a second and then cast the Killing Curse at us.”

Ginny gasped in horror.

“I thought we were going to die. Harry thought we were going to die.”

What happened?"

Snape sighed softly. "Would you be a dear and pass me a glass of water?"

Ginny nodded, jumping to her feet and rushing to the sink. She returned with a glass of water.

"Sit down," Snape said gently. "Before I continue, we need to back up a little. Have you ever thought about Harry's power to do whatever he thinks he can do?"

"Not really," Ginny said in a small voice.

"At one level of his psyche, Harry is highly suggestible. If someone he trusts tells him he can do something, he takes them at their word and makes it happen. Unfortunately, the opposite is also true."

"What do you mean?"

Snape sighed and shifted slightly. "Voldemort told Harry that he had found spells that Harry had never dreamed of, and Harry believed him. The spells that were binding us were not that strong, but because Harry believed he couldn't escape, the spells were unbreakable.

"And then Voldemort cast the spell at us. I was deeply inside Harry's mind at the time, so I was able to follow his thoughts. Part of Harry believed that he was going to die, and with him in that mind set, we were doomed.

"But then thoughts started flashing through his mind. Did you know that you were the first witch he actually knew the name of?"

Ginny shook her head.

"I saw your entire history together, including what he did in the Chamber of Secrets. I saw everything, and I saw just how much he loves you. You are the centre of his universe, Ginny. In a way, you are the most important person in the world, more so than Harry, because you are his inspiration, his reason for fighting, for defeating Voldemort.

"And he didn't want to leave you. He knew how upset you would be, and he couldn't do that to you. All of this was happening so fast that I could see the spell moving toward us in slow motion.

"Two parts of Harry battled each other – the part that believed he was going to die with the part that loves you so much. The part that doesn't ever want to leave you."

Ginny had tears running down her cheeks as she listened to her once-hated professor explain her boyfriend's heart to her.

"At the last second, his desire to live with you won, and he started to act.

"Harry could have easily protected himself from the spell, but I would have died. I told him to do it, and he told me to shut the hell up."

Ginny choked out a laugh.

"He literally grabbed all of his own magic, and all of mine, and formed a shield in front of us. It was the most beautiful, most incredible thing I have ever seen. The curse bounced off the shield, and hit Voldemort, and that was pretty much the last thing I remember, 'til I woke up here about twenty minutes ago."

"Thank you for telling me," Ginny whispered.

Snape smiled in the darkness. "He's an incredible young man," he said softly. "He had a chance to get out and leave me. And honestly, I wouldn't have blamed him if he had. Instead, he chose to make sure that I got out of there alive, regardless of the personal cost to himself."

"Harry sees himself as normal," Ginny said with a little sigh. "He thinks that, in any situation, everyone else would act the same way he does. He doesn't see himself as being anything special.

"Excuse me for a second," Snape said. "Could you pass me my wand; I've got an Mmail from Bella."

Ginny nodded and reached into a cabinet, handing her Potions professor his wand.

"Oh, good," he smiled. "It looks like Voldemort is in as much of a state as we are."

Ginny nodded. "One of Professor Dumbledore's spies said that he would need time to recover. Which is a good thing because Harry does as well."

Snape nodded. "I think just spending time with you will be all the rest he needs."

"I hope so," Ginny said. "It feels like we are moving from crisis to crisis half the time with very little time to ourselves."

"So I saw," Snape agreed. "But I can tell you that the times he spends alone with you are the most important things in his mind. When he took you to London and walked through the gardens with you, it was his idea of heaven."

Ginny smiled slowly. She was happy that Harry was alright, but she didn't like the way he had tried to do something so dangerous without any

support. “I am going to tell him off,” she admitted.

“I know,” Snape laughed. “And I shall confess to Albus. He will be disappointed with me and will make that very clear. Don’t be too hard on him, though.”

“I won’t be,” Ginny promised. “I just want to make sure that he thinks things through a little more before placing himself in danger.”

Snape yawned softly. “If you don’t mind, Ginny, I’m going to go back to sleep. Please don’t tell anyone else about Bellatrix – that is between Harry and me. I told you so you could help him deal with the decisions he has to make.”

Ginny stood, gasping a little as she found that the floor was a lot colder than it had been before. “Thanks for helping bring Harry back to me,” she whispered and lightly patted his hand.

She danced over to Harry’s bed and slid in next to him. She threw one leg over him and rested her head on his shoulder. Snape had given her something to think about. It was all very well – everyone playing games with Harry’s psyche for their gain, but as Voldemort had proven, it could have a negative aspect as well.

She sighed as she realised there were a few examples she should have recognised. Times when Harry had appeared fine after doing some complicated magic, but as soon as she had told him he must be tired, he had suddenly looked it. If she hadn’t said it, he probably wouldn’t have been, but in his suggestible state, and the trust he had in her, he had agreed.

She was so tired that she didn’t even notice the feel of Harry’s arm moving to hold her in place.

“So,” Lavender said. “Where shall we start?”

“Well,” Parvati said, as she looked around. “The bedroom?”

There was a knock on the door, and as they opened it, four more girls trooped in.

“You weren’t planning on decorating Harry’s room without us, were you?” Susan asked cheerfully.

“It was supposed to be a secret,” Parvati explained.

“There’s no such thing in Hogwarts,” Blaise grinned. “So, we’re here to help.”

There was a small pop, and Dobby appeared. “Begging Mistress’ pardon,” Dobby said, bowing low and moving away. “But what are students doing in here?”

Luna walked forward and dropped to her knees. “This is going to be Harry’s room,” she said to the house-elf. “We are going to decorate it for him.”

Dobby’s eyes went enormously wide. “Harry Potter will live here, miss?” he squeaked.

Luna nodded, her own eyes pretty wide.

Dobby shook his head, looking visibly upset. “No, no, no,” he cried. “Not good.”

“What’s not good, Dobby?”

“Harry Potter sir cannot live like this. This small, cramped room is not right for such a great and powerful wizard like Harry Potter, miss.” The elf suddenly seemed to cheer up. “Dobby will fix it,” he promised. He clapped his hands, and as before, two dozen more house-elves appeared.

“Harry Potter sir, the great and wonderful wizard, is going to be living here. Harry Potter’s rooms are too small. Hogwarts needs to give Harry Potter bigger rooms!”

The elves all nodded at once, and they walked to the walls, six along each, and started to push. The room seemed to grow as the elves pushed the walls back, bright lights shining from where their hands touched the walls.

“Harry Potter will be needing a kitchen as well,” Dobby said. The elves moved like whirling dervishes, reshaping the walls as Dobby directed them left and right.

Ten minutes later, Dobby collapsed to the floor in front of them, as the other elves vanished. “Dobby is tired,” he said softly. “This room is now fit for Harry Potter sir. If Mistresses need more help, Dobby will return tomorrow.”

Luna went down on her knees again and gently hugged the house-elf. “You make sure you are here when we show Harry his room,” she told him. “You deserve to be thanked by him as well.”

Dobby blushed and stammered, before disappearing with a pop.

“You’re very good with him,” Susan said.

Luna smiled. “This is amazing,” she sighed as she looked around. “I wonder if Ginny would let us move in as well.”

Lavender laughed. “Probably not; she’s a little possessive.”

“And I thought Gryffindors knew how to share,” Blaise smirked. “It’s a good thing we came, as you are definitely going to need help now.”

“Yeah,” Lavender agreed. “I didn’t know the elves could even do that.”

“Nor did I,” Padma said. “I’ll have to do some research on them later. They do good work, though.”

“Guys,” Lavender yelled. “Come and look at this!”

They followed the sound of her voice and ended up on a large balcony that faced the Quidditch pitch.

“Harry’s never going to want to leave here,” Blaise said softly.

“I’ll bet that’s what Ginny is hoping for,” Parvati replied.

“Well,” Lavender said, clapping her hands. “Let’s get to work. Padma, you and Luna are on research. I want you to find out how they did the ceiling in the Great Hall. Blaise, Susan, you’ve got the bathroom to start with. I know they’re both Gryffindors, but don’t make it Gryffindorish. We want this place to be a mixture of all the houses.”

Blaise saluted instantly. “Sir, yes, sir!” she shouted and turned on her heel.

“Do we really need her?” Lavender asked Parvati.

“I think so,” Parvati grinned. “She’s fun.”

Friday morning dawned with the monotonous regularity of something that happened once a week.

Ginny yawned deeply and inhaled. She’d been sleeping quite well these past few nights, and while the whole school knew exactly where she spent the nights, no one had made a joke about it. Not even Draco.

“Why are we always dressed when we wake up together?” Harry asked, his voice dry and raspy.

“I’ve been asking myself that all week,” Ginny replied, before freezing. “Harry?”

He nodded.

“Harry!” she yelled and threw herself on top of him. She buried her face in his neck and broke down in tears.

“Shhh,” Harry whispered, stroking her back softly. “It’s okay. I’m here.”

She looked up at him; he was a little blurry because of the tears in her eyes. “Harry,” she said seriously. “I need you to do something for me.”

“Anything,” he said seriously.

“Come into my mind – I need to show you something.”

He nodded, whispering the spell under his breath.

Ginny took a deep breath and welcomed him into her mind. She carefully guided him to the memory she had stored and nudged him toward it.

He didn’t back away; he absorbed the memory completely, before pulling away. Tears were running down his face, and he had a heartbroken look.

“That’s what I felt like when I thought you were gone,” she choked out, crying with him. “I can’t feel like that again, Harry.”

“I’m so sorry,” he whispered.

“I know,” she said. “I just want you to remember that the next time you think of doing something like this again. I won’t hold it against you if I’m there, Harry, if I can help look after you, but you can’t go off on your own.”

“I won’t,” he promised.

“Good,” Ginny said softly and gently kissed him. “Now, come into my mind again.”

He nodded, and did as she said, and she was so relieved that he had taken what she had done the right way. She’d been scared that he might push her away, for her own sake, but had decided that it was the best way to make him understand.

As she felt him, she nudged him toward another memory, this one bigger.

He moved into it and stood there. After a second, he seemed to glow and grow bigger inside her mind.

He left her, reluctantly, and she met his eyes. He was staring at her with absolute awe. “That is how much I love you,” she said softly. “I know how

much you love me; Severus told me all about it, so I felt it was fair for me to show you just how much I adore you, Harry.”

“Thank you,” he said, his voice breaking a little. “Thank you.”

She leant down and kissed him again.

“How is everyone?” Harry asked. “Is Severus okay? What day is it? Have Fred, George and Abe launched the Butterbeer yet? How’s the DA gone? What’s happened with Voldemort?”

Ginny laughed. “Typical, Potter. You’ve only been awake for a few minutes, and already you’re asking questions. You’re not getting answers immediately. I think we need a bit of a meeting. So, you go jump in the shower, and I’ll get everyone here.”

“And breakfast?” he asked eagerly.

“And breakfast,” Ginny agreed.

Harry smiled and dropped a quick kiss on her lips and slowly walked over to the shower. His body was obviously more tired than his mind. She walked out of Harry’s room in the hospital ward and wandered over to the fireplace. She threw some Floo powder into the fire and fire-called Sirius first and then Remus.

She paused for a second and then called her mum as well, inviting her to the meeting, so that she could see for herself that Harry was all right. Molly had been more than a little upset that she hadn’t been notified immediately about Harry being unconscious.

That done, she walked into the hallway and padded sleepily along to the Great Hall, aware that she still looked a bit of a mess, having slept in her clothes again.

She pushed the door open and smiled as every head in the room turned to her. “He’s awake,” she said simply.

The spontaneous cheer that rang around the hall knocked her back onto her heels.

Ginny raised her hand, quietening them down. “So you all know,” she said. “Harry and Professor Snape were both ambushed by Voldemort. Voldemort, having prepared for the attack for a long time, locked the Professor and Harry in their minds, and then cast the Killing Curse on them.”

There was a gasp of horror from around the Hall.

“Luckily,” Ginny continued. “Voldemort once again forgot that my boyfriend is the Boy-Who-Will-Not-Be-Defeated-By-The-Dark-Tosser, and Harry managed, with the help of Professor Snape, to redirect the curse back onto Voldemort.”

There was another huge cheer from the students – one that some of the professors joined in as well.

“Obviously, doing the impossible took a lot out of Harry and Professor Snape, which was why they were both unconscious. As Harry used all his magic, I honestly thought he was dead. And as you can guess, I am more than slightly pleased that he is still alive.”

There was a small rumble of laughter that echoed around the hall.

“But,” Ginny continued. “We have heard from our spies that Voldemort is in an even worse state than Harry.”

This cheer was accompanied by the whole school (bar a couple of exceptions) jumping to their feet and cheering at the top of their lungs.

Ginny smiled and waited till they had finished. She had prepared this speech in her mind while waiting for Harry but hadn’t expected it to be so well received. It made her realise that, as Harry’s girlfriend, she had gone from obscurity to fame in a very short time. As Harry had gained in responsibility, so had she.

“Professor Dumbledore, Professor Snape, Professor McGonagall, Ron, Hermione - Harry has a few questions. I’ve called Padfoot and Moony as well, and they’re on their way.”

“Thank you, Ginny,” Albus said, standing.

“There is one other thing,” Ginny said, on the spur of the moment.

“Please,” the headmaster said, spreading his arms wide.

Ginny placed her hands on her hips and stared into the Hall.

“Harry is having tomorrow off,” she stated flatly. “We are going to have a picnic, then we’re going to play some games, and then we’re going to have a barbeque. Everyone, including the staff, is invited.” She paused for a second and then pulled her wand out of her pocketing, and muttering “*Sonorous*,” as she pointed it at her throat. “Quiet!” she yelled over the cheering. Her magically enhanced voice bounced off the walls.

As everyone went instantly silent and stared at her, she cancelled the spell. “Thank you,” she whispered. She glared into the room, at everyone, including the professors. “That means that tomorrow, Harry is *not* available for problem solving. I don’t care what happens in the rest of the world – for tomorrow, no one brings it to Harry. He is going to have fun, he is going to relax, and he is going to remember just how good the Wizarding world can be, and just how much he can enjoy himself.

Have I made myself clear?"

There was an audible gulp from a lot of the students, followed by a wave of nodding.

"Good," Ginny smiled brightly. "Lavender, Parvati, you're in charge of organising the menu. Talk to Dobby, he'll be delighted to help. If you want to buy anything, come and talk to me, and we'll get it here. Seamus, Dean, you're in charge of the games. Make them a mixture of Muggle and Magical. Blaise, Susan, Luna, you're in charge of the music. I want something light for the meals, and something we can dance to in the evening. Prefects, you're in charge of finding enough seating for the Professors who don't want to sit on the ground and lighting spells for the evening. Orla, you're in charge of photography, but no publishing photos of Harry without my approval."

She looked up at the Professors' table to find that Snape was laughing so hard he had tears running down his face.

"Professor?"

Snape took a deep breath and made a visible attempt to calm himself. "Gin," he started, and paused as people gasped in shock that he'd call her by a nickname. "Having just ordered the entire school to organise a picnic for your boyfriend, might I inquire as to what you are planning next?"

Ginny smiled at him. "Harry should be well enough to take charge next time," she replied sweetly. "So I won't need to."

Snape snorted and stood. "Come on, Professor," he said to Dumbledore. "We've been told what to do."

"Quite right, Severus," Dumbledore agreed cheerfully. He turned to walk down the stairs and then paused. "I think," he announced. "That Ginny's plans are excellent. So I shall cancel the last two lessons for today to give the people who have jobs to do time to do them. I expect a most wonderful day tomorrow."

The cheer he received was nearly as loud as the earlier cheers. Nearly.

As Ginny led the professors and Ron and Hermione out of the room, Dean turned to Seamus. "Well, that was unexpected," he said.

"Yep," Seamus agreed cheerfully. "It's going to be fun, though."

Dean nodded and sighed a little.

"Kicking yourself?" Seamus asked.

"A little, yeah," he sighed. "She's like a flower."

"In what way?"

"For the past few days, she's been down and hardly noticeable. Hermione, Ron, and Blaise took the D.A. meeting, even though she was there. Everyone's been treading carefully around her. But as soon as Harry wakes up, she's back to her vibrant best. She just ordered the whole school around like it was nothing, and she looked so beautiful doing it."

"Aye," Seamus agreed. "That she did. But as you said, it's Harry who puts that smile on her face and gives her that energy."

"I know," Dean sighed again. "I just wonder if I could have made her do that, if I'd fought for her, you know?"

"Don't take this the wrong way, mate," Seamus said. "But you couldn't have. You just have to see the two of them together to realise how much they are in love. But don't concentrate on that, concentrate on the good things."

"Like what?" Dean said morosely.

"She's just got us out of Astronomy for the day and given us freedom to organise the games for tomorrow."

"True," Dean agreed, smiling slowly. "And hey, it was nice of her to invite us. There's obviously more going on than we know about."

"You mean the way Snape is suddenly calling Ginny, Gin, or the way that our Headmaster was amused by her ordering around the whole school rather than being upset?" Seamus grinned.

"Yep," Dean grinned. "Makes you think, doesn't it?"

"A little," Seamus said, his smile fading. He was suddenly aware that students had been listening to his conversation with Dean. He stood on the bench and looked around. "But you know," he said loudly. "I'm kinda glad I'm not involved anymore than I am. For better or for worse, Harry appears to be our only hope now, and if it means he gets special treatment because of it, I'm all for it. He's the one who's putting his neck on the line for us, and the one who seems to nearly die at least once a year. I don't want that sort of pressure on me. I like being a kid; I like being sixteen. I promise that when Harry needs me, I'll be there for him, as he has been for me over the last six years."

Across the Hall, Blaise climbed on to the Slytherin table. "With a couple of minor exceptions," she said with a pointed glare at her own table, "look at what the school is now. Look at what Hogwarts has become. Students from all four houses are starting to talk to each other, being friendly toward one another. This is what Harry is doing for us, so the least we can do is make sure he has a kick-arse day off tomorrow."

"You all know what you are doing. If you've not been given a job, and want to help, come see either Susan, Luna, Parvati, Padma, Lavender, or

me. We'll put you to work. Let's prove that we can organise everything without Harry, Ginny, Hermione, or Ron."

Seamus grinned and offered a bow. "Any one else feel like making a speech?" he asked.

"Why not?" Susan said, climbing to her feet, and then blushing furiously. "Erm," she said, looking around. "I'm a Hufflepuff, not a Gryffindor," she mumbled, just loud enough to be heard. "To back up what Blaise and Seamus have said – for too long, we've been depending on Harry and his friends; this is our chance to say thank you for putting their lives on the lines for us and our families. Let's not blow it, okay?"

There was a cheer, especially from the Hufflepuff table, and Susan turned an even brighter red.

Cho Chang climbed onto a table next. "I feel that Ravenclaw honour would be sullied if at least one Ravenclaw didn't say something here," she said, taking a deep breath. "As a house, we are completely behind Harry and Ginny. And after the magnanimous way in which they treated me after I made my rather public mistake, I – personally – am firmly behind them as well. To borrow some words from Harry, 'when Hogwarts stands together, there is NOTHING that we can not do!'"

There was another cheer from the students. Then, Lavender got to her feet. "Okay people, remember what Professor Dumbledore said. Classes first, organise party later. So, everyone get to where you're supposed to go."

There was some general laughter, as the students filed out of the Hall.

Ginny walked back in to the Harry's room to find her parents, Padfoot, and Moony already there, talking with Harry, who was finishing off some breakfast. She walked up to the bed and raised her arms up to him. She was more than capable of climbing next to him herself, but that was hardly the point.

Harry made his tray vanish with a snap of his fingers, reached out and easily pulled her up and gave her a quick kiss before sitting her down next to him. She immediately slung her legs over his lap, and snuggled closer to him. There had not been enough contact between them for her liking, and now that she had his telling off out the way, it was definitely time to catch up with that.

Harry wrapped an arm around her tightly, obviously feeling the same way.

"How are you feeling, Sev?" Harry asked the professor.

"Pretty good; you're going to be tired for the rest of the day."

"You still look like crap," Harry grinned. "Sunlight won't kill you, you know."

Severus rolled his eyes. Ginny had to hide a smirk as she looked at the shocked faces of Ron and Hermione. Apparently, the idea of Snape and Harry bantering was beyond either of their comprehension. She hadn't told anyone exactly what had happened, as it wasn't her story to tell. But if anything was going to bring Harry and Snape closer together, it was sharing an attack with Voldemort.

"We'll find out tomorrow, won't we," he said with a grin.

"Oh?" Harry asked.

"Indeed," Snape said. "General Weasley, the one sitting in your lap, decided that you are having a day off tomorrow and ordered the entire school to help you or face her wrath. It was a very motivational speech," he finished.

"Ginny?" Harry asked.

She felt herself blushing furiously. "I didn't threaten them," she protested.

"Not in as many words, Ginny," McGonagall said with a slight smile. "But you did make it very clear that you would be upset if anything went wrong."

Ginny shrugged and turned to Harry. "I just wanted to make sure that you got to rest and have fun tomorrow. We're going to have a picnic, then play some games, and have a barbeque after that."

"Barbeque?" Sirius asked. "Are we invited?"

"Of course," Ginny smiled.

"Woohoo!" Sirius crowed. "Me man, cook meat on fire. Fire good!"

"You can do your own, Padfoot," Harry laughed. "I'll have mine done by someone who can actually cook."

"I'm insulted," Sirius sniffed.

"Why?" Moony asked. "You're the only person I know who can burn water!"

"Hey!" Sirius protested. "What is this, 'Pick On Me' morning?"

"It can be," Snape said. "But as fun as that is, I think we should answer Harry's questions first."

"Thanks," Harry said dryly. "Okay, what's happening with Voldemort?"

Dumbledore answered. "It seems that you managed to reflect the Killing Curse at him, and he is suffering more than you are."

"Good," Harry said cheerfully. "So we can expect some quiet time?"

"I'd say so," Dumbledore nodded. "The Death Eaters have no idea what happened, so they're laying low until someone tells them to do something."

"So, it's Friday today?" he asked.

"Yes," Hermione said. "You were out for two and a half days."

"Hey," Harry grinned. "That's not bad for me. What's happened with the DA?"

"Me and Hermione..." Ron started.

"Hermione and I," Hermione corrected.

"Does it really matter?" Ron asked.

"Yes," Hermione replied firmly.

"Fine," Ron sighed. "Hermione and I have been running it, with Blaise, Susan, Lavender, Parvati, Luna, and Padma. We followed your notes and practiced the shield some more."

"Excellent," Harry smiled. "Now, does someone want to tell me what else happened while I was out?"

Ginny settled down comfortably, listening to everyone talk with one ear and to Harry's heartbeat with the other.

Harry listened to what had happened while he was out, asking questions as they talked, but was more concerned about Ginny.

The feeling of devastation she had felt chilled him to the core. It was like nothing he had ever experienced, and he couldn't ever put her through that again. She loved him. More than anyone else alive, she loved him. It humbled him, because he finally had what he had wished for. She was someone who put him first and loved him as much as he loved her.

And he did love her. And this picnic tomorrow seemed like a perfect opportunity for him to put the first of the three rings on her finger.

He looked at his watch, as people stopped talking, and saw that it was nearly time for lunch. "Okay," he said, as he looked around. "I'm going to steal Ginny for the afternoon. I need to find out how Fred, George, and Abe are doing. I think we need to really push this launch as hard as we can and hit Lucius where it hurts while Voldemort is out of commission. It should make him a little unsure as to what to do, in case he does something that Voldemort doesn't like."

"Good idea," Dumbledore nodded.

"Padfoot, take the afternoon off as well. I don't want you getting in trouble before tomorrow. The search for Voldemort's base can wait.

"Molly, have you got anything planned for this afternoon?"

"Not at all," she said.

"Ginny, who have you got working on the food for tomorrow?"

"Lavender and Parvati," Ginny replied instantly.

"Could you work with them? I think they might appreciate an expert's advice."

"I'd love to, Harry."

Harry closed his eyes and silently Summoned his wallet. As it appeared in his hand, he lobbed it gently to his girlfriend's mother. "Buy anything you need. If we're going to have a party, let's make it a good one.

"Hermione, Ron? I've got something a little more difficult for you to do."

"What?" Hermione asked.

"I want you to go with Remus to the Library."

"Why?" Remus asked.

Harry took a deep breath. "I was thinking while I was in the shower," he paused for a second and decided to see how many of the adults he could freak. "And I must have been tired because I wasn't thinking of Ginny," he paused and laughed to himself. Ginny was blushing, Snape looked amused, Sirius was gagging, Molly and Arthur were looking like they really wished they hadn't heard that, Minerva and Albus were smiling slightly, and Ron and Hermione looked like they knew he was teasing. He'd have to try harder next time. "And for some reason," he continued. "I was

thinking back to another time I was here in the hospital wing when Lockhart removed the bones in my arm.”

“And?” Remus asked softly.

“Well, we all know that he was a complete fraud, right?”

“Erm, not all of us, Harry,” Sirius said dryly.

“Oh, well, he was. But that’s not important right now. What he did was travel the world meeting people, getting their stories, and writing them down and claiming them as his own.”

“Right,” Sirius nodded.

“Well, he told us a story once, in the Defence class, about the time he was in Australia.”

Hermione started and looked at Harry. “How did I miss that?” she exhaled.

“It was hardly that important at the time,” Harry shrugged.

“But I memorised all his books,” she sighed. “Including *Wandering with Werewolves* – I should have remembered.”

“You can’t blame yourself, Hermione,” Harry said firmly.

“Flip you for it,” Sirius’s voice interrupted them.

“Heads,” Snape called, as a Galleon span into the air.

“Heads it is,” Sirius sighed. “It’s all yours.”

“Why thank you,” Snape grinned. “As I’ve won, I get to ask the burning question. What on earth are you two talking about?”

Harry blushed and felt Ginny giggle against him. “Hermione, you can probably quote it better than I can.”

She nodded. “Lockhart was talking about it with Harry in class, and he said, *“I pounced - like this - slammed him to the floor - thus with one hand, I managed to hold him down - with my other, I put my wand to his throat - I then screwed up my remaining strength and performed the immensely complex Homorphus Charm - he let out a piteous moan - go on, Harry - higher than that - good - the fur vanished - the fangs shrank - and he turned back into a man. Simple, yet effective - and another village will remember me forever as the hero who delivered them from the monthly terror of werewolf attacks.”*”

“You’re scary at times,” Ron laughed softly. “You even got his voice right!”

“That’s partly how I remember things,” Hermione explained. “I go back to where I was at the time.”

“So,” Harry continued, looking at the stunned Remus in front of him. “Everyone dismissed it because it was Lockhart saying it. But, what if there really was a werewolf in Wagga Wagga? And what if someone there did manage to cure it?”

“But...” Remus started.

“It can’t hurt to look, Remus old boy,” Sirius said cheerfully. “And in fact, I’ll even go so far as to help you research.”

Harry said, “Eep,” and Vanished with Ginny. “Is it safe to come out?” he asked from under the bed. He could feel Ginny laughing against him.

“Err, where are you?” Ron asked.

“Under the bed,” Harry replied. “Padfoot wanting to study is one of the signs of the Apocalypse.”

He Apparated them back onto the bed and grinned as he saw everyone but Sirius laughing hard.

“Hey!” Sirius protested.

“Okay,” Snape said as he looked at his watch. “I’ve got a class to teach. I’ll see you later.”

“I have as well,” McGonagall said, climbing to her feet. “It’s good to see you awake again, Harry.”

“I’ve got to get back to work,” Arthur said cheerfully. “I’ll see you later, dear,” he said to his wife and walked out.

“I’ll go and see what the girls have going with the food,” Molly announced. “It should be fun.”

“Don’t worry about the drinks,” Harry said. “I’ll get Fred and George to bring up enough Butterbeer for the school, if they’ve got the capacity; otherwise I’ll just buy up a load of the old stuff.”

“Okay,” she nodded. “Be good this afternoon,” she said to Ginny.

“I will,” Ginny said quietly.

“And we’ll get to work in the library,” Hermione said, taking Ron, Remus, and Sirius with her, leaving Harry, Ginny, and Dumbledore alone.

“I’ve had a talk with Severus,” Dumbledore said slowly.

“And I’ve had a more effective chat with Harry,” Ginny interrupted.

“Ahh,” Dumbledore said and nodded slowly. “In that case, give my regards to your brothers and mine.”

“We will,” Harry smiled and Apparated himself and Ginny to his bed in Gryffindor Tower.

“I need to get changed first,” he said. “And maybe have a nap.”

“Why, Mr Potter,” Ginny said with a smile. “Are you trying to get me to sleep with you?”

Harry nodded eagerly. And if he wasn’t so damn tired, he’d try for the lack of clothing part as well. “Please,” he begged.

“Well,” Ginny said, kicking off her shoes and removing her skirt, leaving her in a long white shirt. “Don’t say I don’t do anything for you,” she finished, as she crawled under the covers with him.

“Thanks,” he smiled and kissed her lingeringly. “I do love you,” he said softly.

“I know, sweetheart,” she whispered back. “Sleep now; I’m here. I’ll always be here.”

From: Filius

To: Other heads of house

Subject: A miracle

I was marking my sixth years’ homework at lunchtime, and I came across a rather surprising essay.

It was very well written, a definite O. And it was definitely in the student’s handwriting.

The only problem is that I never gave this homework to this particular student. And he’s been unconscious for almost the entire time since I gave it out.

Now, either Harry’s powers have grown so much that he is writing essays while unconscious, or something strange is going on.

F

From: Sev

To: Commander Albus and his right-hand men

Subject: Re: A miracle

I must confess to having noticed this myself. Harry’s homework is here, in place, well written, and O material.

Unfortunately, Ms Granger is a little too clever for her own good. She might have copied Harry’s style of handwriting, and a lot of his phrases, but she wasn’t able to dumb it down enough.

Harry has never written “whom” in the entire time I have taught him. Nor has he ever used the word “discombobulate” when “confound” would do just as well.

So, why is Ms Granger doing homework for Harry that hasn’t even been set?

Sev – Curious.

--

Working for the downfall of the Dark Tosser for fifteen years

From: Right hand **Wo** man

To: The rest

Subject: Re[2]: A miracle

I’ve got it as well – perfect homework. It’s an exceptionally good forgery, and if I had set Harry the homework, I’d be giving him points for effort.

Do you think we should ask her?

Min – curious as well

--
purr

From: Commander Albus

To: Ground Control

Subject: Re[3]: A miracle

Knowing Ms Granger quite well, I am of the opinion that she is simply ensuring that Harry finishes school on time with top marks. We all know that he has more important things on his mind, like keeping everyone alive. And as we never told him - or Ms Granger - that we would not be giving him homework, she must be doing it for him to ensure that his grades don't suffer.

I find it admirable and another example of the loyalty Harry generates in those around him.

I shall have a quiet conversation with her about it, and if I am right about her motives, then I suggest that we accept the homework as if it was by Harry and allow his grades to adjust accordingly.

Of course, I'm sure that once Harry has defeated Voldemort, he will return to doing his studies normally.

Albus

--
Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot and Chairman of the International Confederation of Wizards

From: Right-hand sprout

To: Lefties

Subject: Re[4]: A miracle

Well, in that case, I'll look forward to receiving some excellent homework from 'Harry'.

Sev, how's the betting coming along?

Pommie

From: Book-master General

To: Soon-to-be-richer-Professors

Subject: Betting

Good news, I got odds of four to one from one of the Goblin syndicates.

And I wouldn't worry about us being cheated. I might be a little nicer these days, but I do have twenty-odd years of practice being a git to fall back on.

I almost think that he would pay up even if Harry lost.

Sev – whistling innocently

--
Working for the downfall of the Dark Tosser for fifteen years

From: Schoolmaster General

To: Senior Colonels

Subject: Re: Betting

Severus, I would be castigating you for threatening a poor goblin, but as I'm in the pot, I won't.

Have you been practising?

Albus

--

Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot and Chairman of the International Confederation of Wizards

From: Snape

To: Minnie and Rolanda

Subject: Help

Can I beg a favour please? Albus has just reminded me that I need some practice, so could you join me next week for a practice session or two?

Thanks,

Sev

--

Working for the downfall of the Dark Tosser for fifteen years

From: Chaser Min

To: Chaser Sev

Cc: Keeper Rollie

Subject: Re: Help

Normally, no... but as there's money involved, you can count me in. I still remember a few tricks from back in my day that they will never have seen.

Min

--

purr

From: Grateful Sev

To: Minnie

Subject: Re[2]: Help

You're not that old, Minnie dear – you certainly don't look it.

Severus

--

Working for the downfall of the Dark Tosser for fifteen years

From: A blushing Min

To: Snake Charmer

Subject: Re[3]: Help

You little charmer you; however, I remember teaching you your first Transfiguration charm.

Min

--

purr purr

From: The non-cat charmer

To: The cat

Subject: Re[4]: Help

But you carry the years so well...

Can I pop by your office later? I need some love advice.

Sev

--

Working for the downfall of the Dark Tosser for fifteen years

From: There goes another one of my lives

To: Cat-killer

Subject: Re[5]: Help

I think I just about choked to death when I read that last Mmail. I'd be upset if I wasn't so bloody curious.

Come on over at nine – I'll have a drink ready.

M.

--

purr

From: Harry

To: Sev

Subject: Poisonous Plants

I appreciate the botany lesson. I understand more now how potions can be useful with a bit of poison.

I'd appreciate a demonstration, face to face, so to speak, on Sunday.

Harry.

--

Audaces fortuna juvat

From: Professor Snape

To: Harry Potter

Subject: Re: Poisonous Plants

Are you SURE you're not a Slytherin?

I'll arrange for the demonstration, and give my apologies to Ms Weasley, but this should be a one on one session.

S.

--

Working for the downfall of the Dark Tosser for fifteen years

From: HJP

To: SS

Subject: Re[2]: Poisonous Plants

I agreed to tell Gin what I learnt afterwards, and she's happy with that.

Let me know what time.

Oh, you might want to talk to Sirius... he's got a very effective hangover cure. If you two put your heads together, you might be able to improve it. HAOBb will then licence it from you and sell it along with the Butterbeer for the perfect night out.

You could both make a lot of money from it.

Harry

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

From: Sev

To: Sirius

Subject: Partnership

It seems that Harry isn't happy with us just getting on; he's decided that we should work together.

He tells me that you have a cure for a hangover that could do with some improvement. He has suggested that we work together, and then license it to Harry for production.

Thoughts?

Sev.

--
Working for the downfall of the Dark Tosser for fifteen years

From: Thoughtful

To: Thought provoker

Subject: Re: Partnership

Are you out of class yet? I'm so far out of my depth in this research that I'm thinking of changing into Padfoot so I can at least make myself useful by keeping their feet warm.

If so, I'll pop down and we can discuss this in person.

Did you ever think that we'd end up friends, and that we'd spend our time following around a sixteen year old that has trouble getting free time to spend with his girlfriend?

Sirius

--
woofing thoughtfully

From: Poor Professor

To: Person who could help change that

Subject: Re[2]: Partnership

Actually, we can have a bit of a talk about that when you get here. While I won't betray Harry's confidence (I have been in his mind), we really ought to see if we can help them get a bit of free time.

Pop down to my dungeon when you're ready – it's close to the Slytherin common room.

Sev

--
Working for the downfall of the Dark Tosser for fifteen years

“Wear this,” Ginny said, laying a black shirt on his bed.

“Kay,” Harry smiled. “It's really disorientating to wake up and realise you've missed half a week.

“I'll bet,” Ginny smiled, as she sat on the edge of the bed. “What's the plan for this afternoon?”

“We'll go see Fred, George, and Abe first. Then we'll go and see the Goblins and bring them up to date. Then we'll stop by the Ministry and see how Percy and Kingsley are doing.”

Ginny smiled softly. “That’s a full afternoon,” she said softly. “But where’s the kissing Ginny time?”

Harry paused in his shirt-buttoning and looked at her seriously. “I’m hoping that I’ll have the energy at the end of the day, and if I do, we’re going to get one of the boats, and sail into the middle of the lake, and be alone.”

She smiled brilliantly at him. “Wonderful,” she clapped. “Let’s go then. And don’t worry about having the energy, you will.”

Harry nodded. “Do I look okay?”

“You look like you’ve been in a fight for your life, and that you should be resting, but you’re too responsible to stop.”

Harry smiled crookedly. “Which is how I feel. But I promise that tomorrow, I’m all yours.” He held out his arms. “Let’s get going.”

Ginny smiled and walked into them, hugging him tightly. A second later, they Apparated, reappearing in a giant warehouse.

A huge flywheel turned in one corner, a light brown liquid cascading over it, falling into what appears to be a deep stream. Along the stream, multi-coloured bottles bubbled merrily, occasionally giving off burps of shimmering bubbles.

“Welcome,” Aberforth exclaimed, bowing merrily. “To Honest Abe’s Original Butterbeer Factory.”

“It looks amazing,” Ginny said, as she looked around.

“It does,” Abe agreed. “Come and have a look.” He pulled them to one corner, where what looked like a giant pair of bellows was wheezing at a steady pace. “This is the Bubble-iser,” he said proudly. “It’s what gives the Butterbeer its foam. Highly important part of the business.

“This,” he continued, pointing to the flywheel, “is the mixer. It takes water and the first part of my formula and mixes them together. The height is set perfectly. We originally tried to use a giant whisk, but it wasn’t as dramatic. Each of those glass bubbles is adding more ingredients to the mixture, including the preservatives.”

He danced over to where the stream of Butterbeer seemed to defy gravity and flow up a large pipe. “This goes to our bottling plant,” he explained cheerfully.

“This whole place looks like a Muggle theme park,” Harry said.

“Exactly,” Abe said, spreading his arms wide. “We’re going to open a branch of Weasleys’ Wizarding Wheezes here and charge Wizard families for the privilege of looking around. We’re going to have an experimental area where kids can play with the latest and greatest Wheezes free of charge, giving us invaluable market research and test subjects for free.

“And then we’ll add a Quidditch practice area where people can pretend to be you, or Viktor Krum, or Oliver Wood.”

Harry laughed softly and wrapped an arm tighter around Ginny. “Do you need any money to get it started?”

“We should have enough with what you have already invested,” Abe said, suddenly going serious.

Harry shrugged. “It’s only money, Abe, and I’d use it all to see my friends happy.”

“That’s hardly the point, Harry,” Abe replied seriously. “The point is to have fun doing something you love. I’ve lived a quiet life for many years now – just me and Michael. This,” he said, waving his hand expansively, and continued, “is the most fun I’ve had since Albus and I went on a Mediterranean Cruise with the Mother of All Saints Nunnery.”

“One day,” Harry said slowly, “we are going to sit down, and you are going to tell me all your stories.”

“And me,” Ginny said firmly.

“You should know, Harry,” Abe grinned, “we old men love to talk.”

“And we’d love to listen. Anyway, where are Fred and George? I want to know how things are going.”

“Through here,” Abe said, opening the door to the bottling area.

Inside held another cornucopia of sights and smells. The Butterbeer which had flowed up the pipe on the other side continued to defy gravity, as it ran along the roof in an upside down stream – before it hit a large sieve. The Butterbeer then parted into thirty or forty different trails and flowed down into a series of funnels, each leading to a row of bottles.

A steam-powered device controlled the flow, starting and stopping it as new bottles were launched into place. Once the bottles were full, they were moved to another machine, where two skeletal hands added a cap and the label.

“Isn’t that a bit inefficient?” Harry asked, laughing.

“A little,” Fred agreed, appearing from nowhere. He was wearing a bright blue coverall. “But this is only for the bottles. The wholesale distribution is done downstairs, and we have quadruple the volume going through there.”

“How are you doing with the volume?”

"We're at full production now and ready for launch on Monday."

"Do you have enough to spare for every student at Hogwarts tomorrow?"

George dropped from the ceiling, hanging from a rope upside down. He was wearing a bright orange coverall "You've got us into Hogwarts?" he asked, a wide smile on his face.

Harry nodded.

George flipped to the ground and did a little dance on the spot. "As soon as they taste this stuff, they'll be hooked, and they'll tell their parents! It's perfect."

"You can thank your sister. It's her idea, and she's the one organising the party."

"And yes," Ginny said instantly. "You three are invited. It's tomorrow from ten o'clock on."

"What do you say, Abe?" Fred asked. "Think we can take a day off to do a bit of flesh pressing and show off the gear?"

"I think so," Abe said cheerfully. "This thing runs itself as it is."

"Well," Harry smiled, "about that. I've got a new challenge for you."

"A new one?" George asked. "We've not finished this one yet."

"Shh, George," Fred said soothingly. "I'm sure it will make us a lot of money. It will, won't it, Harry?"

Harry took a small step backwards, so he was no longer next to Ginny. "I've got Snape and Sirius working together on a hangover cure. I've tried it myself, so I know it works. This way, people can drink as much as they like at night, and then take the cure, and be fine for work the next morning."

Fred and George looked at each other and then leapt at Harry, who sidestepped calmly.

As Fred and George went flying, Abe jumped and landed firmly on Harry.

"You didn't think you'd get away with that twice did you?" Fred demanded with a huge smile.

Harry groaned and dumped Abe onto the floor – he was a little surprised at just how sprightly the old man was. "I had hoped," he grumbled. "Anyway, I'll be having a word with Amelia Bones about increasing the punishment for drunk and disorderly behaviour. There'll be no excuse at all for it when you can get sober quickly. That way, we won't have a rise in bad behaviour."

"And we can claim to be socially responsible as well," Fred agreed.

"Socially responsible? Us?" George asked, before collapsing to the floor in hysterical laughter.

Ginny smiled and shook her head slowly. "If I wasn't related to you two, I'd've disowned you a long time ago."

"No, you wouldn't," Fred said, breathing hard from the laughter. "You've always been our favourite sister."

"I'm your *only* sister."

"Irrelevant," George sniffed. "The point is, you love us because we're cute."

"Right," Harry agreed dryly. "Not to drag you back on topic or anything, but how are the solicitors coming on with the Cease and Desist letters?"

"They're all ready."

"I was thinking," Harry said slowly.

"Quick, someone get me some oxygen," Abe said. "When Harry starts thinking, you better be prepared."

Harry fixed him with a dour look, "Wouldn't it be more effective if the Solicitors were accompanied by some armed Goblin guards? It would send out the message that we're not playing games here."

"How are you going to arrange that?" Fred demanded.

"Leave that to me," Harry smiled. "I'll have them here on Monday." He turned to Ginny apologetically. "It might take a little longer at the bank than I thought."

Ginny smiled and rolled her eyes. "Just don't forget Ginny-kissing time."

"Problems in paradise?" George asked, his eyes alight with mischief.

"Only because Harry has problems with his free time – he doesn't get any. Organising the defeat of Voldemort is very time consuming," she pouted.

“I’ve promised I’m all yours tomorrow,” Harry said softly. “And for tonight.”

“I know,” Ginny said, lightly standing on her toes to kiss his cheek.

“I never thought about that,” Fred said, shaking his head. “I kind of forget that you’re still in school and organising the fight back at times, too. You seem to be everywhere when you’re needed.”

“I’m not infallible,” Harry said with a shrug. “I’m just trying my best to keep everyone I love and care for alive and happy.” He looked at his watch. “And we better get going, I want a talk with Mackrack next.”

“You do hang in exalted circles,” Fred grinned. “But who are we to be surprised; we knew you were destined for greatness, especially after you saved our Ginny. And we’ve never said this,” he continued, going very serious, “but we owe you more for that than we can ever repay. You coming into our lives has been the best thing that has happened to our family – you even helped persuade Percy to stop being a git.”

“Damn straight,” George continued. “We’ll be with you where ever you go.”

Harry blushed and looked down, faintly aware that Ginny was smiling broadly. She moved forward and gently kissed both of her brothers on the cheek. “I do love you two as well,” she said. “Even if you are irredeemable.”

Fred and George both grinned, “Fancy a sweet?” they offered.

Ginny laughed and jumped into Harry’s arms. “Get me out of here, quick.”

“Okay, we’ll see you tomorrow,” Harry said with a smile and Apparated them to the entrance hall of Gringotts.

“When we get in, don’t be surprised by anything I say,” Harry said, looping one of his arms into Ginny’s.

“Oh?” Ginny asked.

Harry smiled at her. “Mackrack makes good tea,” he said, changing the subject. “I was very surprised when I met him on Monday.”

“What are you asking for?”

Harry grinned. “That would be telling.”

Ginny skipped in front of him and wrapped her arms around his neck. She writhed against him firmly, placing little kisses on his jaw. “Harry,” she purred.

He felt his arms close around her automatically, holding her close. “Ginny,” he groaned.

“What are you asking for?” she asked again, her eyes wide and clear, looking up at him with absolute love.

“You’re a witch,” he groaned. “How am I supposed to talk to Mackrack now?”

“Just think of Umbridge in a bikini,” Ginny suggested brightly. “And now that I’ve embarrassed you enough, you’ve got a goblin to the left waiting patiently for you.”

“Hi, Griphook,” Harry said. “I know I’ve not got an appointment, but I was wondering if Mackrack was available for a quick meeting.”

Griphook bowed solemnly. “I believe he can fit you in,” he said. “If you’ll follow me.”

“Come, wench,” Harry growled. “And don’t think you’re not going to pay for that later.”

“I’ll look forward to it,” Ginny grinned.

They walked down the statue-lined corridor, and into the luxurious office. “Mackrack, this is Ginny, my mate. Ginny, this is Mackrack, manager of Gringotts, and their current leader,” Harry introduced the two to each other.

Mackrack bowed formally. Ginny curtsied and then shot a blinding smile at the goblin. “It’s a pleasure to meet you,” she said, walking closer and offering her hand.

Mackrack shook it and then looked at Harry. “I should have known the mate of Harry Potter would be prejudice free.”

Harry smiled at the goblin and placed an arm around Ginny’s shoulders.

“Please, sit,” Mackrack said, indicating a couch in the corner. “My desk is a little too formal at times. Can I offer you a drink?”

“Harry told me that you make a delightful cup of tea. That would be wonderful.”

Mackrack showed his teeth and nodded. “Griphook,” he commanded and took a seat in a large chair.

“I thought I’d let you know,” Harry said, sitting down next to Ginny. “That Voldemort and I had one of our little fights on Tuesday. I’m afraid that Voldemort came off a little worse for wear.”

“His snake-iness *does* hate having the Killing Curse reflected back onto him,” Ginny smiled.

Mackrack nodded slowly. “I’m glad you’re not dead.”

“So am I,” Harry laughed. “But enough about that, let’s talk about something important.”

“What’s more important than Voldemort?” Mackrack asked.

“Money, of course,” Harry grinned.

“Ahh, Harry, I knew you were special,” Mackrack laughed. “What would you like?”

“Well,” Harry said, taking a deep breath. “I was thinking that Goblin Mercenaries are legendary, especially in their bravery. If I was to hire them, not only would they have something to do and keep in shape, but they would also be able to enjoy a good fight. It would also show the Wizarding world how far Goblins have come in the last few centuries and make the population realise just how lucky they are to have such good bankers.”

Mackrack looked at him, his eyes hooded. He took the tray Griphook brought into the room and passed them each a cup of tea. Harry sipped his for taste, and smiled contentedly. “Excellent,” he exhaled.

“It is good,” Ginny agreed.

“I think, Harry,” Mackrack said, as he sipped his own tea. “That I will be able to let you hire our Mercenaries. Obviously, I’d have to charge you.”

“How much?” Harry asked.

“Hmmm,” Mackrack said slowly. “A hundred and fifty troops, commanders, and associated personnel, plus equipment. I’d have to charge at least a Galleon.”

“You drive a hard bargain,” Harry said, nodding. “Not to enquire about your confidential business practices, but if, say, Lucius Malfoy, came asking for a similar service...?” he trailed off.

“I would have to charge full price,” Mackrack said sadly. “I can’t let two people have discounts; it’s just not done. And judging by the state of the Malfoy finances, he would find it extremely difficult to raise the amount.”

“More so after Monday,” Harry smiled. “One of my companies has acquired the legal rights to the Butterbeer trademark. On Monday, our solicitors will be visiting selected businesses, and the main factories, demanding an immediate cessation of the production and sale of Butterbeer under its current name.

“At the same time, we will be offering to buy up all the old Butterbeer, at a reduced rate and offering for sale a new, improved, drink, endorsed by me personally.”

“You’re going to do a complete takeover,” Mackrack stated calmly. “Are you taking this down, Griphook?”

“Yes, sir,” Griphook said.

“I’d like to hire some security guards tomorrow to go with the Solicitors. This is business, not personal, so I will be paying full price.”

Mackrack nodded firmly. “This is what I like about you, Mr Potter. You know where the line is. We will happily provide you with guards. Would you like the ones that visit the factory to know that any accidental damage of property will be frowned upon?”

“Absolutely. Tell them that they’ll be punished with a bonus. I know how Goblins hate that.”

“Indeed,” Mackrack agreed. “Griphook, does Mr Malfoy have any outstanding debts with us?”

“A few,” Griphook said. “I don’t know the exact figure, off hand.”

“Prepare the documents to have them foreclosed on Monday. We want to make sure we get our money first.”

“That won’t put you in an awkward position with the Death Munchers?”

“Not at all,” Mackrack bared his teeth. “It’s strictly business, and they know that business always comes first.”

Harry finished his tea and relaxed back in his chair. “When this is over, we’re going to have to talk about my vaults and managing them properly. I think I’d like to start an investment company.”

“Mr Potter,” Mackrack said firmly. “If things go the way we hope, then you will never have to worry about such a thing again. We do have the best people here.”

“I’m sure you do,” Harry smiled. “You will take the cost of the guards on Monday out of my vault?”

“We will, indeed.”

“Are you finished, dear?” he asked Ginny. As she nodded, he turned and stood, shaking Mackrack’s hand. “It’s been a pleasure. I’d like to do this

again, without all this silliness.”

Mackrack bowed and as he took Ginny’s hand, he kissed the back of it. “The pleasure’s been mine, Harry. And you and your mate are welcome any time.”

“Thank you. I’ll be in contact about the deployment of the Mercenaries. They might want to start practicing, by the way.”

“They will be ready. You have my word.”

Harry bowed, and took Ginny’s hand. “It was good seeing you as well, Griphook.” He slid around so he was holding Ginny and Apparated them both away.

Mackrack stared at the spot for several long moments. He turned and pressed the button on his desk, retracting the wall so that he could conference call with the other Heads of branches.

“Mackrack?” The head of the Egyptian bank asked. “This is unusual.”

“I’ve just had an unusual meeting,” Mackrack said, growling softly.

“Of course,” the Egyptian head said, raising his hands gently. “I didn’t mean to imply anything.”

“I’ve just had Mr Potter come pay me a visit along with his mate. It seems that Harry is following a very Goblin-like pattern with finding his life-mate at a very young age. They do appear to be devoted to each other.”

There was a wave of approving nods around the fireplaces.

“And his mate is as open-minded as he is. I’ve agreed to hire out our Mercenaries, for the sum of one Galleon, to Harry for the battle against Voldemort.”

“One Galleon!?” the Egyptian head demanded. “Are you insane?”

“Mr Slitscythe,” Mackrack thundered, “you will remember your place or I will remove you from it.”

“But you’ve gone mad,” he protested.

“Mad?” Mackrack growled. “How much do you think complete trust from the Wizarding population is worth? How much do you think their hero’s personal recommendation is worth? How much do you think Voldemort’s defeat is worth? How much do you think that Harry alone – Harry, who is currently organising a complete takeover of the entire UK Butterbeer businesses – is worth?”

“Your problem, Slitscythe, is that you are incapable of seeing beyond your small and insignificant nose.” Insulting another goblin’s nose was the biggest insult possible. “We have been handed a gilt-edged chance to overcome the inequality we suffer, and you are concerned about a few measly galleons.”

He paused and looked up and down the fire.

“I hereby call for a vote on the removal of Slitscythe as General Manager of Gringotts Egypt.”

“Seconded,” the head of the French branch said instantly. “For?”

There was a series of Aye’s.

“Against?”

There was only silence – due to the rules, anyone faced with dismissal from the board was not allowed to speak in his own defence. He had to rely on others to defend him. Unfortunately for him, no one was willing to intercede on his behalf.

“Then it’s agreed,” Mackrack said, pleased. “I shall send Griphook out immediately to manage for a few days until we can choose a replacement.” He pressed a button, and Slitscythe’s face vanished from the fire.

“Now that we have that out of the way,” the head of the Spanish branch said cheerfully. “You mentioned a takeover?”

“Oh, indeed,” Mackrack said, baring his teeth. He explained the plan quickly. “Harry not only insisted on paying for the guards on Monday, but he also promised to allow us to manage his sizeable fortune.”

“As you said,” the head of the Spanish branch said cheerfully, “we stand to gain a lot more than the price of our Mercenaries. An excellent bit of business.”

“Harry understands that when everyone profits, it is better all around. He trusts us, and we WILL be equal to that trust.”

“Quite, quite.”

“Well,” Mackrack said. “While I have you all here; let’s hear today’s profit reports.”

From: Draco

To: Mum

Subject: Me

I don't know if I can write this, but it's been suggested to me as a good idea to get it off my chest.

A lot has changed in the past few weeks. And some of it you know, as I'm sure Dad has ranted to you about it.

To clarify...

I am gay.

I think I always have been.

I've tried so hard to be what Dad wanted – a junior version of him. I've hated what he hates, I've sneered at what he sneers at, and I've alienated pretty much everyone in the hope that I might get a word from him. A look, anything.

And you know what? I've failed at everything as well. What ever I do, Potter's been better at it than I have, and Dad will never forgive me for that.

And the truly galling thing? Potter doesn't care. He doesn't care about me, or Dad; he just wants to be left alone. He'll save the world, and if he gets his way, will retire from public view and be happy.

And that's where I can learn from him. He wants to be happy. I can't remember the last time I was happy. Even when Dad bought my way into the Quidditch team, I was scared I was going to let him down.

For far too long, I've denied who I am. What I am.

I am not Lucius Malfoy Junior.

I am Draco Malfoy, a boy who's no longer denying what I've always desperately tried to ignore.

I know that Dad is going to abandon me over this. It's one of the things I've had to talk about, and I don't know if I can handle being poor, but I guess I haven't got much choice in the matter, have I?

I love you, and I really hope that for once, you can stand up to Dad, and that I can remain in contact with you. Don't worry; I won't say that in person – I know how you hate declarations of affection. But, considering that I'm admitting to being gay, saying that I love you is hardly on the same level.

And before you think it, no, there is nothing you could have done to stop me from being gay, nor can you 'cure' me. I'm not suffering from a disease here.

I hope you do write back, but I'll understand if you don't.

Draco ~~Malfoy~~

From: Drac

To: Ter

Subject: Mum

I've told her – I've not told Dad, she can do that. He's a homophobe anyway... on top of being a supremacist and a racist. In fact, I don't think there's an 'ist' Dad doesn't like.

D

From: Proud

To: Proudee

Subject: Re: Parents

I'm proud of you, Drac.

And you know what they say about homophobes...

"I'm not a homophobe – I'm not afraid of me house!"

Terry

From: D

To: T

Subject: Re[2]: Parents

Groan!

D.

They appeared in the Ministry of Magic, near Percy’s office. Ginny looked up at Harry and sighed softly. “Are you sure you have to do this now?”

He nodded, looking exhausted. “I have to know what is going on. I have to give the impression that I’m everywhere I need to be, like Fred and George said.” He straightened his shoulders and seemed to will the tiredness away.

She sighed again and hugged him gently. “I can’t wait till this is all over, and I don’t have to share you with anyone else.”

“Have plans for me?” he asked, smiling.

“Plans that involve a bed, no clothing, and a lot of groaning,” she teased gently and then laughed as he blushed.

She opened the door to Percy’s office, and paused as the sound of shouting came out.

“You will call off your investigation!”

“No, I won’t,” Percy’s voice replied icily.

“If you know what’s good for you and your family…”

Harry sighed and moved past the door, slamming it open. “Lucius!” he called cheerfully. “How good to see you again.”

Malfoy looked at him and scowled. “Potter!”

“Well done. Instant recognition – very impressive. So, care to tell me exactly why you are failing at intimidation here?”

“I—”

“—He’s failing because his Ministry support is at an all time low,” Percy said formally. “That will be all, Lucius. You can rest assured that your attempt at suppressing the truth will feature prominently in my report.”

Lucius growled under his breath.

Harry took a step forward; he looked like he was planning on ripping Lucius in half. The long-haired wizard took several steps back until he was against the wall.

“I object to people threatening my family,” Harry stated. Ginny felt a small fissure of electricity shoot through her as Harry released the controls on his magic. She was shocked by just how weak he was at the moment. Although, obviously Lucius didn’t feel that way, as the man paled dramatically.

“If I was you,” Harry continued. “I’d be much more worried about events closer to home.”

“What do you mean?”

Harry’s smile had a tinge of ruthlessness about it. “You’ll see, my dear Lucius. You’ll see.”

Lucius looked around, sneering; only the effect was spoiled by the slight look of fear in his eyes. “I’ll get you.”

“No, you won’t,” Harry said. “How is Voldemort at the moment?”

Lucius opened and closed his mouth before barging past Harry and storming out of the room.

Harry smiled slightly, and then collapsed into a chair in front of Percy’s desk, closing his eyes.

Ginny shook her head and walked over to him, kneeling by the side of his chair.

“Are you quite alright?” Percy asked, looking concerned.

“A little tired,” Harry sighed.

“He’s been catching up on everything he missed,” Ginny explained.

Percy nodded and turned abruptly to his fireplace. He grabbed some Floo powder and threw it in the fire. "Penelope?"

"Yes, Percy?"

"I know it's a dreadful imposition at such short notice, but are you able to handle a few extra guests for dinner? I've got Ginny and Harry here, and Harry looks like he really needs a good dinner, and we need to talk."

"Of course," Penelope's head smiled. "I was making extra anyway. If you want to come home now, I'll open a bottle of wine for a pre-dinner drink."

"Thank you," Percy smiled softly, a look that seemed a little out of place on his normally restrained face.

Percy turned to face them. "Come on, then," he said before he stepped into the green flames. "The sooner we get to my place, the sooner we can get Harry relaxed."

"Percy," Harry called, before Percy could vanish. "Thanks."

"You're welcome," Percy nodded.

"We'll see you there," Harry offered. "I still hate the Floo."

"Of course," Percy said, a faint smile hovering around his face. He stepped into the fire and vanished.

"Come on," Harry said to Ginny.

She smiled and climbed onto his lap, pressing her face into his neck and inhaling deeply.

There was the briefest feeling of movement, before they landed in the living room of Percy and Penelope's house. For a second, Ginny felt a little disorientated. The living room was absolutely perfect with not a single thing out of place. It looked like someone had opened the Home Improvement pages of the *Prophet* and created one of the rooms.

"Come on through into the den," Percy called cheerfully from the next room. He looked more relaxed than Ginny could remember – he'd even removed his Ministry robes, his tie and undone the top button of his Muggle shirt.

The den reassured her that Percy was indeed a Weasley. It had two comfortable sofas, a table behind them, and a wireless playing on the windowsill.

"The living room is for when I have to play politics," Percy said with a shrug. "I do prefer the informality of it in here, but I wouldn't let some of those vipers anywhere near where I live if I had the choice."

Harry sat down and stretched out his legs. "This is really comfy," he groaned.

"Charmed that way," Penelope said with a smile, bringing in four glasses of wine. "I'm sure there are many reasons why I shouldn't be giving you alcohol, but you look like you could do with a drink, Harry."

Harry laughed softly. "Thanks," he smiled. "Ginny, can you bring them up to date please?"

Ginny nodded. She knew Harry hated talking about himself, so she was more than happy to do so. It also gave her a chance to make sure that Harry didn't put his own accomplishments down.

She finished her recital about what had happened at Fred and George's, unsure if Harry wanted her to talk about what they had done after that.

"We then had a meeting with Mackrack," Harry continued smoothly. "We've arranged for the Goblin Mercenaries to join us in the final battle."

"Well," Percy said slowly, after exchanging a long look with Penelope. "Are you sure you should be doing all this today? You look like Death warmed up."

"It's important that people know I am up and around," Harry sighed. "It's as much psychological as anything else. *The Prophet* will print all sorts of rumours about me being seen in certain places, and Voldemort and the Death Eaters will read them and think that I'm fine while Voldemort is still a mess."

"You have excellent instincts for politics, Harry," Percy said.

Harry smiled crookedly.

"What I'm worried about, is how low his magic is getting," Ginny said, taking the subject away from politics. She wasn't ready for Harry to find out about her plans for him yet, all of which could wait till after Voldemort was decomposing somewhere.

"Low?" Percy asked.

"Didn't you feel how low it was earlier?" Ginny asked, a little surprised.

"That was low!?"

Ginny nodded firmly.

Percy laughed softly and shook his head. "I'm starting to realise just why we didn't stand a chance against you," he admitted.

Next to her, she could feel Harry relax and drift off, so she reached out and took the empty wine glass from his hand.

"Don't take it personally," Ginny said quietly. "He only does it where he feels comfortable and safe."

Penelope smiled. "Then I shall take it as a rather large compliment. Shall we go into the kitchen?"

"I think that's a good idea," Percy said. He stood and pulled off a blanket from the back of his chair, spreading it over Harry.

Ginny followed Percy into the kitchen and walked over and kissed him gently on the cheek. "I do love you," she said softly.

"A fact that I am eternally grateful for," Percy said solemnly. "But enough about that. How are you, Ginny?"

Ginny walked over to the counter, out of the way, and climbed onto it. "Tired and scared," she admitted softly. "It's been an incredibly long week. Not having Harry in my mind was worse than having Voldemort in there."

"I'm not doubting you," Percy said carefully. "But are you sure you're doing the right thing, being attached to him?"

"This is what I've wanted all my life," she said simply. "I didn't realise the price would be so high, but then I didn't think the rewards would be either. I had a chance, Percy, to go for normality. I had that chance with Dean; I could have stepped to one side and been out of the fight. It wouldn't have been scary, but it was also very boring and dull. There was no fire. Harry can make me feel like my blood is on fire, like I am the most important person in the world."

"With Dean, I would have met Dean's mum and step-sister during a holiday. In just one day with Harry, I've seen the new Butterbeer factory, been introduced as Harry's mate to Mackrack of all people, and am now spending time with my brother on a school night, with everyone's full permission."

"What I really need is time alone with Harry."

Percy looked thoughtfully at her. "Not to ignore everything you just said, but did Harry really introduce you as his mate?"

"Yeah," Ginny nodded. "Why?"

Percy smiled slowly. "That does make me feel a little better," he admitted.

"Why's that, dear?" Penelope asked from the stove.

"Because Goblins mate for life. Introducing a female as a mate is effectively the same as saying this is my life-partner."

"Really?" Ginny asked, suddenly feeling a bit of her fear about Harry vanish.

"It means he's making long term plans for you," Percy nodded.

"Which means he thinks he can defeat Voldemort," Ginny said brightly. "I was worried that this last week might have dented his confidence."

"Hiring Mercenaries is a sure sign of that," Percy agreed. "It is a pain that Snape is no longer a spy."

Ginny coughed softly. "I can't tell you anything," she said apologetically. "But Harry does have a spy in the Inner Circle – please don't tell anyone else."

"We won't," Percy said firmly. "It is reassuring though. He's come a long way in the last few weeks, hasn't he?"

"Have you ever thought that it's down to you guys?" Ginny asked with a smile.

"It is?" Percy asked doubtfully.

"If you hadn't forced him into a corner, he would never have discovered that he does have the ability to lead."

Percy laughed softly and shook his head. "I think I shall keep that knowledge firmly to myself," he said. "My behaviour wasn't exactly exemplary, and even if something positive has come out of it, I won't be admitting it."

"Hey, Perce, you around?" a voice called from the fireplace.

"William?" Percy asked, moving in front of it.

"It's Bill," Bill groaned.

"And I'm Percy," Percy agreed, before going silent. Ginny hid a giggle.

"Fine. Percy," Bill stressed. "Have you seen Harry and Ginny? Albus said they're doing the rounds at the moment."

Percy looked at Ginny, and she nodded.

"They're here," Percy acknowledged.

“Can I come through?” Bill asked.

“Of course,” Percy said, stepping back.

The long-haired Weasley arrived through the fireplace a second later, brushing himself off casually. “Hey, Munchkin,” he said cheerfully. “Where’s Harry?”

“Having a nap,” Ginny said, holding out her arms for a hug.

Bill walked over and grabbed her, lifting her off the counter and spinning her around before hugging her tightly. He put her down and grinned.

“So,” he said cheerfully. “Does any one have any idea why my boss at Gringotts would suddenly be replaced, and the new guy, a Goblin I think is called Griptook, placed in charge?”

“Griphook?” Ginny corrected. “We had a meeting with him and Mackrack earlier.”

“I thought Harry would have something to do with this,” Bill said. “I’ve officially been seconded to Harry for the duration of the crisis, on full pay, as has Fleur. She’s packing at home right now.”

“That’s wonderful,” Percy said. “It will be good to have you around a bit more.”

Bill paused and looked at Percy. Then at Penelope. “Penelope,” he said slowly. “I don’t know what you’ve done, but it’s worked.”

Penelope laughed softly. “Harry did the hard work,” she said gently. “I just helped Percy deal with it. I’ve always seen the man inside.”

Percy was currently proving that he was indeed a Weasley by blushing furiously.

“So,” Bill said, changing the subject. “Where’s Mum today?”

“At Hogwarts,” Ginny said promptly. “She’s helping organise the food for tomorrow’s picnic and barbeque. I’m having a day off for Harry with the new Butterbeer, games, and food. And yes, you are all invited.”

“Cool,” Bill grinned. “We’ll be there.”

“Absolutely,” Percy smiled.

“Okay, Bill,” Ginny said. “Listen up, and I’ll tell you what’s been going on this week.”

When she had finished, Bill whistled slowly. “Wow. Do any of you feel the same tingle?”

“I do,” Percy said.

“Me too,” Penelope agreed.

“What tingle?” Ginny asked.

“It’s called hope,” Bill said softly. “It’s something that’s been missing for some time.”

“Ginny,” Penelope said. “Why don’t you go wake Harry up? The food is almost ready.”

“That smells great,” Bill said.

“Bill,” Percy sighed. “Subtlety is not your strong point. Go and get Fleur and join us.”

“Thanks,” Bill grinned and jumped into the fire.

“Is he really the oldest?” Percy asked.

Ginny laughed and walked back into the den. She knelt in front of Harry, and gently brushed his hair back. This was the time when he was truly hers and hers alone. No one else got to see what he was like when he was sleeping. It was different to when he was unconscious; it was more personal, and she knew that if he sensed anyone else, he’d wake instantly. No one else got to see him looking so young and vulnerable.

“Hey,” Harry said, his voice a little croaky. “I should apologise to Percy.”

“I wouldn’t,” Ginny said softly. “They took it as a compliment that you felt safe and comfortable enough to fall asleep here.”

“The wine helped,” Harry admitted.

Ginny leaned forward and kissed him softly, feeling him respond to her. “The food’s ready,” she said as she reluctantly pulled away. “And Bill and Fleur are joining us. Griphook seems to have been promoted to manager of the Egypt branch, and he put Fleur and Bill under your command for the duration on full pay.”

Harry ran his fingers through his hair as he sat up. “That was nice of Mackrack,” he said slowly. “I wonder how Fleur would feel about doing some

modelling.”

Ginny blinked and shook her head slightly. “What?”

“Can you imagine the effect a Veela would have on the market, if we had pictures of her drinking Butterbeer as part of our advertising blitz?”

Ginny paused for a few seconds, letting the thought permeate through her mind. “That’s a pretty good idea.”

“And I can get them doing some serious research as well. They’re both good at their jobs, so there must be some curses they can find for me.” Harry smiled. “I’m starting to think about ending this soon.”

“You are?” Ginny asked.

“Yeah, it’s interfering with my love life, and I’m not willing for that to happen for much longer.”

Ginny smiled broadly and kissed her boyfriend. “I think I like being your mate,” she said firmly.

Harry laughed softly and stood, lifting her with the ease that always thrilled her. “Come on,” he said, as his stomach growled.

“Just take a seat at the table, Harry,” Penelope called from the kitchen.

“Thanks,” he called back, taking a seat.

Ginny walked to a cupboard and pulled out some cutlery; she’d never been here, but it was where her Mum had kept them, so she’d guessed that Percy would have as well.

She set the table quickly and then walked into the kitchen to see if she could help.

“Can I use your Floo for a second?” she asked.

“Better be quick,” Percy said firmly.

Ginny nodded and jumped into the fireplace. It didn’t take her long to persuade Fred and George to donate a few bottles of HonestAbe’s, and she returned loaded down.

“It’s the new Butterbeer,” she explained cheerfully to Penelope.

“Oh, what a wonderful idea,” Penelope smiled. “I must admit to being quite curious about it. Bill and Fleur are talking to Harry.”

She nodded and walked back into the den, and took a seat next to Harry and opposite Bill. There were two places left at each end of the table for Percy and Penelope.

She felt Harry’s hand reach down and hold hers, his thumb lightly brushing over the back of her knuckles.

“Officially, the Goblins are still neutral,” Harry said, “but Mackrack and I are friends, so if it came down to it, they would join us. I’m hoping that they won’t have to. Their neutrality is good for their business.

“Mackrack seconding you to me I didn’t expect, but I’m pleased with it. We’ve got a heavy duty research project going on at the moment, and if we can crack it, the results will reverberate around the world.”

“Oh?” Bill asked, looking curious.

“Have you heard of the *Homorphus* Charm?”

Bill and Fleur shook their heads.

“It’s rumoured to be a cure for werewolves. As it’s a charm, I’m guessing that the werewolf issue started as a curse. At the moment, I’ve got Remus, Hermione, and Ron studying it, but as they can only do it part time, so I’d like you two to take over. It’s important because if we can come up with a cure, it will lose Voldemort some of his supporters, and it will make some of the others think twice about following him.”

“If it is, then it’s the ultimate curse,” Bill said softly. He turned to Fleur. “Sound fun?”

“Eet does,” Fleur said, smiling massively. “We shall enjoy doing zat.”

Percy and Penelope walked in, each carrying two steaming plates of what looked like beef stew. Ginny smiled as she noticed that Harry’s plate was decidedly bigger than everyone else’s.

Penelope sat down, while Percy went back and got the last two plates and a plate of thick white bread. He placed the plates down and sat at the head of the table. Ginny got to her feet and poured everyone a glass of the new Butterbeer.

“Before we start,” Percy said formally, “I think a toast is in order.”

Bill groaned and was elbowed firmly by Fleur.

"Thank you, William," Percy sighed. "I was merely going to say, 'To hope.'"

"And to freedom," Harry added.

"To love," Ginny smiled, looking at Harry.

"And to life," Penelope continued.

"To friends," Fleur agreed.

"And to family," Bill finished, looking directly at Harry.

They clicked their glasses together and drank as one.

"Wow," Bill said. "This stuff is great."

"I know," Ginny smiled. "You'll love Fred, George, and Abe's factory."

"Speaking of that," Harry said, as they all started to eat. He paused what he was going to say, and turned to Penelope. "This is great!"

"Thank you," the prim witch said softly. "It was a recipe of my grandmother's."

Harry nodded and turned back to Fleur. "How would you feel about being famous?"

"Een what way?" Fleur asked, daintily taking a bite of the stew.

"Our logo for Honest Abe's Original Butterbeer is basically Abe's head on a black background. While this is good for some people, I don't think it's perfect for everyone, especially some of the younger ones. I was thinking that a series of adverts with you drinking Butterbeer would attract them."

Fleur blushed prettily. "You want me to be a model?"

"Exactly," Harry smiled.

Fleur looked at Bill.

Bill laughed and shook his head. "What, you think I'm going to say no?"

Fleur smiled brilliantly. "I vould luv too!"

"Great," Harry said. "I'll talk to Fred and George tomorrow and get them to talk to some advertising specialists, and we can see what we can come up with. We'll be going for classy, as we want this to be a family drink."

Fleur nodded.

Ginny reached out and took some of the bread, tearing it into chunks and placing it on the stew. She suddenly realised just how much Harry was doing for her family, especially her brothers, and how quietly he was doing it. Percy's career was back on track, more so now that Harry had helped knock the stuffing out of him. This report he was doing was his chance to really be noticed, and he had been given it because of his relationship with Harry.

Fred and George, well, they'd benefited the most. The way things were going, they'd end up richer than the Malfoys, and it was down to Harry always believing in them that they'd been given the chance.

Bill was now being given the chance to do something extraordinary. To find the cure for Werewolves, along with the fact that Mackrack now obviously knew who he was, which would help his career as well.

She lightly squeezed Harry's leg. She had no idea what he had in mind for Charlie, but was willing to bet everything she'd find out sooner or later. She wasn't even sure if it was conscious on his part, or if he just believed that everyone he was with should be happy and successful.

He'd make a wonderful Minister for Magic. Apart from being completely incorruptible, and having a nobility streak a mile wide, he was determined to do the right thing, regardless of what other people thought.

"Okay," Harry said. "Sorry to bring work into this, but I am here for a reason. Percy, how's the investigation going?"

"Frustratingly," Percy sighed. "Our visit to Azkaban was perfect in every aspect."

"And?" Bill asked.

"That's just it. It's a prison. It should not be perfect. It was absolutely spotless. It was as if we had been prepared for."

"Take some Aurors and do a surprise visit next week," Harry said with a frown. "Don't tell anyone, except Kingsley, beforehand. If they're hiding something, you should be able to find it some way. There is something going on or Mackrack wouldn't have given me the hint otherwise."

Percy nodded. "At the moment, the report, while taking the Ministry to task for its actions, doesn't have anything dynamite to talk about. I firmly believe that Azkaban is the key."

“I know you’ll find out what it is, Percy,” Harry said confidently. “If you do run into any problems, let me know. I can be there in seconds. And don’t be afraid to fall back into how you were last year. It may be that these people will respond more to that than how you are at the moment.”

Ginny smiled as Percy’s back straightened, and he nodded. It was another sign of the Harry effect. A few words from him, and people were revitalised and ready to go back into the fight.

It made her realise that he had been right earlier. It wasn’t as much what he was doing, as it was that he was doing it. Despite fighting Voldemort and nearly dying, he was here, giving advice and taking responsibility, giving support, and people were responding to that. It was as if they had realised that, and though they may be tired and frustrated, they had someone to turn to, and that someone was working harder than they were.

The rest of the meal was spent in general conversation, the subject moving away from Voldemort, and Ginny found that she just had the chance to enjoy a meal, as an adult, with two of her brothers and their partners. It was the first time she’d done it, with a partner of her own, and she really enjoyed it. As she finished eating, she shifted nearer Harry and smiled as his arm went around her. She listened, mentally planning what she would serve when they could throw their own dinner party.

From: SS

To: BB

Subject: Rendezvous

Belle. Sunday, 1pm. That clearing in the Forbidden Forest. I'll be bringing a guest.

S.

--

Working for the downfall of the Dark Tosser for fifteen years

From: Informal Belle

To: Stuffy Sev

Subject: Re: Rendezvous

I'll be there – without bells.

B.

From: Sinistra

To: Headmaster, Hogwarts

Subject: Ginny Weasley

Albus,

Was Ms Weasley ill today? Only, she wasn't in my lesson today, and I didn't have a report from Madam Pomfrey.

Sin

From: Albus

To: Astronomy Professor

Subject: Re: Ginny Weasley

Ginny was with Harry today.

Albus.

--

Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot and Chairman of the International Confederation of Wizards

From: Sinistra (again)

To: Headmaster, Hogwarts (again)

Subject: Ginny Weasley (again)

Albus,

Exactly why was Ms Weasley allowed to skip classes along with Mr Potter? Today was a very important lesson for her OWLs.

Sin

From: Albus

To: Sinistra

Cc: All staff

Subject: Re: Ginny Weasley (again)

I'm well aware that our primary function at Hogwarts is to teach, and from that perspective, I will wager that Ginny learnt more today with Harry than she would have here at Hogwarts. The insight into Goblin society alone is highly educational.

More importantly though, it has allowed Ginny to spend some time with Harry. As much as I would rather they were both in school, there are schemes in place to rid the world of Voldemort. A couple of students missing a few lessons is a small price to pay for that.

Over the next few weeks and months, there will be times when a number of students will simply not be available for classes.

We have an exceptional couple of years' worth of students, all of whom have rallied around Harry and are dedicated to the complete destruction of Voldemort. For the first time, my school is becoming one, with inter-house rivalry suspended, and I for one, am extremely pleased to see it.

As it is no longer restricted knowledge, Harry is the only person who can defeat Voldemort. There are no ifs, buts, or maybes about it. He has proven over the past few weeks that he can shoulder the mantle of responsible leadership, and as such, and as a professor in his own right, is entitled to a degree of latitude not normally given to either students or staff members.

If anyone has an issue with this, please see me in person.

Albus.

--

Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot and Chairman of the International Confederation of Wizards

From: w4n] M4K3|25

To: 4L8U5]UM8L3]0|23

Subject: Enhance Your Wand!

Do You Want To Have Better Than The Average Wand Size?

Of course you do! Many witches have admitted that they are unhappy with their Wizard's wand size. This proves that size really *does* matter. Witches view Wizards with big wands as being more attractive, more powerful, and more likely to be able to perform all the spells they want. A bigger wand gives you a large surface area, which gives you more room to handle, and to focus your magic. A larger and more natural wand is more of a visual turn on for witches!

Our solution is natural – no surgery, no damage to your wand, and no wand pumps!

We absolutely guarantee in writing that our solution will work for you, or your Galleons back, no questions asked!

Our Unique And Proven Wand Enhancement Can Truthfully Lengthen, Thicken, And Enlarge Your Wand. 100% GUARANTEED!!!1!!11!one

There's No Need To Look For Another Solution!

You'll exude Power and Confidence whenever you are around Witches, or you cast magic in public, all while other Wizards glare at you with great envy, wanting to be just like you. But the biggest perk is the first time you unveil your new wand to your Witch. When she sees how truly long, thick, manly, and massive your wand is, she will submit to your powerful magnetism and let you do anything you desire with her. She will be overwhelmed by your new massive wand, and will be forever addicted to the kind of deep fulfilment that only YOU can provide. The way that Witches will throw themselves at you once they know about how truly massive your wand is, will be a spectacular experience. You will have them bragging to others about your wand's awesome size.

Don't Delay! Order Today! Simply Reply and our team of expert Wand Enhancers will be back to you in seconds!

From: The Wizarding World's Terrific Trio

To: The Wizarding World's Saviour

Subject: Monday

Attachment: Orderofbusiness.pmt

Harry old boy. Just to let you know, our first port of call on Monday will be the Butterbeer factory on the outskirts of Guildford. We've attached the schedule for you.

F&G&A

--

Weasley's Wizard Wheezes – coming soon to Diagon Alley

This Means War

9 - Harry Potter's Day Off (part 2)

From: The Wizarding World's RELUCTANT saviour

To: Abe and Fred and George

Subject: Re: Monday

Gotcha.

Question: Why does your signature say that your store is opening soon when it's been open for ages, and why does it have the wrong name?

H.

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

From: The embarrassed ones – not Abe

To: Harry

Subject: Signature

Let's just say it was a lesson learnt and leave it at that?

G&F

--
Weasley's Wizard Wheezes – coming soon to Diagon Alley

From: The curious one

To: The curiosities

Subject: Re: Signature

Come on... you can tell me...

H.

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

From: The curiosities

To: You know what it did to the cat

Subject: Re[2]: Signature

It was one of the things we told Lavender and Parvati. When we started out, we listened to a salesman and ended up with a load of personalised Mmail paper with the wrong name on it – way too much actually. We tried to sue, but the salesman skipped town. So we're still using it now for anything not to do with the business itself.

F-G

--
Weasley's Wizard Wheezes – coming soon to Diagon Alley

From: Cat knower

To: Cat teasers

Subject: The curios cat

At least the cat died happy...

Harry.

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

“We’ll see you tomorrow at Hogwarts,” Harry said to Percy, Penelope, Bill, and Fleur, as he cuddled Ginny.

“Oh, and wear casual clothing,” Ginny added, as Harry Apparated them away.

“Where are we?” Ginny asked, looking around.

“The Carpathian ridges in Romania. I guessed you’d want to invite Charlie tomorrow as well.”

Ginny reached up and pulled him down, kissing him lingeringly. “I do,” she agreed.

“Come on then,” he smiled, taking her hand. The last time he’d seen a dragon was during the Tri-wizard tournament, and that one had been a little grumpy toward him at the time.

They walked into what looked like a permanent campsite. “We’re looking for Charlie Weasley,” Harry yelled, as someone hurried across the site.

“West field,” The man shouted back, pointing to his left.

They walked through the grass in silence, following a trail. “I’d like to do this again one day,” he said quietly. He didn’t want to think about Voldemort and everything else at the moment. He just wanted to enjoy the moment with his girlfriend.

“I know,” she whispered simply and moved closer.

The meal with Percy had been very good, but it had been the idea of having his own dinner parties with Ginny that had been the most restorative thought. Sure, he was still pretty weak magically, but he could feel his power coming back to him all the time – especially after his cat-nap.

He opened a gate in the fence for Ginny, and they walked through into complete chaos.

One of the dragons, a dark blue one, seemed to be trying to escape, throwing off the ropes that the Dragon Handlers were using to keep it still. It roared, sending a burst of bright yellow flames high into the sky, before turning violently and running straight toward them.

Harry sighed softly and wondered if his mother’s blessing, that had allowed him to survive, had also ruined his luck. Because it certainly seemed that whenever he turned up anywhere, something bad happened to him.

“Harry, Ginny, get the hell out of the way!” he could hear Charlie yell.

“Don’t move,” he said to Ginny firmly and took a couple of steps forward. As the dragon got closer, he released his magic, wrapping it around him like a shield, and waited.

When it was only fifteen feet away, he cast a Sonorous charm on his throat. “Sit!” he yelled.

The noise echoed around the plain like thunder, and the dragon stopped, skidding to a halt in front of him. It looked at him in surprise.

“What on earth do you think you are doing?” Harry demanded of the dragon. “I bring my mate to see her brother, and you attack us? What on earth were you thinking?”

The dragon whined and placed its head on the ground, covering its snout with its front paws.

“Look at the others,” Harry continued. “They’re all being good dragons, but no, not you.”

The large grey eyes of the dragon seemed to whirl in apology. Harry sighed and walked over to it, rubbing its forehead gently. “Were you just playing?” he asked, cancelling the Sonorous spell.

The dragon nodded.

“You *do* know that the humans are trying to help you, don’t you?”

The dragon nodded again.

Harry sighed. “You’re a silly beast, aren’t you?”

The dragon snorted and got back to his feet, sniffing Harry firmly. He stood there, feeling the heavy breath brushing against him. He was more than a little surprised that the dragon had done what it was told, as he had been prepared for a fight with it. He’d have to ask Charlie about it later.

“This is my mate,” he said, beckoning Ginny forward.

The dragon sniffed her as well and nodded.

"Do you have a mate?" he asked.

The dragon nodded proudly.

"Well, are you going to introduce us?"

The dragon nodded again and offered a leg to Harry.

"You want us to ride you?"

The dragon nodded for a third time.

"Cool," Harry grinned. The thought of flying on a different animal appealed to him immensely. He'd enjoyed the feeling of flying on Buckbeak when he was younger. Flying with another animal was very different to flying with a broom. He placed a leg on the dragon's, and vaulted on to the huge back, landing between two ridges that seemed to hold him comfortably in place. He reached down and pulled Ginny up easily from the dragon's leg, placing her behind him. He felt her wrap her arms around her waist, and he yelled, "We're on."

The dragon snorted and turned on the spot, galloping toward the north. As he picked up speed, he spread his wings, and a second later they were swooping high into the atmosphere.

He could hear yelling and realised that it was coming from him – Ginny was screaming with pleasure behind him. It was like nothing he had experienced and made the experience with Buckbeak pale in comparison. The dragon was so strong, so magical, and so powerful, that he could feel it affect all his senses.

"Faster," he yelled, encouraging the dragon. The dragon roared, and they went into a steep dive. They were moving faster than he had ever been before, even on a broom, as they descended from a great height, before swooping over a great lake, their speed causing a huge trail of water to plume behind them.

As suddenly as they had started, they stopped. The dragon spread his wings wide and reared up, so that they were pressed down. Almost daintily, the dragon landed in with the herd of other dragons and offered them a leg down.

Harry helped Ginny down first, before vaulting forward, over the dragon's head, and landing in front of him.

The dragon lowered his head and lightly nudged Harry's chest.

"Aren't you a strong one," Harry said softly, rubbing the dragon's head hard. "That was amazing."

"It was," Ginny agreed, walking around to the front and rubbing the dragon's head as well. She scratched hard between its ears, and the dragon's left rear leg thumped into the floor with pleasure.

"Thank you very much for the ride," Ginny said to the dragon, giving him one of her most beautiful smiles. "It was brilliant."

The dragon raised his head, and a little roar came out. A second dragon moved over. This one was a beautiful mixture of pale white and yellow.

"Is this your mate?" Harry asked.

The blue dragon nodded.

"She's beautiful."

The dragon threw his head back and puffed out his chest.

Harry walked over to the white and yellow dragon. "I'm Harry," he introduced himself. "This is my mate, Ginny."

The white dragon sniffed them both closely, and then bared its teeth in a draconic grin. She lowered her head, and Harry scratched it as well.

"Harry," Charlie's voice rang out. "Can you ask them to keep the others still for the night? We want to repair the wards tonight, so that Muggles don't see their home."

"Did you hear that?" Harry asked.

The dragons snorted.

"Are you going to do it?"

The blue dragon snorted again, and rolled its eyes.

"What's the matter?" Harry asked. "Do you not need the wards?"

The dragon shook its head.

"Why not?"

The dragon roared softly and then seemed to shrug. It looked frustrated that it couldn't communicate back with Harry.

"Can I try casting a spell to allow me into your mind?" Harry asked softly. "I'm very good at it, and I won't invade your privacy."

The dragon sniffed Harry slowly and then looked into his eyes. "Only me," Harry agreed. He wasn't sure how he knew what the dragon wanted, but it was working.

"*Legilimens*!" he whispered and floated toward the dragon's mind. What he encountered was nothing at all like he had expected. The dragon seemed to be a mixture of animal and human. There was definite thought, but also instincts were a lot more important, as were the senses. He discovered that his own smell was one of power and respect, despite his obvious young age.

He opened his own mind a little, sharing the respect and awe he held the dragons in. How magnificent they looked, and how strong and powerful they seemed.

In pictures, the dragon flashed a few things at him. "Crenth?" he thought. "That's your name?"

He felt Crenth smile at him. "Ahh, it's the name as I would understand it," Harry laughed. "What's wrong with the wards?"

Another series of images flashed through his mind, including how the dragons used to live, long before Wizards found them.

"Thank you," he said, and pulled back from Crenth's mind.

"Charlie," he shouted. "Cancel the wards spell!"

"Are you insane?" Charlie shouted back. "They're the only thing that are stopping the Muggles from finding that dragons exist!"

Harry turned to face Charlie, and around forty other dragon handlers. He put his hands on his hips. "Turn off the bloody wards!"

Behind him, he could feel Crenth and Midram, Crenth's mate; breathe a plume of fire in agreement with him. It was so bloody typical of wizards to presume that they knew best.

Charlie gulped and nodded. He turned and talked to the person who was obviously the boss. The boss sighed, and nodded, glaring at Harry.

The group of wizards turned around and pointed their wands out, each of them casting a cancelling spell. There was a display of red light as the wards fell.

"Go on, Crenth," Harry said, turning back to the dragon.

Crenth sat back on his hind legs and raised his face. He roared into the night sky, breathing fire. Next to him, Midram did the same. The other dragons matched them, until the sky was bright with fire. The fire seemed to arch out above them in a beautiful yellow cover. With a little grumble, Crenth stopped and the fire seemed to shiver in place for a second before fading away.

Harry held out his hand, feeling for magic, and found that Crenth had been right. The magic the dragons had produced had given them a much stronger ward.

"I'll get them to bring you some more food," Harry promised, as Crenth lay down on the ground.

Crenth lightly butted his shoulder.

"You're welcome," he said softly. "Come on, Ginny."

She grabbed his arm and walked with him over to the Dragon Handlers. Charlie, and his boss, moved to the front of the group, waiting for them.

"What was that?" Charlie asked.

Harry sighed. "Crenth was trying to tell you that they've been protecting themselves for far longer than humans have existed. He knew that you were renewing the wards tonight, and he didn't want you to do it. Wizard magic makes them itchy and irritable. The first group of Dragon Handlers cast the spell as soon as they came here, not noticing that the Dragons already had a ward spell up.

"They've dealt with it, realising that you were only trying to help, but Midram is in clutch, and Crenth wants to be a father. He's not willing to put up with anything that might make it more difficult for Midram to give birth.

"Dragons are part pure magic," he continued, "as I'm sure you know. They see things differently. When he saw me, he recognised my power and came straight over; he was hoping that one of the 'Old Wizards' would be able to help him."

"'Old Wizards'?" Charlie asked softly.

Harry sought out Ginny's hand and held it. "A wizard who could understand them," he explained.

"How did you talk to them?"

"Through Legilimency," Harry explained. "I went inside Crenth's mind. He's amazing; a mixture of human and animal. He communicates in images, like a Muggle TV."

“Well, Mr Potter,” Charlie’s boss said, shaking Harry’s hand. “You certainly know how to make an entrance. I’m Morgo Flashchime, by the way. I’ll apply to the Ministry to get a Legilimens out here to see what else we can find out.”

“Pleased to meet you,” Harry nodded. “And this is Ginny Weasley, Charlie’s sister,” he added, noting the glance the man through towards the red-haired dragon tamer.

“You also need to be careful to get someone honest,” Harry advised. “If they don’t trust the person, it might not work. It might be a good idea if I teach Charlie myself. Crenth trusts him.”

“Weasley,” Flashchime ordered. “Go with Mr Potter; come back when you’ve learnt to talk to the dragons.”

“Sir?”

“You heard me,” Flashchime grunted. “I may be a Dragon Handler, but that doesn’t mean I don’t know what is going on in the rest of the world. And if the dragons trust him to be their messenger, that’s enough for me.”

“Harry, can you really teach me?”

Harry nodded.

“All right!” Charlie yelled, jumping into the sky and pumping his fist. “And will I get to ride them like you did?”

“Crenth likes flying with humans,” Harry smiled.

Charlie took a couple of steps forward and pulled Harry into a tight hug. “Thank you,” he said.

Harry laughed softly. “You’re welcome,” he croaked. “But air is good.”

“Sorry,” Charlie grinned and turned to his sister. “Snapdragon!” He picked up Ginny and spun her around, before hugging her hard. “It’s good to see you too. What are you two doing here, anyway?”

“Well,” she said, before Harry could say anything. “It seems that Harry hasn’t helped your career out recently, so he thought that, after fixing Bill, Percy, Fred and George, he’d get around to you next.”

Harry blinked and stared at Ginny. “Huh?” he asked. He hadn’t done anything.

“It’s okay,” she smiled, hugging his arm and giving him that smile that always said that she knew something he didn’t, and that it was better for him to just accept it. We came to invite you and Tonks to a picnic and barbeque at Hogwarts tomorrow,” Ginny said cheerfully. “The whole school, as well as all our family, will be there.”

“Cool,” Charlie nodded. “I’ll be there, seeing as how I’m now at Harry’s disposal.”

Harry laughed softly. “I’d hardly call it that,” he shrugged. “But come to Hogwarts tomorrow; I think I’m going to have you, Bill, and Fleur stay there.”

“Bill and Fleur are going to be staying there as well?”

“Mackrack had them seconded to me,” Harry explained.

Charlie nodded slowly. “Okay, I’ll be there tomorrow morning. I’ve got a few things to do this evening.”

“And we’ve got to get back,” Harry agreed. Thanks to time zones, it was still only nine pm back home.

From: Excited Dragonboy

To: Siblings of the Male variety

Subject: Our future brother in law and his mate

Harry and Ginny just dropped by to invite me to the party at Hogwarts tomorrow. As usual, Harry made a bit of an entrance. Bluedust, one of our bigger dragons was very upset that night, and broke free, running toward Harry.

Of course, I tried to tell him to get out of the way, but since when has that boy ever done anything logical? Instead, he took a few steps forwards so that he was protecting Ginny and cast a Sonorous spell. He yelled out ‘Sit’ at the dragon, and the dragon sat.

As did I.

As did everyone else in earshot, including my boss and some of the toughest dragon handlers in the world, and every single bloody dragon on the field.

A few minutes later and Harry’s introduced Ginny to Bluedust as his mate, and they’re being offered a flight on the dragon! This wasn’t one of our usual flights, where we strap a saddle to the middle of the dragon’s back and don enough padding to survive an attack by an Acromantula. They sat just behind his neck and seemed perfectly comfortable there. And judging by the speed Bluedust was going, they were perfectly safe.

When they got off, both Harry and Ginny were almost glowing with pleasure. You can see that they both love to fly almost as much as they love each other (and don't gag till you've seen them together).

Bluedust then introduced his mate, Starsparkle, to Harry and Ginny, before Harry cast Legilimens at the dragon. When he finished, he'd found out that Bluedust's real name is Crenth, that the Dragons can do their own wards, and that Wizards and dragons can communicate.

So, my boss has ordered me to stay with Harry till I learn to be a Legilimens as well – I'll be in England for some time! And when I've finished, I'll be able to fly with the dragons like Harry and Ginny did.

Speaking of them, I am now feeling quite guilty about what we did. Seeing the way they hold hands, or the looks they give each other, or the protective way Harry looks after Ginny, even though she doesn't really need it, shows that he isn't playing with her – far from it.

In a weird way, I'd love to see someone hurt Ginny a little. Just because I think the resulting explosion would go down into history as proof positive that you do NOT touch Ginny.

Anyway, Ginny said something that really got me thinking. When I asked what they were doing here, she said, "It seems that Harry hasn't helped your career out recently, so he thought that, after fixing Bill, Percy, Fred and George, he'd get around to you next." I wasn't sure what she meant, but I think she was giving me a message.

Thoughts?

Charlie

--
Draconis dominium

From: Percival

To: Siblings (Male)

Subject: Harry and Ginny

Charlie, are you feeling quite all right? I do believe that your last Mmail was the single longest communiqué I have ever received from you.

I am pleased that you will be back in England.

As for Ginny's message, it mirrors something I have been thinking myself. Like you, I share in your guilt, perhaps more so, as it was my stubbornness that dragged it on longer than needed.

Fred and George were not only funded originally by Harry but are poised for further success. Bill has been given a challenge, which I am sure that he is up to, which will see him hailed as a hero. My own career is rocketing skyward, as this report has some highly important people knocking on my door, asking advice, and now you will have the chance to become the first true Dragon Rider since the old days.

What I have found interesting is the way that he isn't giving us anything other than a chance to do it ourselves. We have been given the chance for success, nothing else.

As for Harry and Ginny, I will admit that I lost the rest of my reservations when I found out that Harry introduced Ginny as his mate to the Goblins.

Percy

--
The information in this Mmail is confidential and may be legally privileged. It is intended solely for the addressee. Access to this Mmail by anyone else is unauthorized. If you are not the intended recipient, any disclosure, copying, distribution or any action taken or omitted to be taken in reliance on it, is prohibited and may be unlawful.

From: Werewolf Curse Breaker

To: The boys

Subject: Re: Harry and Ginny

So, all the boys are going to be in the country in preparation for our Quidditch match next Sunday? I'm trying to work out if it's coincidence, or if Harry is merely planning ahead.

I agree with you Perc(-e+y), he is just giving us a chance – a chance at a lot of hard work actually, but isn't that what a leader is supposed to do? He's delegating tasks that he hasn't got time to do himself. Everything is for the war effort, even though he hasn't said it.

Fred and George: Attacking the financial side

Percy: Attacking from the ministry

Charlie: Air support for when the fight happens

Me: Removing some of Voldemort’s key supporters

Ron: Helping lead Hogwarts

Bill

From: Ron Researching

To: Brothers Becoming

Subject: Re: Harry and Ginny

I got the Mmail about Bill earlier, and I’m happy you’re taking over the research. Hermione’s got a few starting points for you, so don’t be surprised if we join you in the library a few times.

Interesting list, Bill. And first, I will say that the chances of you all being in the country when Harry needs you being luck is zero. He’s planning things so far ahead these days that even Dumbledore is taking more of a back seat.

Dumbledore offered Harry a seat at the game, and he’s taking it.

You did miss one person out on your list though...

Ginny.

Her role is the most important because she’s Harry’s strength. Without her, we wouldn’t be in this situation. When Harry was unconscious this week, Ginny was a mess. It was almost heartbreaking. She moved in almost a daze – don’t get me wrong, she was still telling people what to do, and encouraging them, but the light was gone from her eyes. It was worse than after that bloody diary finished with her because at least we had something to fight then. This time there was nothing.

As soon as Harry woke up, so did Ginny. His first reaction was to look for her.

Anyway. I’m looking forward to tomorrow; I can’t wait to try the new Butterbeer, and Mum’s been working with Lavender and Parvati all afternoon, preparing the food. She’s been ordering supplies in, left, right, and centre – and speaking of that, something’s happened there as well, as she didn’t even flinch when Harry said he was paying – I was expecting an explosion. Hate to say it, but I think Mum’s realised that Harry’s grown up and is treating him as an adult.

Ron

From: Fred, featuring... George!

To: This generation of male Weasleys

Subject: Re[2]: Harry and Ginny

Well, we hate to say we told you so... but... We told you so!

We’re looking forward to seeing you all tomorrow. We’ve had a few more developments we should tell you about. Monday is gonna knock the Wizarding world on its arse!

I don’t think Harry has done what he’s done for us on purpose – that’s not how he works. He simply sees opportunities and thinks of which of his friends would be the best for it.

You should be grateful that Harry still thinks of you as friends.

You’re all going to love Abe... imagine one of us with as much power as Dumbledore, with over a hundred years of pranking experience!

George, with assistance from... Fred!

--

Weasley’s Wizard Wheezes – coming soon to Diagon Alley

From: Ron

To: Brothers

Subject: Abe

Don't worry too much; Abe's not quite that bad... He's a very good bloke though. Got to talk to him a few times while we were keeping Harry company.

Ron

On the balcony outside of Harry's new rooms, Blaise, Susan, Padma, Parvati, Lavender and Luna were sitting in comfortable chairs, drinking glasses of Butterbeer as they stared across the lake.

Padma pulled out her wand and chanted a spell under her breath, allowing them to see more clearly.

They watched as Harry stood in the middle of the small boat, one arm wrapped around Ginny who was standing in front of him. He moved his right hand slowly, causing plumes of water to shoot high into the sky. A bright white light appeared, shining toward them. As it grew higher in the water, it refracted into an almost dizzying myriad of colours, bathing the water in an amazing light show.

Two of the plumes bent toward each other, creating an archway of pure water that became breathtaking as it moved in front of the light.

Slowly, Harry turned Ginny around and leant down, kissing with her such tenderness and love that it took the watchers' breath away. They saw Ginny reach up and gently pull him down, so that they were lying in the bottom of the boat, staring up at the stars.

They were still for a few minutes, talking softly, before Ginny moved on top of Harry and kissed him rather seriously.

Padma sighed softly and let the spell drop, letting them have their privacy.

"Where am I going to find a boy whose idea of romance is creating a beautiful light show, and then staring at the stars from a boat in the middle of a lake? Where am I going to find a boy who you know will be able to handle it if anything went wrong during that?" Blaise asked, sighing softly.

"Out there with the tiny redhead," Lavender said. "All you have to do is beat Ginny in a fight, survive Harry's wrath, rescue him from the depression he'd be in, and then persuade him to love you."

"Oh," Blaise laughed. "Is that all? I doubt I could get past step one, never mind step two."

"True," Padma agreed. "I guess we're just going to have to tell the boys that if they want to go out with us, they have to act more like Harry, and less like, well, teenage boys."

"This is why I don't date," Luna said cheerfully. "I'm waiting till after we leave Hogwarts and get to spend time with non-Hogwarts boys and men. It's not exactly a hardship."

"They're not that bad," Parvati said, "as long as you don't compare them to Harry. They've got their own charm. Are you going to join us tomorrow morning?"

"What are you doing?" Susan asked.

"We're going to make sure Ginny looks perfect. A full makeover. I got her some casual clothes for exactly this sort of thing."

"What time?" Blaise asked.

"Well, this thing kicks off at ten, so how about six? I'm thinking of bringing her here, so she can see where she's going to be living. Then we'll set to work on her."

"I'm in," Blaise said.

"Me too," Susan agreed.

"I'll be there," Luna smiled.

"I'll make an effort to get up that early," Padma groaned.

"I'll wake you," Luna offered brightly. "Mornings are the best time of the day. It's full of hope."

"I've always like evenings," Blaise said slowly. "It closes the day off, drawing a veil over everything that has happened, in preparation for a new day."

"Do you think that they'll allow us to continue to spend evenings here?" Padma asked softly.

"Yes," Blaise replied instantly. "Because it's what Harry wants – a group of people from all the houses wanting to spend time together. Hopefully, Ginny and Harry will join us as well."

Saturday dawned slowly over the horizon, as Lavender and Parvati entered the fifth year girls' dorm and sneaked over to Ginny's bed.

"I wish I had that skin and hair combination," Lavender complained.

Oh shush," Parvati grinned. "Ginny," she called.

"Huh?" she asked, opening her eyes.

"Come on," Lavender said. "It's time for you to get ready for the party."

"What? Already?" Ginny asked, still not awake.

"Yep," Parvati agreed. "Come on."

Ginny sighed and rolled out of bed, still in the long t-shirt she slept in. The fact it was Harry's was fairly obvious.

She looked at her watch. "It's only six o'clock!" she complained. "I'm going back to bed."

"No, you're not," Lavender said, grabbing one hand.

"You're coming with us," Parvati added. "We've got one hell of a surprise for you."

"But..."

"No buts!"

From: Blaise Zabini

To: Professor Dumbledore

Subject: Harry and Ginny

Good Morning, Headmaster.

I was wondering if you could do us a favour this morning. We've kidnapped Ginny, and we are planning on giving her a full makeover before the picnic today.

Would you please keep Harry busy all morning? We don't want him to suspect anything.

Sincerely,

Blaise Zabini, on behalf of Harry's Girls – Susan, Padma, Parvati, Lavender, and Luna

From: Albus

To: Harry

Bcc: Harry's Girls

Subject: This morning

Harry, when you wake up, can you please join me for breakfast this morning? I'll be in my office and would like to be brought up to date with your plans.

Thanks,

A.

--
Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot and Chairman of the International Confederation

From: Susan

To: Ron Weasley

Subject: Harry

Ron, we're giving Ginny a bit of a makeover this morning. We've already arranged for Harry to be distracted with Professor Dumbledore this morning.

When Harry gets in the shower, can you go into his trunk and pull out the khaki trousers and deep green shirt that will be on your left and leave them on his bed?

Thanks,

Susan – on behalf of the others.

From: A tired Ron who is going back to sleep.

To: Susan Bones

Subject: Re: Harry

No problem.

R.

Harry woke, sitting up instantly, and frowned. He looked at his watch, and he thought of going for a workout. A large yawn later, he realised that he needed more sleep, so he lay back down, and rolled over.

He was asleep again in seconds.

“Where are we going?” Ginny asked. “And you could have let me put some socks on; it’s bloody cold.”

“Quiet, wimp,” Parvati sighed. “We’re going to Harry’s rooms.”

Ginny instantly perked up. “Oh, why didn’t you just say so?”

“We’re here,” Parvati said, saying the password.

Ginny walked in; glad it had carpeting for her bare feet, she stopped dead in her tracks. “Oh. Wow,” she said breathlessly.

“Thank you,” Padma said from a couch opposite her. “We did put some work in.”

“It looks amazing,” Ginny breathed. The ceiling looked almost transparent, as it matched what she could see outside.

“We know you both love to fly,” Blaise said softly. “So we made the ceiling reflect what it’s really like outside.”

“This is huge!”

“We know,” Susan agreed. “It was normal size to start with, but Dobby was horrified with the idea of Harry living in it like that, so he got some of the other house-elves to help reshape it.”

“Come and look at this,” Luna called.

Ginny walked over and gasped with pleasure as she looked out at the sun slowly rising over the Quidditch pitch. The balcony looked like it could support a full party.

“This is amazing,” Ginny said again.

“You think Harry will like it?” Lavender asked.

“Like it? He’ll love it!” Ginny said firmly.

“Go and see your bedroom,” Susan said.

“Okay,” Ginny said, and then stopped, blushing. “You mean Harry’s bedroom?”

“Yeah, right,” Blaise snorted. “You’re little red riding hood, and Harry’s a big bad wolf. Who are you kidding? I don’t think anyone in the school expects you to spend time away from here.”

“Oh,” Ginny said and walked into the bedroom. She instantly fell completely in love with it. From the ceiling that was enchanted, to the gloriously huge four poster bed, to the matching colours.

“Right, enough gaping,” Lavender said firmly. “Go get in the shower and make sure you wash your hair!”

“Okay,” Ginny said slowly and walked into the bathroom. She looked around and decided that the girls had been right. She was moving in here. She stripped off Harry’s t-shirt and her knickers, and played with the knobs. She soon had a powerful, hot shower running, and stepped into it, letting the water wake her up completely.

There were several bottles to one side; obviously Lavender and Parvati had borrowed them from her cupboard. With a shrug, she started to wash her hair, sighing a little at just how long it took to get it completely clean.

Fifteen minutes later, she finished rinsing the conditioner out and stepped out of the shower. Her t-shirt had vanished, and all that was left was a

pair of high-cut knickers, a sleeveless t-shirt, and a towelling robe. She dressed quickly and wrapped a towel around her hair.

"Okay," Lavender said. "I think we'll start with the hair."

"I'll do that," Padma said. "I've got some new drying charms that will help."

"And I've got a curling charm that will make her hair look amazing," Susan announced.

"Okay, you two get to work. Sit down, Ginny," Parvati said, pointing to a chair in the middle of the room. "And take that robe off."

"Why?" Ginny asked.

"No questions," Lavender said firmly. "Your problem is that you grew up with too many boys, and not nearly enough girls. When was the last time you shaved your legs?"

"A few days ago," Ginny said, blushing furiously.

"More like a week," Lavender said thoughtfully. "But never mind, we're going to wax your legs."

"You're going to do what?" Ginny asked.

"Wax them. Well, actually it's a potion, but that's hardly the point."

"What does it do?"

"It rips the hair out, and don't worry," Parvati said cheerfully, bringing over a small cauldron, "it's got some anti-inflammatory stuff in it as well, so your legs will look perfect."

"Won't that hurt?"

"Not at all," Lavender promised. "And don't move, Blaise and Luna are going to do your nails."

"You know its bad when I know more about being a girl than you do, Ginny," Luna smirked. "I've been one of the make-up experts for the Quibbler for years."

"You were one of them?" Padma asked, surprised.

"Yep," Luna smiled. "I was so tempted to make it crazy, but I would have felt guilty if someone had actually followed the advice and got hurt, so I used a penname."

"There were some good articles in that. Who were you?"

"Selene," Luna replied.

"Oh, clever," Padma said.

"Why is it clever?" Blaise asked, as she pulled a chair over to Ginny.

"Luna is the Roman goddess of the moon. Selene is the Greek goddess of the moon."

"That *is* clever," Blaise agreed. "Pass me the clippers."

Ginny felt a little bewildered as everyone started to work on her. She could feel Padma and Susan doing something with her hair, and she realised she had no chance of escaping, so she sighed softly and relaxed. It did feel good to have people paying so much attention to her. Parvati seemed to be making sure her legs were very dry, applying talcum powder to them as well.

She almost fell asleep as she closed her eyes and relaxed further. She trusted them completely, even if she did feel like it was a waste of time.

She felt something on her leg, and looked down as Parvati spread a lime green concoction in a strip by her right knee. Lavender then applied a small cotton strip to it and smiled cheerfully at her. The girl grabbed the end of the strip and pulled it up her leg, hard.

Ginny screamed, and then swore violently and repeatedly, pulling in every swearword she'd ever heard her brothers use.

"Do you kiss Harry with that mouth?" Susan asked.

"It bloody hurt!" Ginny complained.

"It wasn't that bad," Lavender said dryly. "Show some of that Gryffindor courage!"

"You said it wouldn't hurt!"

"I lied," Lavender admitted with a small shrug. "Now sit down, and don't move, you'll ruin the work."

"But—"

“—Sit still, Ginny,” Blaise said firmly, “and let me work your cuticles.”

Ginny sighed and settled back down on to the chair. *Harry had better bloody appreciate what I'm going through for him*, she thought.

Harry rolled out of bed, and stretched. Absently, he padded into the shower. A few minutes under the hot needle-like stream and he felt much more awake. It only took him a second to wash his hair.

He wrapped a towel around his waist and walked over to the sink. He needed a shave, so he looked around quickly. As no one was around, he moved his hand to his face and cast a spell under his breath. All the hair around his face and neck fell painlessly into the bowl below, leaving him completely clean shaven.

He ran a comb through his hair quickly and brushed his teeth.

He gave himself another quick look in the mirror, and then walked back into the boys' dorm.

“If you walk like that to breakfast, I guarantee that you'll make every girl in Hogwarts' year,” Dean said dryly.

Harry shot him a foul look. “Don't you start,” he muttered. He was a little surprised to see some clothes laid out for him. With a shrug, he put on some deodorant and got dressed, finishing the outfit with some brown boots. He glanced outside and saw that it was going to be a nice day, so he carefully rolled up his sleeves, and undid the top two buttons of his shirt.

“Never mind the girls,” Seamus grinned. “I'm thinking of jumping you myself.”

Harry grabbed his pillow and heaved it at the Irish boy, hitting him squarely.

“Ron,” Harry said. “I've got breakfast with Dumbledore; if you see Ginny, will you tell her I'll catch up with her when I can? Oh, and we invited all your brothers to come along.”

“Yeah, they Mmailed me last night,” Ron said. “I'll tell Ginny.”

“Thanks.”

“Okay,” Blaise asked. “What colour are we going to do her fingernails?”

“Leave them clear, I think, just make them shiny,” Luna said. “She doesn't need any enhancement.” The blonde then picked up Ginny's hand and slapped her wrist, hard.

“What did you do that for?” Ginny asked, looking bewildered.

“It's a warning,” Luna said calmly. “Next time you start to bite your nails, you'll remember that and stop. We don't want our work here ruined because you've got a nervous habit.”

“I'm finished,” Blaise said after a few more minutes.

“We are as well,” Padma said.

“And with this,” Lavender said, ripping of another strip. “We're done as well.”

“Another minute here,” Luna sighed. “I've just finished repairing teeth damage.”

Ginny felt herself blushing.

“Right,” Lavender said. “I'll get her clothes for the day.” She vanished out of sight and returned a second later with a pile of carefully folded clothes.

“Finished,” Luna announced. She pulled out her wand from behind her ear, and cast a charm at the nails. “There we go – that will last all day. As long as you don't bite them.”

“I won't,” Ginny promised fervently.

“Get dressed then,” Parvati said.

Ginny nodded and sat up, stretching hard. She turned her back to the girls and pulled on the white bra that was on top of the pile. It wasn't one of hers because she'd never had something this soft and light. She pulled on the button-up blouse next, wondering if it had been chosen so as to not mess up her hair. She bent and pulled on the white ankle socks next, and then looked at the skirt provided.

“I can't wear this to a picnic,” she complained. “Everyone will be able to see up it when I sit down.”

“Are you, or are you not, a witch?” Lavender sighed. “You're going to put an Obfuscation charm on the bottom, so that no one can see up it.”

Ginny paused. “Can we make that charm specific?”

What do you mean?"

She grinned wickedly. "I wouldn't mind Harry being able to see up it," she said innocently.

Lavender faked a tear and a sniff. "I'm so proud of her," she said as she turned to the others. "She's growing up and learning to tease her man properly."

"I'm not teasing, really," Ginny said. "I'd quite like the chance to get him alone and awake long enough for him to see if he can find my limits."

"Do you have any?" Blaise snorted.

"Of course not," Ginny grinned. "But he doesn't know that. And if I did, by the time he's worked up the courage to get that far, I'll be over them anyway."

"Yes," Padma interrupted before the conversation could deteriorate any further. "We can make the charm so that Harry can see."

Ginny smiled and pulled on the tight denim skirt and then the white trainers. "So," she said brightly, as she turned to the others. "How do I look?"

Blaise whistled slowly. "Like it's a good job that Harry is the most powerful bloke in the school, or he'd spend the entire day fighting the other boys off."

"Here's the deal," Parvati said firmly. "Obviously, Hermione is going to be your Maid of Honour at your wedding. You make us all Bridesmaids, and we'll do this again the morning you get ready." She moved a large mirror over, so Ginny could see herself for the first time.

She looked at herself, and gasped. "Deal," she said instantly. "And you two can design my dress as well, and Harry's tux. We'll let you do a few publicity shots of us."

"Are you sure?" Parvati gasped, looking shocked.

"Definitely," Ginny smiled.

"All right!" Lavender shouted, jumping at Parvati and dancing her around the room.

"Thank you," Ginny said softly, looking at the other girls.

"You're welcome," Susan said. "Now, come and eat some breakfast, before we have to go outside."

"Ginny," Hermione called. "Can we have a word with you?"

"Sure," Ginny said.

"In private," Hermione said apologetically to the others.

"We'll see you outside," Susan said, shepherding the others away.

"What's up?" Ginny asked.

"Come into the library," Ron suggested. As they entered, he quickly put up a privacy spell.

"I've had an idea," Hermione said. "We spent most of yesterday trying to find that charm, without much luck, when it suddenly occurred to me that we don't need it."

"We don't?" Ginny asked, looking confused.

"No," Hermione agreed. "What we do is give Harry a fake charm, and tell him that he has to do it at midnight when Remus is in full werewolf mode, and that he should be able to do it easily."

Ginny frowned. "So he'll ask the same question I'm asking. Why hasn't it been done before?"

"That's the clever bit," Hermione grinned. "We'll tell him that it's really painful, so no one had the guts to do it. He'll do it, and when he does, as it's a fake spell, he won't be hurt."

Ginny looked horrified, "Sweet Merlin, No!" she gasped. "Oh hell no! We're not doing that. No chance at all."

"Why not?" Ron demanded.

Ginny shook her head. "I've not had a chance to tell you this yet, but Harry's ability to do whatever he thinks he can do goes both ways. If he thinks he can't do something, he won't. It's because he's got a highly suggestible subconscious. What do you think would happen if you suggested a curse would be painful?"

Ron and Hermione both paled dramatically.

it would be worse than the Cruciatus,” Ginny said for them.

“Well, can’t we get him to do it without the pain?” Ron asked.

Ginny shook her head again. “I’m not willing to use that anymore, and I’m going to be working with Harry to see if we can find a way of controlling it. Look, I love Remus as much as anyone and I know he would agree that if there was a chance of permanent damage to Harry, he wouldn’t go through with it. We need to find the correct charm and let Harry perform that, so that we know what the consequences will be.”

Hermione nodded slowly, and started to smile. “I think I’m pleased,” she said softly, “because it did seem close to cheating.”

Ron laughed softly, and hugged Hermione with one hand. “In that case, let’s get to the party.”

From: HJP

To: The forgetful one

Subject: The Quibbler

Luna,

What’s your father’s Mmail address? I think he might be interested in a little project we are organising on Monday.

H

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

From: Why am I forgetful?

To: The boy who makes curious comments

Subject: Re: The Quibbler

Attachment: Dadsaddress.mml

Dad’s address is attached.

Luna

--
The Truth Is Out There

From: Harry

To: Luna

Subject: Why

I was referring to your little performance in the D.A....

Thanks for the Mmail address.

Harry

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

From: Harry Potter

To: Mr Lovegood

Subject: Tip-off

You might want to think about having a cameraman and a reporter available on Monday lunchtime, perhaps having lunch at the Three Broomsticks.

H

--

From: Editor in Chief, Quibbler

To: The Boy Who Could Help Find The Mysterious Crockells

Subject: Re Tip-off

Why thank you, young man.

It will be a pleasure to take a working lunch. I appreciate it.

If you ever want a new pet, I know where you can get an Ashwinder.

L.

“Good morning,” Harry said, as he walked into the Headmaster’s office.

“Morning, Harry,” Albus replied. “I hear you had a busy day yesterday?”

“A little,” Harry agreed and launched into an edited version of what he had done.

“Interesting,” Albus said, as he finished. “You seem to be intent on getting this over and done with.”

Harry nodded. “I’m still working out the final details,” he admitted. “But the longer this goes on, the longer Voldemort has to grow in strength and power. We’re close to being ready.”

“Can I ask what you intend on doing?”

Harry frowned. “I’m going to get Voldemort to do something remarkably stupid, but I can’t tell you what at the moment. It’s a little ironic, but I finally understand why you couldn’t tell me everything. Sometimes, secrets aren’t yours to share.”

Albus smiled faintly. “And I think I now understand your frustration at not being told everything.”

“Well, destroying your own office probably wouldn’t get you very far,” Harry said with a smile. “As much fun as it is.”

Albus laughed merrily. “It’s very unusual for me not to know everything, Harry,” he admitted. “It is a little disconcerting.”

Harry nodded. “But I think that’s enough talk for today. I promised Ginny that I was hers and hers alone today.”

“Quite right,” Albus agreed. “I think it’s time for us to go outside. I’ve heard some wonderful plans for today. If it goes well, I think I shall make it a regular event.”

“It’s good for the school to do something together where everyone has to make friends with other houses,” Harry agreed.

“It is, indeed. I’m afraid that, with the never-ending battle with Voldemort, I’ve rather taken my eye off the school itself.”

Harry shrugged. “It’s not really your fault. Everyone just started to believe that they had to live up to their House’s legends. It didn’t take much to remind everyone that we are all kids.”

“All?” Albus asked with a smile.

“Most of them,” Harry corrected himself, as they walked out of the school and toward the large field next to the Quidditch pitch, and paused. “Wow,” he whispered.

“I quite agree,” Albus said.

A large canvas marquee hovered in one corner of the field, covering a row of tables that looked to be heaving with food. He closed his eyes slightly and nodded as he saw the charms keeping the food fresh.

To the left of the marquee was a small tent where he could see Fred, George, Abe, and Charlie, setting up row after row of Butterbeer bottles.

Next to them, Bill, Fleur, and Tonks were setting up a stand full of Weasley Wizard Wheezes.

At a right angle to them, along the back of the pitch, was a row of chairs for the professors, and in front of them, was a large area covered in a humongous multi coloured blanket.

He could see Draco’s blond hair in the distance and was a little surprised to see him sitting next to Terry Boot, very close to Terry in fact.

In front of that was a grassy area where Seamus and Dean were walking around, marking out specific areas with strokes of their wands.

Above everything hovered thousands of small lights that would provide illumination for when it started to go dark.

"I think, Harry," Dumbledore said softly, "that you are right. When the school works together, there is nothing that we can't do."

Harry nodded, and turned, and froze. He tried to blink, to do anything. He could hear someone telling him to breathe, and it seemed like a good idea. He shook his head, trying to clear it, but couldn't.

Ginny was walking toward him. No, she was floating toward him because no one who looked like that would ever need to walk.

Her long, vibrant red hair had been curled slightly, and the curls tumbled down over her shoulder, the vivid red contrasting sharply with the white blouse she was wearing. He let his eyes drift downwards, over her hips, and over the denim skirt she was wearing. It came to mid thigh and exposed a lot of leg that he really wanted to start exploring. An exceptionally cute pair of socks and trainers finished her look.

His eyes slid back up her slowly, burning everything into his mind as she walked closer. He looked at her hands, and noticed that her nails seemed to be shining, before he went back up to her face.

Her lips were smiling at him, and her skin looked perfect in the bright, early morning sunshine. He met her eyes and finally managed to breathe.

"Hey," Bill said quietly. "The guests of honour have just arrived."

Tonks let out a slow wolf whistle. "Charlie, if I wasn't in love with you, and scared of Ginny, I'd be all over him like a rash."

"No worries," Charlie said back, a grin on his face. "I'd probably end up fighting you for him as well."

Bill shook his head slowly. "I really didn't need to hear that," he said, as he saw what appeared to be most of the school start to fill up the grass.

"And here comes Ginny," Tonks said. "And I want to hear what they say to each other," she finished, vaulting over the table.

Bill took one look at his sister and joined Tonks, striding over the grass, aware that Fleur was right beside him.

"Harry?" They heard professor Dumbledore say. "Breathe, Harry."

"Is it wrong to think that your sister looks hot?" Charlie asked under his breath.

"Yes," Bill said. "But she does."

"We're not the only one to think so," Charlie pointed out, nodding his head toward the general direction of the other students.

Bill looked around him and sighed. Some of the students were looking at Ginny like she was a Veela. "We'll have to remind them that Ginny's off limits," he said to Charlie.

Harry seemed to suddenly come back to life, and he took a step toward Ginny, before he paused, and turned, looking at the students. The Boy-Who-Lived seemed to snarl suddenly, releasing a focused burst of magic.

For a second, Bill was afraid, as if he'd just seen inside a tomb full of the worst curses imaginable. He looked around again and laughed softly. "Okay, maybe we won't," he said to Charlie. "I think that Harry's just reminded everyone that Ginny's his."

"And I think that Ginny won't take long to remind everyone that he's hers," Charlie smirked.

They stopped, close enough to listen in, as Ginny and Harry walked toward each other.

"Ever had the feeling that Voldemort could attack at the moment, and they wouldn't notice?" Tonks asked in a stage whisper.

Bill laughed, hearing Fleur giggle next to him.

As Harry and Ginny got closer to each other, they stopped barely a foot apart. Harry reached up, softly touching her face, running his fingers gently over her cheek.

"Every time I see you," he whispered. "I fall in love with you a little bit more. At the moment, I can hardly believe that you exist, let alone that you are in love with me. It makes everything I do and everything I still have to do worthwhile, just to see a smile on your face, just to see that look you give me when you're proud of me. You haunt my days and inhabit my dreams, Ginny, and I thank Merlin every day that I have you in my life."

Bill turned slightly to find tears running down Fleur's cheek. He could hear Tonks sniffing to the other side and exchanged a guilty look with Charlie. He almost wished that he hadn't been listening in on such a private moment. He looked up at Dumbledore and was a little surprised to see the Headmaster with a similar expression of regret on his face.

"Oh, Harry," Ginny breathed softly. "I'm very real, and you've never, ever, let me down. You've saved my life and saved my soul. I'll be in your days for the rest of time."

Bill suddenly swallowed hard and brushed at his cheek. It must have been one of the Weasley Wheezes, he thought to himself.

Harry slowly leant forward and kissed Ginny with such tenderness and love, that Bill turned on his heel, no longer wanting to intrude.

He glanced to his side to see Charlie smiling crookedly at him. "How are we going to apologise?" he mouthed.

"No clue," Charlie mouthed back.

"So," Ginny said brightly, breaking the mood. "Is everyone here?"

"I think so," Harry said. "Even Snape's out in the sun."

Ginny laughed. "You should say a few words, thanking everyone for coming," she suggested to Harry.

Harry nodded and strolled forward with her, so that they were in front of the entire school. "Thank you all for coming," he said.

Bill was a little surprised, as he hadn't even seen Harry cast the Sonorous spell. "I can't tell you just how impressed we are at what you've done, this place looks amazing. You've all worked incredibly hard, and it shows."

Bill found himself joining in the cheers from the students.

"Today is a day for us to have fun," Harry continued. "It's a day for us to refocus, and a day for us to remember what we are fighting for. And this is the perfect way to do it.

"Look around you, look at your friends and house mates, the people in the same year as you. Look at the Professors and people you've seen and don't know.

"Every single one of you is smiling, is relaxed, and is ready to have fun without the threat of danger.

"This is the reason. *This* is it. This is what the Death Munchers want to take away from us, and this is what we are fighting to keep. For one day, we are going to celebrate, and every laugh we have, every smile we break, every look we share will be a direct response to those who don't want us to be able to do this. This is the day we affirm our independence and gather around us the energy we need to fight.

"The end is coming, and when it does, we will be ready. We will have prepared; we will have the ability. And in the end, when the dust has cleared, we will stand triumphant on the field of victory, and we will have shown the world that Hogwarts is the finest Wizarding School there is!"

Bill roared his approval, his eyes locked on Harry and Ginny. For a second, they appeared to be more than human. He shook himself, and the feeling vanished, leaving behind a sense of pride that he knew them both, that he was related to one and would soon be related to the other. He could hear Fleur screaming her agreement next to him, and as he looked around, he even saw the Professors at the back on their feet with the students, and he realised just why everyone was willing to follow Harry.

The boy was a leader; purely and simply a leader. He would follow Harry wherever the boy went, and the feeling of hope grew inside him, and before he knew it, he was screaming again.

Harry and Ginny stood still for a minute, and then Harry raised his hand, stopping the cheering as effectively as a conductor controls an orchestra. "So, let's get this party started. Dean? Seamus?"

The two boys moved to the front and talked to Harry quietly.

Harry nodded and waved his hand. A piece of Mmail paper appeared in front of him. He appeared to think for a second, and then the paper started to duplicate, the original vanishing as it duplicated.

All around the field, students and professors' Mmail notification alerts went off.

Bill looked down, as his own went off, and he cast a spell to read it.

From: Harry

To: Gamma Team

Subject: Teams

Congratulations, you have been selected to represent Gamma Team in today's competitions.

The teams have been selected randomly, and each team will have members from all years.

To add an element of competition, each member of the winning team will win house points for the students and bottles of wine for the adults.

Good luck, and remember to have fun.

HJP

--
Audaces fortuna juvat"

"I'm in Gamma," he said.

"Delta," Charlie smiled.

“Alpha,” Fleur added.

“Beta,” Tonks finished.

“I wonder what team Harry and Ginny are in,” he mused.

“You should all have received your team notification,” Harry’s enhanced voice said over the chatter. “We’ll have our first game in half an hour. Before then, feel free to have a drink; for one day only, the drinks will be free thanks to our sponsors, Honest Abe’s Original Butterbeer.”

There was another, smaller, cheer as the students started to walk toward the tables.

“We better get back there,” Bill said. “They’re going to need our help!”

“Damn right,” Charlie said, and started to jog toward the table.

He took Fleur’s hand, and walked fast, aware that his elegant, French girlfriend would never jog.

“Can Harry Potter and Professor Dumbledore please join us at the front?” Dean’s enhanced voice rang out over the crowd.

Harry, a surprised look on his face, lightly kissed Ginny and walked to the front.

“Now,” Seamus shouted, his own voice under a sonorous spell. “Professor Dumbledore and Harry are going to be our judges. As a lot of today’s competitions are magical, it’s not really fair if any one team has the two most powerful and skilled magic users in their group.

“But,” and Seamus paused and shot a grin to the crowd, “it’s hardly fair if they get to watch us making fools of ourselves, and not do so themselves, is it?”

“No!” roared the students. Harry couldn’t help laughing, especially as he saw Sirius and Juanita shouting along with them.

“So,” Dean continued. “We thought that the first game would be a bit of fun between Harry and the Headmaster. It’s a little like Muggle football, in that they have to get the ball in their opponent’s net. But,” and he paused dramatically. “The only rule is that they are not allowed to move. It must be magic only. To adjudicate, we have the other non-combatant for the day, Abe Dumbledore.”

Harry laughed softly. “So, are you ready to get beaten?” he asked Albus, knowing that his role was to be the young upstart.

“Beaten? I don’t think so. I believe I can still teach you a thing or two, you young whipper-snapper,” The Headmaster replied jovially.

Harry looked around and then blinked as he saw a flash of white. He gulped, realised he could see straight up Ginny’s skirt as she sat in front of him. “Excuse me for one moment,” he croaked and jogged over to Ginny.

“You’re flashing everyone,” he whispered, as he bent over next to her.

“It’s a charm, Harry,” she whispered back, sounding amused. “I’m flashing you alone; no one else can see anything.”

Harry gulped, “How am I supposed to stand up straight now?”

“Umbridge in a bikini?”

“Witch,” Harry groaned.

“Just enjoy it,” Ginny smiled.

Harry shook his head and tried to think of Umbridge in a bikini. Unfortunately, bright white knickers kept drowning her out.

“Ready?” Abe asked.

Harry nodded and tried to focus on the game. Thankfully, he noticed Ginny switch positions, and he realised could concentrate on the game.

“The rules are simple. You’re not allowed to attack each other, only the ball. You’re not allowed to build any permanent structures, and anything you create must be destroyed within five seconds. Apart from that, anything goes.” Abe held up a large white ball. “Ready? Set! Go!”

There was a large cheer as the ball flew into the air. A bat appeared next to it, and swiped the ball toward Harry’s goal.

Harry threw up his hand, trying to take control of the ball.

“Should I have told you that the ball is charmed to resist direct magic?” Abe’s voice rang out.

“Yes,” Harry shouted back, as he created his own bat and slammed the ball back. With a wave of his hand, he made the bat vanish and started to plan ways of winning.

“Whoops,” Abe said, to chuckles from the watching students. “I should also have said its best out of three.”

A large plant suddenly grew out of the ground and caught the ball it its long branches. The plant bent all the way backwards and whipped forward fast, throwing the ball back toward Harry's goal faster than he could see. He created another bat, only to misjudge it slightly. The ball sliced down and bounced into his goal.

He swore under his breath and then grinned as he saw Albus doing a small dance on the spot, before raising his fists in victory, extending the index and little finger of each hand.

He laughed as he heard Dean exclaim in disbelief, "Dumbledore threw up the horns!"

"Round two; if Albus gets this one in, he wins," Abe shouted, throwing the ball into the air.

Harry swished his hands in front of him, creating a small winged creature. The creature grabbed the ball, and flew toward the goal. He counted to five, then made the creature vanish, letting the ball continue on its path to Albus' goal.

A second plant appeared, but Harry was ready this time. As the plant bent backwards, an axe flew through the air, slicing through the branch. The ball bounced down and into Albus' goal.

Harry smiled wildly, and threw a grin at Ginny. The midday heat was starting to get to him, and he wished he wasn't wearing such a heavy shirt. He absently undid it and threw it toward Ginny.

He wondered exactly why Ginny felt the need to stand for a second, and stare at the students behind her.

He shrugged, and wondered how Dumbledore was able to stay in his full robes.

"Built-in cooling charm," Albus called over, obviously interpreting his envious look.

"Final ball, gentlemen."

Now that they had both got the hang of the game it was a more even match, as all sorts of objects flickered in and out of existence, as they fought over the white ball.

Harry managed to get the ball to fly toward his target when Albus raised his hands high, causing the ground itself to rise, protecting the goal.

The ground returned, and a ball of fire seemed to circle the ball, firing it toward Harry's goal. He reached out with one hand toward the lake and pulled a couple of hundred gallons back, using it to douse the ball, throwing it randomly into the air. Using the elements had given him an idea, though.

He started to move around the grass, twisting. He put his hands out and started to hover, twisting faster and faster.

With a yell, he suddenly released a tornado of air that caught the ball and travelled straight at the goal.

Dumbledore threw both his hands forward, and a burst of pure magic knocked the ball off track, sending it spiralling into the sky, before another burst sent it back at Harry.

He grinned; he really couldn't remember the last time he had had so much fun. He sunk to his knees and raised his hands. With a dramatic pause, he brought them both down, jumping to his feet at the same time. Two hundred new balls appeared around the original, all illusions, next to them, two hundred bats sent them in different directions.

Albus worked faster than Harry would have thought, casting wave after wave of spells that made the illusions vanish.

Harry sent five directly at him while absently kicking the genuine ball along the ground.

Albus, looking up, defeated the balls, not noticing the one trickling along the ground, until it crossed the goal line.

"Goal," Abe yelled. "Harry Potter wins!"

A second later, Harry found an excited red-haired witch kissing him enthusiastically. "That was brilliant!" she yelled. The cheers from the watching students seemed to agree with her.

Harry felt himself blushing and walked over with Ginny to his headmaster. "Good game," he said loudly, offering his hand.

"Very good game," Albus agreed, shaking his hand enthusiastically. "I've not had as much fun in many years. We shall have to have a rematch next year."

"Absolutely," Harry grinned and pulled the older man in for a quick hug.

"Well," Dean's voice called out over the noise. "I don't think anyone quite expected that display of magic. I'd like to thank Harry Potter and our headmaster, Albus Dumbledore, for starting off the day in style. The next game will be between Alpha team and Delta team, and will start in an hour. Lavender, Parvati, Mrs Weasley, and the Hogwarts house-elves have slaved hard, and now it's time for us to enjoy their efforts. The charms have been removed from the food, so everyone grab a plate, some food, and tuck in!"

"We're going to do this in order," Lavender's voice rang out. "There is more than enough food for everyone, so don't worry if you're last. Alpha Team, you're first!"

Harry took his shirt back from Ginny and pulled it back on, not bothering to do that buttons up, as he was still pretty hot. They walked, hand in hand, and sat next to Ginny's parents, Percy, Penelope, Sirius, Remus, and Juanita.

"That was amazing," Sirius grinned happily. "That last move was brilliant, you sneaky little bugger."

Harry smiled, as Ginny sat comfortably in his lap. "It was a lot of fun," he smiled. "Did you know I was going to be doing that?" he asked Ginny.

"Nope," she said, kissing him on the side of the face. "It was good to watch, though. Even if I did have to remind certain witches and wizards that you belong to me."

"Possessive, aren't we," he teased.

"Very," she agreed. "Are you having a good time?" she asked her parents.

"We are," Arthur said cheerfully. "It's good to see all the family here, although most of them are working with Fred and George. It looks like the new drink is going to be a success."

"We hope so," Harry agreed. "How did the curse hunting go yesterday?"

"A few leads," Remus said with a shrug. "But nothing concrete."

"I've assigned Fleur and Bill to work on it full time for the next few weeks," Harry said casually.

"You have?" Remus asked.

"Yeah, it's important that we approach it seriously. And those two have a lot of experience in curse breaking."

"Thank you," Remus said softly.

Harry shrugged. "What about you, Juanita, having a good time?"

"I'm a little out of my depth," she smiled. "You're not like any wizard I ever saw back home. They could do little things, but what you were doing..."

"Percy, Penelope, are you enjoying the day?" Harry asked.

"We are, undoubtedly, having a truly splendid time. The entertainment has been suitably entertaining so far, and I will admit to having a little anticipation toward participating in the games myself."

Harry smiled warmly at Percy, pleased that the once stuffy Weasley was more willing to be himself these days. He might still talk formally, but Harry suspected that it was more to do with the company he kept at work, rather than any real desire to sound like he had a wand up his...

"It's our turn for the food," Ginny said, stopping the conversation and interrupting his thought process.

They stood as a group and walked over to the heaving tables, which were covered with every cold food imaginable. Huge bowls of salad fought for space alongside massive plates of quiche, cold chicken, and sausage rolls.

"This is amazing," Harry said, turning to Molly.

"Oh, it was nothing," she said, smiling broadly. "Lavender and Parvati arranged for most of this, I just had the odd suggestion here and there."

With their plates full, they sat back down again and were joined by the rest of the family.

"When's the last time we were all together like this?" Fred asked cheerfully, as Abe sat next to him.

"I don't think we ever have had everyone together like this," Ron said, as he sat down with Hermione next to Harry.

"At least, not with us all as couples," Charlie added.

"I guess we're all just one big happy Weasley family," George said with a grin.

There was a round of groans, as several people threw food at him. "That's really bad," Fred said. "I'm so proud of you."

"Hey, the rest of us are eating," Ginny protested. "Angelina, can't you hit him or something?"

"Not today," she laughed. "But if he's not a good boy, he'll regret it later."

There was a round of ribald laughter as George blushed furiously.

The afternoon passed quickly, as different games were played among the ten teams, with some personal grudges being settled in the fun and games. One of the most amusing was a relay Quidditch race that ended up with McGonagall and Snape racing each other around the field through a course of turns and dips.

In an absolutely shocking display of cheating and underhandedness, McGonagall cast a charm on Snape's broom, causing it to go backwards.

Despite Snape's fervent protests, his appeal for a rematch went unheeded, as, after a quick conversation between the judges, it was decided that nowhere in the rules was sabotaging your opponent's broom forbidden, and Epsilon team got another ten points.

Ginny, in Zeta team, gathered her team together. The final contest before the barbeque was a magical dodge ball contest. In a series of closely run matches, her team was playing Severus' team in the final. The winner of the match would be crowned the champion. She wanted to win, not for the points, but for the kisses she was going to claim from Harry as her reward.

"Okay, listen up," she said. "First and Second years, I want you to protect the older years. Your job is to catch or deflect everything that comes toward us. Third and Fourth years, your job is to get the balls to the Fifth, Six, and Seven years. Blaise, you're concentrating on Lavender and Parvati. Snape's mine. Everyone know what they are doing?"

"Yes, Ginny," her team said, looking excited.

"Remember," Ginny said firmly. "All I ask is that you try your best if you do, we might be defeated, but we will never be beaten. And the chances are, we will win. Now, as much as Professor Snape has improved recently, this is our chance for a little payback for all the years he was a git. Now, are you ready?"

"Yes!" her team yelled.

"Then let's get 'em!"

They spread out and approached the other team, who looked as fired up as hers were. It was almost bizarre to think that Severus would be able to motivate people, but as he had proved earlier, when his team had knocked out McGonagall's, he certainly could.

She was pretty sure that Harry had not made the teams up randomly, and that she'd been given a bit of a handicap. Hers was the only group without a Professor, and without any of her family in it. All it had done was made her more determined that they would win, and she'd played on their underdog status – blithely ignoring the nagging voice that said any team with both her and Blaise in it was not going to be an underdog.

"Ready?" Abe, who had decided he liked being a referee more than serving Butterbeer, shouted.

Ginny held up her hand and pulled her hair back into a ponytail, mentally apologising to her friends for ruining her hairdo. She turned, and undid her shirt, before tying the tails into a knot under her breasts. She stretched a little and wished her skirt was a little less restrictive when she felt it give slightly. She shot a look at Harry, who mouthed, 'Good luck,' to her.

She blew him a kiss and made a mental note to give him a firm thank you for transfiguring her skirt so subtly.

"Stop!" Fred yelled, suddenly running into the middle of the pitch with George.

"What is it?" Abe asked.

Ginny spotted Harry stalking forward, looking around warily for threats.

"We're taking bets on the outcome, one bet per person. Seven to two on Snape, two to one on Ginny."

She laughed softly as a storm of people shouted out small amounts of money. Bill, Charlie and her parents appeared next to George, taking all the bets down on parchment.

"Any more bets?" George asked, as the noise level lowered.

"100 Galleons on Professor Snape," Dumbledore said firmly.

"We can't cover that," Fred gasped.

"You're covered," Harry said. "I'll bet the same on Ginny with one proviso. The winner donates the money to St Mungo's."

"Agreed," Albus said loudly and walked over and shook Harry's hand.

There was a loud cheer from the students, as Abe took centre stage again.

"Are there any more interruptions?"

"Just one!" Harry yelled, jogging up to Ginny. He kissed her firmly and whispered, "I love you."

Ginny sighed happily, and just looked at him, knowing she didn't need to say anything.

He winked at her, and ran back over to his seat next to Albus.

"In that case," Abe shouted, "Let's play ball!" He waved his hands dramatically, and fifteen bright red balls took to the sky.

The game was played to the traditional Dodge Ball rules. Simply, if you were hit, you were out.

Her first and second years were doing a sterling job. The charms they used were the simplest – they just had to point and yell the word – but they were very effective at deflecting the balls at the last minute.

The third and fourth years were using Summoning charms to bring the balls nearer, passing them on to the senior students who were using a variety of charms to fire them back at their opponents.

Seeing an opportunity, Ginny ran and dived over a first year, rolling along the ground. She jumped to her feet at the end of the roll and scooped up a ball, throwing it diagonally into the air. She pointed her wand at it and fired a blast of magic, catching it at just the right angle to fly directly at Anthony Goldstein, taking the boy out.

She dashed back into the safety of the group and noticed that it was diminishing rapidly. Snape had obviously ordered his team to pick off her first and second years first, meaning the others had to spend more time defending.

She looked up at her opponents and frowned. It was going to be a close run thing, as she didn't have time to change tactics at the moment. She leaned back slightly, letting a ball fly past and got an idea. She pointed her wand at the flying ball, and locked it, before spinning, letting the ball pick up speed, before she launched it straight at Lavender.

The ball flew towards the girl's stomach, but didn't do any damage, as they had been charmed to stop an inch from the skin. Lavender groaned and dropped to the floor, crawling out of the match.

As the match continued, more of the students were hit, until there was only Ginny, Blaise, Parvati and Snape.

With a strangled curse, Blaise dodged a ball from Snape and walked right into one from Parvati.

She could hear the crowd cheering them on, shouts of support to both sides echoing around the table.

Ginny grit her teeth, determined that if she was going to do down, she was going to go down fighting – hard.

As two balls flew at her, she jumped in the air and then straightened her legs, leaning back so that the balls flew under and over her. Craning her head backward, she grabbed two of the balls with her magic, sending them on a corkscrew toward Parvati.

The Gryffindor managed to dodge the first but not the second, which left the final of the competition a one-on-one duel between Ginny and Severus Snape.

Snape immediately spun in a circle, gathering all the balls around him, before launching them one by one at Ginny.

Ginny cart-wheeled to the right, jumping straight into a flip, before diving over another ball, rolling, so that she landed on her back safely. She raised her legs and pumped them out, using the momentum to move her back onto her feet. She dived forward, catching a ball in mid-air, and used her movement to power the ball toward at Snape.

Snape jumped, vaulting the ball with ease, but the movement gave Ginny enough chance to get her bearings back and launch her own focused attack.

She quickly cast a Reversal charm on one of the balls, and launched it at herself, swiftly sending the other normal balls out with it. The non-charmed balls were moving faster, so Snape got to them first, using them to trap Ginny in place.

The Professor smirked, as he realised he had Ginny with nowhere to go. With a dramatic shake of his wand, he cast the last ball straight at Ginny.

Only, the Reversal charm did its job, and the ball flew directly back at the surprised Snape.

"And the winner is," Abe shouted. "Zeta team!"

There was a loud cheer from the students and professors, mixed with some good-natured grumbings from the students who had bet on Snape.

Ginny smiled as she bent over, trying to regain her breath. She looked up and turned to see Harry running at her full speed. She opened her arms and let him embrace her, swinging her around fast. "I knew you could do it!" he yelled.

"I didn't do it," Ginny corrected. "*We* did it," she said, nodding at her team.

"And congratulations indeed," Dumbledore said. "Thirty points to each member of Ginny's team and first choice of the food at the barbeque."

Ginny slid from Harry's arms and walked over to her team, kneeling before them. "I told you," she said softly, "that if you tried your best, it would be all that I could ask. You did better than that, and I am so proud of all of you. Every one of you played an important part in our victory, and don't ever forget it. Now, go, see your friends, and have fun!"

Her team cheered and ran off excitedly.

"Good work, Ginny," Blaise said softly, embracing the smaller girl. "You might think that it was a team effort, but in the end, a team is only as good as its leader, and we had the best."

Ginny blushed and looked down at her feet. "Do I look okay?" she hissed suddenly at Blaise. "I've ruined my hair and my blouse."

Blaise threw her head back and laughed loudly. She undid her own ponytail and smirked at Ginny. "Go over to Harry now, and ask him the same question."

"But..." Ginny started.

“No buts, go,” Blaise said firmly.

Ginny smiled, and gave Blaise a quick hug. “I couldn’t ask for a better number two,” she whispered and started to jog back to Harry.

She held out her arms to him, and he moved into them, and suddenly, she found herself on top of the Astronomy Tower.

“What are we doing here?” she asked in surprise.

“Do you have any idea what you look like?” he asked, his voice sounding lower than she remembered.

“A mess,” she said embarrassedly. “My hair’s all over the place, I’ve ruined my blouse, and mmph,” she finished, as Harry kissed her firmly.

“We’ve not got long,” he said apologetically, “But I couldn’t wait any longer to kiss you properly. You were incredible out there.” He paused and kissed her again, his hands dipping under the back of her shirt and caressing the skin.

She purred against him, definitely wanting to encourage this sort of behaviour.

“I came close to casting a blindness spell on the entire school,” he whispered against her lips. “Didn’t want them seeing how damn sexy you looked.”

“Sexy?” Ginny squeaked, and then cursed herself. Squeaking wasn’t a good way of appearing attractive.

“Oh yeah,” Harry groaned, kissing her again. “I ended up just casting the same charm you used on your skirt on your blouse. You were bouncing,” he said reverently, as his hands slid down and lifted her against him.

“Oh,” Ginny said, feeling the hard rock of the wall of the tower against her back. “So you looked yourself?”

“Damn right,” Harry groaned. “You’ve been driving me nuts all day; I nearly lost to Albus because all I could think about was your underwear. It was impossible to sit with your parents, with you in my lap, when all I wanted to do was run my hands under that damn skirt of yours and see if your thighs are as soft as they look, and judging this contest... I didn’t even see Minerva charm Snape’s broom; because I was too busy looking at you.”

“What’s stopping you from exploring now?” Ginny demanded, tilting her head so she could kiss him a few times.

“The fact that we’re due back downstairs in a minute or two,” Harry sighed, resting his forehead against hers. “You were brilliant out there, my love. Like some sort of warrior queen from the past. You organised your troops, got them working as a team, and in the end, snatched victory from the jaws of defeat. I’m so proud of you, and so proud that I have you.”

Ginny gasped softly, suddenly feeling her eyes tear up. Hearing Harry praise her like that went straight to her heart, and the only response she could think of was to kiss him, hard, and pour her soul into him. So she did.

Eventually, to her disappointment, he broke the kiss and took a step away from her. His hand went to his pocket, and he suddenly looked nervous.

“Ginny,” he said softly, his tone suddenly serious. “I was going to do this later, but I can’t wait anymore. In the short time we’ve been together, so much has happened between us. I can hardly remember what my life was like before you launched yourself into it so dramatically.”

She suddenly found that she couldn’t breathe. Her stomach started to twist nervously, as she looked at him, having no idea what he was doing.

“I know we’re young,” he continued, “but I also know that I want to spend my life with you. So,” he pulled his hand out from his pocket, revealing a velvet lined black box. “Will you take this ring, knowing that as soon as we’re old enough, I’ll add a proper engagement ring to it, and as soon as we can afterwards, a full wedding ring? Will you take this ring, as my promise to you?”

She gaped at him, her mind stopped. She couldn’t believe what he had just said; it had been the last thing she had expected.

“Yes, Merlin, yes!” she half screamed and threw her arms around him, bursting into tears.

She felt him hold her gently, stroking her back hard. She sniffed and held out her ring finger, not knowing if he knew what finger it went on, and not willing to take the chance.

He slid the ring down her finger and smiled at her in a new way. It was possessive; even more so, as if he’d publicly claimed her now. She felt the ring tighten around her finger; she looked down at it and gasped. “It’s gorgeous,” she breathed.

“It’s a family heirloom,” Harry said softly. “When I place the other two rings on your finger, they will merge into one.”

“I love it,” Ginny said, kissing him firmly. “And I love you.”

Harry kissed her back, lingeringly, before he broke the kiss. “We’ve got to get back,” he grumbled.

“Why?” Ginny asked. “Can’t you just Apparate us to your bed, and we can continue to celebrate in private?”

“Ginny,” Harry sighed. “There is nothing in the world I’d want to do more than that. But your entire family is downstairs, as is the rest of the school, and they’re waiting for us so that they can start to eat.”

The words Ginny used to explain her thoughts on the school were strangely apt, considering her previous offer, and it put a smile on Harry’s face.

“You better not,” Harry grinned. “That sort of behaviour should be reserved for me, and me alone.”

“It is reserved for you,” she smiled. “But we’re going to have to search through that vault of yours and find you a ring as well.”

The look Harry shot her almost took her breath away.

“Come on, my love,” he said, and Apparated them away.

They appeared back with the students, near her family.

“Oh My God!” Parvati screamed loudly, attracting everyone’s attention. “What is on your hand?”

“This?” Ginny said casually, holding up her hand. “Oh, Harry just promised to marry me as soon as we’re old enough.”

Lavender squealed and grabbed her, pulling her away from Harry. Ginny looked over her shoulder to see Harry being grabbed by Charlie and hugged hard. She laughed at the look on his face, and turned back, as all of her friends, and her female family members, gathered around, demanding to hear what had happened.

Harry exhaled slowly. He’d been a little surprised by how firmly he’d been welcomed into the family – even Mr Weasley shaking his hand excitedly. He’d explained to all of them where he got the idea from and how he was planning on getting engaged to Ginny as soon as he was seventeen and marrying her after she finished school.

Even Ron had congratulated him, pointing out that they really would be brothers now, as he had hugged him.

Molly Weasley, her face blotchy from crying, had taken to hugging him at random moments, and spending others deeply ensconced with Lavender and Parvati, probably arranging his wedding.

After the distraction had subsided, and he was glad he didn’t have to talk anymore, Albus and Abe had worked together so that the picnic tables were magicked away, revealing huge barbeque pits beneath them. Another charm had set them alight, and all the Hogwarts house-elves appeared, loaded down with platters full of food, and the smell of sizzling meat had awakened the hunger of everyone there.

The sausages, burgers, and steaks, had tasted as good as they had smelt, leaving them all pleasantly full, and they spent the night in loose-knit groups, as people wandered from one to the next, talking under the thousands of lights the Prefects had organised. At the back, some of the students danced to the soft music.

“Are you sure you know what you’re doing?” Hermione asked, as she sat down next to him with Ron next to her, so that they were in a small triangle.

“I think so,” Harry said slowly. “I meant it, you know? One of the things Voldemort has been trying to do is to kill hope. He’s trying to stop us living the lives we want to live. Well, I want to live my life with Ginny, and that ring is my promise to her that I will do everything and anything I can to survive and put the other two rings on her finger. We both know that it might not happen, but fear is not a good reason to not do it.

“I had thought about doing it this evening at the end, but she looked so beautiful; she’d fought so hard to win that I realised I couldn’t wait. I can’t keep threatening the rest of the school, so this is also a statement to them, that Ginny is mine, and she will be mine for the rest of my life. And as soon as we can find a ring, I’ll be wearing one as well, so everyone will know that I belong to her, just the same.”

Hermione smiled. “I never thought that when Ginny started kissing you, it would end up like this.”

“Who would have thought that?” Harry asked.

“Not me,” Ron grinned. “I was too busy trying to protect Ginny. Of course, what I should have been doing is trying to protect you, mate. Once she got her claws into you, you had no chance.”

Harry laughed. “I wouldn’t say she had claws.”

“You’ve never been against her,” Ron smirked.

“True,” Harry nodded.

“What are you three talking about so intently?” Ginny asked, dropping firmly into Harry’s lap.

“Why you, Ms Weasley,” Harry smiled.

“Ms Weasley only till I leave school, then I’ll be Mrs Potter,” Ginny said happily.

“See,” Ron smirked. “Told you so.”

“Oh shush you,” Ginny said, exhaling.

Harry felt her snuggle deeper into his chest, so he wrapped his arms around her, holding her firmly. One by one, the rest of the Weasley family joined them, and they spent the evening talking quietly, enjoying the company.

It wasn’t for a while that Harry noticed Ginny had fallen asleep on him. Her exertions earlier had obviously worn her out. He shifted slightly, so that

she was more comfortable.

"Go and put her to bed, Harry," Molly said softly. "We're the last ones out here anyway, and it's time we went home."

Harry looked around, a little surprised to find that most of the students had already left, some still walking back to the school. Albus was talking to Dobby in one corner, and dozens of house-elves were at work, cleaning up the mess left by the students.

"I'll put Hermione to bed as well," Ron said cheerfully.

"No you won't, Ronald Weasley," Molly said firmly.

"But, you're letting Harry put Ginny to bed," Ron blurted.

"Actually I told Harry to put Ginny to bed," Molly corrected. "And I will allow you to do the same, if Hermione desires it, when you have placed a ring on her finger."

"Oh," Ron said, frowning.

"Don't even think about it," Hermione said gently. "We'll have plenty of time when we're grown up. We're just the support crew; we've not got the weight of the world on our shoulders."

"You're more than the support crew," Harry said.

"I know, Harry," Hermione said softly. "But it's the principle that counts. As much as I'd like it, I can't take the burden from you. Ginny can help you in a way I can't. You two deserve the relationship you have."

"I completely agree," Percy said, entering the conversation. "I do apologise for my earlier behaviour, Harry. There is no one else I would trust as much with my sister."

Harry shrugged and grinned at Percy. "Don't worry about it," he said. He looked down at Ginny and then turned back to the rest of the Weasleys. "Charlie, I want you to spend the time you're not with me in the library. Hermione, can you find him some good books on Occlumency? Charlie, no practising before I get there.

"Bill, Fleur, I want you to relax tomorrow morning and then meet with Hermione in the afternoon and find out where they got to in researching.

"Molly, I'd rather you started spending time at Hogwarts during the day. I don't like you being on your own at the Burrow. We've got more than enough work to go around.

"Percy, you and Penelope can help with the research tomorrow as well. On Monday, start organising the surprise inspection. I want you to take along Bill and Charlie when you go.

"Fred, George, stick with Abe tomorrow and double check everything for Monday's launch. I had a Mmail conversation with Luna earlier, and I've tipped off her dad, so that we have some press coverage for the early afternoon edition. It will set off the Prophet, so prepare to be inundated.

"Sirius, Remus, Juanita, be bloody careful. Tomorrow you're back on the trail of the Death Munchers' headquarters. If you get in trouble, let someone know instantly; we'll be there to bail you out.

Harry's face turned serious. "I don't want any of you going anywhere on your own now. Things are going to change tomorrow, and I think we'll be on the final countdown then. I can't afford to have any of you captured now, okay?"

There was a row of slightly stunned faces looking at him, but they all nodded slowly.

Harry smiled at them. "Night," he said softly. "And thanks for coming today."

He hugged Ginny a little tighter and Apparated them to her room.

"I wonder what is happening tomorrow," Fred said slowly. "I would have thought he would have said Monday when we attack the Death Munchers financially."

"Yeah," George agreed.

"With leadership comes great responsibility," the voice of Albus Dumbledore interrupted them, as he joined them, sitting down in the spot Harry had vacated. "And Harry now understands a lot more of my own behaviour over the past few years. There are times when a leader cannot tell everything. I do know that something is happening tomorrow, but I'm afraid that even I don't know what, and as much fun as idle speculation is, it will not be helpful in this case."

"We're his friends though," Ron protested.

"Indeed, you are," Dumbledore agreed. "And as his friend, you have to trust him that he is keeping secrets for a reason. You have seen yourself how he is taking the responsibility on himself, and how he is standing tall."

It was so nice to see him having fun today," Molly said, moving the conversation on with the skill of long practice.

"And to see him protecting Ginny," George smirked. "Anyone else notice that Ginny suddenly became blurry when she was playing?"

Bill sniggered. "Yeah, it was hard to miss. He wasn't exactly subtle about the Obfuscation charm he placed on her."

"But," Percy interrupted smoothly. "I do believe that you two owe him an apology."

"We do," Charlie agreed. "We're just trying to work out what you can do for the boy who already has our sister."

"Might I suggest a simple apology?" Albus asked.

"Not good enough," Bill said, wrapping an arm around Fleur. "There's got to be something that Charlie and I can do for him."

"We'll think about it," Charlie sighed. "Still, I can't wait till next Saturday now."

"The Quidditch match?" Hermione asked.

"Absolutely," Charlie enthused. "I've wanted to play Harry properly for years, and this is my chance."

"I just wish I knew who was on his team," Bill complained. He looked around and paused. "You and Remus?" he asked, looking in disbelief at Sirius.

"Yep," Sirius grinned. "And Snape. Snape was a very good chaser in his day, and Remus and I were superb beaters."

"We're going up against the Marauders!" Fred and George said together, jumping to their feet and doing a small jig.

"We said the same thing," Remus said dryly.

"So, we've got Snape and Ginny as Chasers, Harry as Seeker, and Remus and Sirius as Beaters," Bill said. "So, who's the other Chaser, and who's going to be the Keeper?"

"No idea," Sirius said promptly. "But I can't wait to find out. And you know, I wouldn't be surprised if who ever they are just happened to be someone we need around here."

The others laughed. "Well," Bill yawned. "We've all been told what to do, so I suggest we do it."

"Agreed," Percy said, standing. "It's been an immensely pleasurable day."

"And one I shall be doing again next year," Dumbledore said firmly. "It shall be an annual event. With Voldemort gone next year, I think I shall invite all the parents and make it a full day."

"Good idea," Arthur said jovially. "Those games were a lot of fun."

"Come on, dear," Molly said, taking Arthur's arm. "We'll see you tomorrow. I do hope I remember how to research."

Harry appeared in the dark of Ginny's dorm room, and he instantly cast a privacy spell around himself and Ginny's bed. The last thing he wanted to do was startle some of her roommates. He placed her on the bed gently, and lightly stroked her hair back from her face.

As gently as he could, he undid her trainers and pulled them off, along with her socks. He suddenly wished that Molly was here to help him. He knew he had to take off her bra so she'd be able to sleep comfortably, but doing it when she was asleep seemed wrong. And as much as he wanted to see what was under the bra, he really wanted to do so with her encouragement and participation.

With a sigh, he closed his eyes and did his best to transfigure her clothes into something more comfortable. He peeked, and was relieved that he seemed to have succeeded in turning her clothes into a long nightdress.

He slid her under the covers, and kissed her forehead softly.

"I love you," he whispered, and Apparated to his own bed, making a mental note to find out what was happening with his Professor's Room.

Ginny woke and stretched, and sat up suddenly. "I fell asleep?" she whispered. "Oh bugger, I fell asleep." She felt like crying. All the times she'd wanted to spend the night with Harry, and he'd even gone so far as to pre-propose to her. And then, with even her mum happy, she'd gone and bloody fallen asleep.

She looked down and blinked. Before she knew it, she was giggling. Harry had quite definitely put her to bed last night, and her future fiancée had been as noble as always, despite the obvious temptation.

Her nightgown was something she was going to have to keep, just to show her Mum. Harry might be an incredible wizard, but they had obviously found his fatal weakness – transfiguring clothes. Her skirt and shirt had been merged into one garment, and changed into something soft, although she wasn't sure what the new material actually was. She peaked down the front of the thing, and sure enough, the imprint of her bra was on the inside.

She stripped it off smoothly and folded it up, placing it neatly in her chest, before picking up one of her robes and going to have a shower.

From: Ginny

To: Mum

Subject: Last night

Morning, Mum, just wanted to let you know that my darling pre-fiancée might be the best fighter in the world, but I'm going to have to be the one fixing the clothes.

In order to protect my dignity, he transfigured my clothes into... something that was basically everything I was wearing morphed together – even my bra.

Gin

--

Audaces fortuna juvat

From: Mum

To: My pre-engaged daughter

Subject: Re: Last night

I must say that I'm pleased, if a little surprised, as I did expect him to put you to bed properly.

After you fell asleep, Harry decided that all of us should spend more time at Hogwarts. As such, I will be spending my days in the library with Bill, Charlie, and Fleur. I just hope I remember how to research.

Do you know why Harry thinks that things are going to change today?

Love,

Mum – who sees you've taken Harry's signature.

From: Ginny

To: Mum

Subject: Re[2]: Harry

I'm not surprised... we've not actually managed to get past the kissing stage yet. One of us is normally unconscious, asleep, or so busy we can't stop. It's really frustrating.

And yeah, I do know what is happening today. I can't tell you what though.

Love,

Ginny – it's his family motto – and as I'm joining his family, it's going to be mine as well.

--

Audaces fortuna juvat

From: Mum

To: My not-so-little Girl

Subject: Re[3]: Harry

What ever you do with Harry, just be careful – please.

I don't need to know what is happening today, I'm just pleased to know that he has someone he can talk to.

Love,

Mum

From: Harry Potter

To: Minerva McGonagall

Subject: This morning

Sorry to bother you on a Sunday, Minerva, but if everyone else is working today, I'm afraid that I'm going to have to coerce you as well. Can I spend the morning working on my Animagus forms with you?

Cheers,

Harry

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

From: The Deputy Headmistress of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

To: The Boy Who Took Control

Subject: Re: This morning

Attachment: directions.pmt

Morning Harry.

Somehow, I am not surprised at your request. Come to my quarters, we'll have breakfast and go over the basics of the transformation, and then we'll start to work on changing shapes.

Min.

--
yawning sleepily

From: Harry

To: My future wife

Subject: This morning

Morning, love.

I just wanted to tell you I've got an Occlumency lesson this morning I forgot about. I've then got that meeting at lunchtime. Can you keep an eye over everyone this morning, and make sure everything is going smoothly?

See if you can rope Flitwick into helping as well. I'd rather not pull in the other students yet; let them enjoy a few more days, before I set them to work.

Love you,

Harry

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

From: The Future Mrs Potter

To: Mr Potter

Subject: Re: This Morning

Harry, I'm sorry I fell asleep on you yesterday. I really wanted a decent snog session, but you felt so good, and I was so relaxed, I couldn't help it.

I'll spend the morning in the Library. Charlie can be a little distracting, as he doesn't really like studying, but I'll remind him about riding Crenth properly.

Good luck today, and don't let her get to you.

Love you more,

Ginny

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

Harry walked toward McGonagall's room slowly, whistling under his breath. He felt better than he had in ages. The day off had done him more good than he had thought, as he felt rejuvenated. Having a day where he hadn't had to worry about anything more serious than who won a competition had been wonderful, and he knew he was going to have to give Ginny a very private thank you as soon as he could think of something to do for her.

Of everything he ever been given, yesterday's peace had been the best.

He knocked on the statue that McGonagall's directions told him to, and a second later, it pulled into a recess, revealing a wooden door that swung open.

He was more than a little surprised to see his teacher was wearing Muggle clothing and had her hair down.

"I do know how to relax, Harry," she said cheerfully. "Come and sit down."

Harry nodded and followed her into a small kitchen area, where a table was set with two places. He sat down and smiled as he recognised the bottles of drink on the table.

"Fred and George were most generous," his professor said calmly. "And I managed to snag some bottles at the end of the day."

"They are expecting to get the money back from the students," Harry said with a smile.

"Judging by the reaction, I have no doubt of that at all," Minerva said dryly. "Eat, don't stand on attention."

Harry smiled and nodded, digging in.

"Changing forms, Harry, is as much mental as it is magical," Minerva started. "You're forcing your body to change into a new shape. This shape won't feel natural at first; you have sixteen years of your current shape to overcome, and after a while you will find that you are equally at home in any of your three shapes.

"The process itself is pretty simple. You fix the shape you want to change firmly in your mind, and then you use your magic to transfigure yourself into that shape. There is no spell, no incantation; it is purely internal magic.

"The first time I tried, it was after many months of studying, of working out how my magic actually works, so that I knew it well enough to be able to trust it to change my shape. You don't need that. You already know your magic much better than most wizards ever do.

"What do you feel when you use wandless magic?"

Harry swallowed the last of his egg and thought for a second. "In control," he said slowly. "It's simple, really. I kind of tell my magic what I want it to do, and it does it for me. I just have to control how much power I use, so that I am controlling the magic instead of the magic controlling me."

Minerva smiled widely. "That's exactly it, Harry. It's that relationship with magic which is the cornerstone of an Animagus' ability. Take a drink, and come with me; and we'll try a transformation."

"Already?" Harry asked, surprised.

Minerva nodded. "Think for a second, Harry. You already know how to Apparate, so that shows you can control your body and your magic, enough to transport yourself anywhere in the world. You already have your animals in your mind, so we know that you do have the talent to be an Animagus, which isn't a surprise as your father was one, and the talent is often hereditary. And you know how your magic works. So you have the key skills needed.

"When your father, Sirius, and Pettigrew became Animagi, they didn't have any of that, and they had to start from scratch. On top of that, they had to go at a pace that Pettigrew could keep up with. And he was never the strongest of wizards."

Harry nodded slowly, everything she said did make sense. And if Pettigrew could become an Animagus, then he must be able to as well.

"What do I do?" he asked, eagerly.

Minerva smiled slowly and walked into her living room. "Watch my magic, Harry, as I transform."

Harry nodded, squinting a little as he watched his Professor, slowly shrink and start to grow fur. Her transformation was much slower than he had ever seen before, but he could see the way her magic flowed around her, and into her, as she finished the transformation.

It didn't look that difficult.

"Harry," Minerva said, as she returned to her normal form. "I want you to close your eyes and find your wolf. If you need to, I can help put you back in

the trance.”

Harry shook his head, and closed his eyes. He concentrated, mentally calling for it to come out to him, and a second later, it did, bounding out of the recesses of his mind eagerly, as if it wanted to be free.

“I’ve got him,” he whispered.

“Excellent, Harry. Keep him firmly in your mind and then simply let your magic go. Become the wolf, Harry. Change yourself into it. It will hurt the first few times, but it’s nothing compared to the Cruciatus curse.”

Harry nodded and slowly released his magic. He could feel the changes as they happened around him. His fingers split, and while painful, it wasn’t as bad as he would have thought it would be. He could feel huge nails appearing in his hands, and the bones start to change shape.

He opened his eyes, and saw the room start to rise as he sunk forward; his spine changed shape, forcing him on to all fours. He opened his mouth and felt his teeth push forward painfully; he tried to yell, but his tongue grew, filling his mouth.

Suddenly, the pain stopped, and he was still. He looked around, and blinked, repeatedly. Everything was so bright and so very clear. He could see the individual weaves that made up the couch, and he could see the cat hair clearly attached to it.

He inhaled sharply and almost sneezed. He could smell the breakfast in the other room, the flowers in the window, and the faint jasmine that was coming from his professor.

He looked down at his new paws. They appeared huge to him with vicious looking claws out the front. He lifted his paw, turning it, examining it, lightly moving, until he found out how he could control them.

“Harry?” The voice was loud, too loud, and he looked around.

“Why don’t you take a few steps around?”

He nodded and moved his front paws – and almost over-balanced.

“You have to walk with all four legs,” he heard McGonagall say, and he could distinctly hear the amusement in her voice.

He tried again, stumbling a little, until it became more natural for him. It was like swimming, in a way, the movements unnatural and uncomfortable until they suddenly clicked, and his body told him exactly how it wanted to move.

Harry heard something roll on the floor behind him and turned, leaping. He growled, as he landed on it, his claws out.

“Sorry,” Minerva said, only he could tell she wasn’t sorry at all. Her voice was a lot more open to him. He growled softly at her, and looked down at the cat toy dwarfed by his paws.

He pushed it away and went back to walking around the room.

He’d never felt so powerful before, never felt like he had so much energy, like he could run all day and still be able to protect his pack and his mate.

His mate. He wanted to see his mate, but knew he couldn’t. Everything seemed a little more uncomplicated at the moment. Protect his mate, protect his pack, and stop everything that stood in his way.

He growled again, a warning growl, to anyone, everyone, in his way.

“Harry,” he heard her call again. “I want you to turn back now.”

He whined a little; he didn’t want to turn back. He liked it like this.

“Ginny isn’t a wolf, Harry,” he heard her point out, and he could hear her amusement. “Like you did before, picture yourself and let your magic do its job.”

He nodded, and found his form mentally. It was different going back; it was like putting on a pair of old jeans – comfortable and reassuring.

“Wow,” he said softly, as he stood up. He looked around and then blinked. “Where do my clothes go?”

Minerva laughed, throwing her head back. “Of all the questions you could ask, Harry. Your magic takes care of them and your glasses.”

Harry nodded. “That was amazing,” he said. “I felt so strong, like nothing could stand in my way. I didn’t want to come back.”

“We all feel like that the first time,” she agreed. “It gets easier each time, till it’s just another part of you. Tomorrow, we’ll work on your other form. Now, you must be tired, do you want a nap?”

Harry nodded again; now that she mentioned it, he was a little tired. He collapsed onto the couch he had examined earlier and gave into the urge to curl up. A second later, he was fast asleep.

To: Filius

Subject: Wolf-boy

He did it!

He did it!

He was magnificent.

Albus gave me the clue sometime ago, suggesting that I look at Harry's relationship with magic. It turns out that he already has the necessary ability. I just told him what to do, demonstrated it once, and let him do it.

He's napping on my couch now; tomorrow, we'll do his other shape.

Min

--
purring like a lawnmower

From: Philosophical Flitwick

To: Marvellous Minerva

Subject: Re: Wolf-boy

Congratulations!

What did he look like?

F.

From: Mean Min

To: Flippant Fil

Subject: Re[2]: Wolf-boy

Not going to tell you. Not going to tell you. I'm not going to spoil the surprise for anyone!

M.

--
still purring

From: Minerva

To: Albie

Subject: Harry

Albus,

Harry has successfully completed his first transformation.

M.

--
pleased purr

From: Your boss

To: Staff member

Subject: Re: Harry

And? Details please, Min.

From: You couldn't run the school without me

To: Over-opinionated boss

Subject: Re[2]: Harry

I'm not going to tell you, either. That's up to Harry.

M

--

hiss

Harry woke from his nap, feeling refreshed. He glanced at his watch and stretched, before he stood and walked into the kitchen. He smiled, "I never realised how hard professors had to work."

Minerva looked up from the homework she was marking. "Fancy doing some for me?"

"Normally, I'd love to," Harry said dryly, "but I've got an appointment."

"Of course," Minerva said, rolling her eyes playfully. "Come and see me tomorrow afternoon, and we'll do your hawk."

Harry nodded. "Thanks, for everything."

She smiled brightly at him. "One of the greatest gifts an educator can receive is a student who listens and excels. Now, get to your meeting; I've got another fifteen essays to mark."

Harry nodded and said goodbye, walking out of the room, heading toward Severus' dungeon. He knocked on the door and entered as it opened.

"Ready?" he asked.

"Quite," Severus said, a faint smile on his face.

"Nervous?"

"In a way, yes. Your first love is always special, even if things don't work out, and Bella was mine."

"I am, as well," Harry admitted. "This is the day that everything changes. If this goes right, I'll have a spy in the Inner Circle, and my plans will almost be complete." He paused, and shook himself slightly. "I'm going to Apparate us to the edge of the Forest. I don't think we should be seen."

"Good idea," Snape agreed. "Shall we go?"

Harry offered his hand, and as Snape took it, he Apparated them both through the wards and into the forest.

"Do you know the way?" Harry asked.

"That's the sort of question you should have asked beforehand," Snape smirked.

"True," Harry said with a shrug. "So, do you?"

"Of course," Snape grinned. "This way."

They walked through the twisted forest. Despite the fact that it was midday, the forest was dark, still and somehow oppressive.

Harry sniffed the air absently, before realising that it was more of a wolf move than a human one. He could smell something, and he realised that he wanted to change forms. There was something about this forest that was almost appealing to his other form.

They proceeded in silence for a while before Snape said. "I come out here for potions ingredients."

Harry nodded, as he looked around. "I can see why." He grinned suddenly. "I'll bet it's cheaper?"

Snape nodded. "Albus does so hate to have his budget spent on something that third years will turn into sludge."

Harry laughed softly.

"We're here."

They entered a large circular clearing. It almost looked like a meeting point with fallen trees surrounding it and a circle of stones in the middle. Harry walked over to one side, and sat down comfortably.

Are you going to want to talk to her privately?" Harry asked Snape.

Snape thought for a second and then shrugged. "I don't know," he admitted. "I've only seen her while I've been spying for the past fifteen years."

Harry nodded. He looked at his watch, and as the clock turned to one pm, she arrived.

"Punctual," Harry said dryly, not standing.

"Potter," Bellatrix sneered, although it appeared to be more automatic than anything else.

"Bella," Snape nodded.

"Sev," Bellatrix replied, a faint smile appearing on her face.

"Well, you still look like shit," Harry said casually. "Azkaban really doesn't agree with you."

"It doesn't," Bella agreed. "And I have no real wish to go back there."

"You do know that at the moment, I'm more likely to rip your throat out than help you?" Harry said, still keeping his voice casual.

"You?" Bella laughed mockingly.

Harry drove to his feet, moving as fast as he could, pushing himself to get to her as quickly as possible. He summoned his sword from the D.A. storeroom, and stopped, dead still, peering into Bella's eyes, the sword against her throat.

She paled dramatically and looked at him in absolute shock.

"Why shouldn't I just kill you?" he demanded coldly, as he stared at the woman who had dared to try and touch his Ginny.

He saw recognition appear in Bella's eyes; recognition that he could go through with it.

"Severus?" she whispered pleadingly.

"No, Bella," Snape said from somewhere behind him. "Things have changed. I work for him now."

"I don't know," Bella said honestly, answering his original question.

Harry stepped back, sending the sword back to its home with a snap of his fingers. "I've got a take it or leave it deal for you, Bellatrix."

"What?" Bella croaked, falling to her knees and looking defeated.

"You do what I tell you, and you get a second chance when Voldemort is defeated. You don't get a clean sheet, just a suspended sentence. What it means is that you pay me personally for your crimes."

"What do I have to do?"

"You are going to spy for me. You are going to do what Sev did, and when the time is right, you are going to do everything you can to get Voldemort to do what I want him to."

"Voldemort will kill me if he finds out," Bella said softly.

"And how is that different to normal?"

Bella smiled crookedly. "It's not, really," she agreed. "You've changed."

"I have," he agreed. "Do we have a deal?"

"If I do it, you'll remove my Dark Mark?"

Harry nodded once.

"And you'll let me live afterwards?"

"You have my word."

"I'll do it. But what about my sister?"

"What about her?" Harry asked coldly.

"Can the same apply to her?"

"The more people who know, the more dangerous it is for you."

"Narcissa would never tell anyone, not even Lucius."

Harry sighed softly. "Okay. I'll give her the same deal. If she can persuade Lucius to back you up when I tell you what I want, it will be useful."

"Thank you," Bella said, looking uncomfortable as she said it.

Harry nodded. "Sev will be in contact. I won't be."

Bella nodded.

"Sev?" Harry asked.

"Nothing," he said simply.

"I'd say it was a pleasure, but I'd be lying," Harry said. "And you're quite welcome to try and betray me. It will set me back a bit, but I'll still win and when I do, you'll see why Voldemort is scared of me." He said the last bit in the coldest voice he could.

Bella nodded. "I won't," she said simply. "Voldemort is back on his feet, Lucius got him some sort of potion out of storage, and it seemed to return him to a human state." She nodded to Severus and vanished.

Severus walked over to Harry and sat on the edge of a tree. "You were going to kill her," he stated.

"I was bluffing," Harry said, collapsing onto the grass.

"Bluffing?" Severus called, looking shocked.

"Absolutely," Harry sighed. "She's used to dealing with Voldemort, so I knew I had to get through to her the hard way. She needed to see that I was capable of giving her the future she wants."

"You scared me."

Harry shrugged. "I thought I might," he said. "It's why I didn't tell you beforehand what was going to happen. I wanted your reaction to be genuine as well."

"It was," Sev grinned. "And my dry cleaners would appreciate it if you never talked to me like that."

Harry laughed. "I need a drink. I didn't expect Voldemort to be back on his feet so fast."

"Three Broomsticks?"

"Sounds like a plan," Harry agreed.

"I'll buy you lunch," Snape offered.

"See you there," Harry said, as he Apparated away, not bothering to stand up first.

After lunch, Harry walked into the Library at Hogwarts, feeling a little tired. He laughed softly as he looked over the table. There was a row of red-heads studying books, partners opposite them.

He walked over to Ginny silently. "Hey, pretty lady," he purred. "Come here often?"

Ginny didn't look up. "Occasionally," she sniffed.

"You want to go for a drink?" he asked.

"Not interested," Ginny said again, without looking up.

The others were now watching them intently.

"My future husband's the jealous sort," Ginny continued. "He wouldn't take kindly to me going off with someone who tried to pick me up in a library."

"I'm not scared of him," Harry grinned. "And what's wrong with a library?" He moved closer to her, and quickly placed his hands under her arms, and lifted her back, over the chair.

"Put me down, you beast," Ginny said dramatically.

"Oh no," Harry smirked. "I'm just proving that I can pick you up in a library."

Ginny sighed audibly. "That's a really bad pun!"

"I know." He turned her around in his arms. "But you're right."

"Of course I am," Ginny agreed. "About what?"

"I am the jealous type," he said. "And I don't share you with anyone."

“Good,” Ginny smiled and wrapped her arms around his neck. She pulled him down and kissed him softly. “I do love you, bad lines and all.”

“Good,” Harry parroted.

“How did it go today?”

Harry walked over to the head of the table and sat down, placing Ginny down in his lap. “Very good meetings. Things are going as planned,” he told them. “Things are coming together, and the tide is going the way I want it to.”

“You’re starting to sound like Professor Dumbledore,” Ron complained.

Harry blinked and laughed. “Why thank you, I think,” he smiled. “Now that I’m on the other side of it, I understand why Dumbledore talks like he does. It makes perfect sense if you know both sides of the story.

“Anyway,” he continued. “Charlie, you’re with me; the rest of you continue.”

“What about me?” Ginny asked cutely.

“Wherever you want to be, sweetheart,” Harry said.

“Good answer,” Ginny praised. “I’ll get back to researching.”

Harry stretched and looked at the tired people in the Library. Charlie had been an eager student, more than ready to run before he could walk, and Harry had spent as much time holding him back as pushing him forward. Still, the second oldest Weasley offspring did have some latent talent, and would be able to communicate with the dragons eventually.

“Okay, let’s call it a night,” Harry said. “We’ve gone through an amazing amount of books today, and we’ve got some positive leads to be followed up. We’ve all got school or jobs tomorrow, so let’s hit the sack.”

“Carry me?” Ginny asked, walking over to him.

“Always,” Harry smiled. “But I think I want to talk to you alone. I’ve got something to show you.”

“I’ll bet you have,” Charlie smirked.

“Mind, Gutter, Out!” Harry said firmly.

Charlie snorted.

“Let’s get out of here,” Harry sighed to Ginny. “Night all,” he finished, as he wrapped an arm around Ginny and Apparated them both away to the Room of Requirement.

“Why are we here?” Ginny asked.

“I’ve not been totally truthful with you,” Harry said softly.

“What do you mean?”

“I’ve not been in Occlumency lessons. I’ve been learning to be an Animagus with Min.”

Ginny’s eyes seemed to open wider than he had ever seen them. “Really?” she gasped.

He nodded. “I didn’t want anyone else to know yet.”

“Good plan,” Ginny smiled, nodding in an approving manner.

“You’re not mad?”

“You’re going to show me now, aren’t you?”

Harry nodded.

“Then of course not,” Ginny said, a wide smile on her face.

Harry laughed softly and shook his head. He moved to the centre of the room, and concentrated. As he had before, he pulled forth the image of his wolf form and merged himself into it. It was a little easier this time.

He stretched his new body and padded over to Ginny, sniffing her. If he could have, he would have smiled. He could just detect a faint hint of himself on her, marking her as his. He rested his head on her knee and looked up at her, giving in to the urge to study her from a new angle and from a different perspective.

“Oh, Harry,” she cried softly. “You are so beautiful.”

He frowned a little, not sure if beautiful was the right word for him.

Ginny reached out and gently scratched his head. He pressed his head firmly into the fingers, wanting a firmer touch. He turned slightly and licked her wrist, causing her to giggle. She tasted clean and fresh, and his.

“Can you walk around for me?” Ginny asked.

Harry pulled away from her and started to walk around the Room. As he got used to moving again, he started to jog, getting used to the muscles he could feel, before he took off, running as fast as he could. He quickly found out how to use his tail for balance, and how to use his claws to keep from losing his footing. It wasn’t long before he was bounding around the room; he paused and turned, leaping straight over Ginny in a single jump.

He landed and padded around to her.

“That was amazing,” Ginny said, smiling happily. She dropped to her knees and hugged him, burying her face in his ruff. “My beautiful Harry,” she whispered.

He barked at her gently, and pulled back, turning into his human form. “What do you think?” he asked, remembering how tired he had been the first time he had done it. “It still takes a lot out of me,” he confessed, stifling a yawn.

“Amazing,” Ginny said simply. “But you look like you need sleep.”

“I do,” Harry admitted, looking at the couch.

“Get us a blanket, Harry,” Ginny said, kicking her shoes off and walking over to him.

He nodded, and kicked his own shoes off.

Ginny pulled out her wand and made the couch a lot bigger, till it resembled a bed. She pushed him down, taking the blanket from him. With an expert flick of her wrists, she spread it out over him and then crawled under it, until she was lying against him.

“Night,” she whispered, kissing him gently.

“Night,” he whispered back, almost asleep before he finished the word.

From: Harry’s girls

To: Professor Dumbledore

Subject: Harry’s room

Professor, Harry’s room is now completely finished. How do you want to hand it over to him?

The girls

From: Albus P Dumbledore

To: Multi-house task force

Subject: Re: Harry’s room

Carefully, would be the word that springs to mind. Now that Dobby has enlarged it slightly, it’s bigger than mine. I don’t want some of the other Professors feeling put out about it.

I shall casually mention to them today that the house-elves took it upon themselves to enlarge the room a little.

You will all be there to show us around?

A.D.

--

Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot and Chairman of the International Confederation of Wizards

From: Blaise – for the girls

To: Sneaky Headmaster

Subject: House

Professor... exactly what House were you in at school? Because we’ve noticed some decidedly Slytherin tendencies from you.

Blaise

From: Esteemed Headmaster

To: Curious Students

Subject: Re: House

I'm afraid that information is on a need-to-know basis only... And no one needs to know.

A.D.

--

Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot and Chairman of the International Confederation of Wizards

From: Padma – with the others

To: Headmaster, Hogwarts

Subject: Re[2]: House

That sounds like a challenge.

Consider it accepted, sir.

Padma

From: One Happy Albus

To: Happy Heads

Subject: The school

Morning all.

I've just had a wonderful Mmail conversation with a few of our sixth year students. For the first time, they are seeing me as something more than a respected Headmaster and are treating me as a person. I do so find it refreshing.

Anyway, they are now on a mission to find out what House I was in when at Hogwarts – so please, don't help them.

Albus

--

Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot and Chairman of the International Confederation of Wizards

From: One Tired Min

To: Uncle Albie

Cc: Other heads

Subject: Re: The school

I'm happy for you – although why you had to tell me so bloody early I don't know. As long as they don't forget that you are the Headmaster.

M – going to try and get another five minutes

--

curling up

From: Uncle Albie indeed

To: Aunt Min

Cc: The non-argumentative ones

Subject: Re[2]: The school

It's all very well for you to talk Min – you who invites Harry to share breakfast – you have a house full of people you can be close to. As headmaster, I've had to tread a fine line, so as not to seem like I am favouring any one house – and being Headmaster, it has meant that I've not been able to spend as much time as I would like getting to know the next generation of adults we are training.

Sometimes it's lonely being the headmaster. I took this job because I love to teach, and I love to see children grow into fine adults. Running the war has taken me away from it, and the fact that I am finally getting to a stage where people feel free to talk to me fills me with joy.

Albus.

--
Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot and Chairman of the International Confederation of Wizards

From: Wide-awake Sev
To: The lonely old man and the others
Subject: Re[3]: The school

In order to help, please feel free to take my first year potions class this morning.
S.

--
Working for the downfall of the Dark Tosser for fifteen years

From: Also-awake Pommie
To: Sev – and the rest
Subject: Re[4]: The school

I'm sniggering into my coffee here. But Snape's right, Unca Albie. When this stupid Voldemort thing is over, why not start taking some lessons yourself?
P

From: Half-awake Flitwick
To: Unca Albie
Cc: The teasing trio
Subject: Re[5]: The school

I quite agree with them – get back to doing what you actually enjoy. It will do wonders for you.
FF

From: Excited Albus
To: Wonderful (if a little too full of teasing) colleagues
Subject: Re[6]: The school

I will. And I think I'll spend the morning brushing up on a few things. Fudge's report can wait.
AD

--
Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot and Chairman of the International Confederation of Wizards

Harry woke slowly and smiled at the ceiling. He could feel Ginny sleeping on him, and he could smell her hair. It was somehow both relaxing and exciting, as he felt like he was awake enough to enjoy it.
He slid his hands down, stroking her back softly through the green shirt she was wearing, before he looked at his watch.

Gin,” he whispered softly.

“Don’t want to wake up,” Ginny mumbled, pressing her face into his shoulder. “Warm, comfy, you smell good.”

Harry laughed softly. “Breakfast?”

“Would rather have you,” Ginny mumbled.

“We’ve not got time.”

“We’ve never bloody got time,” Ginny sighed grumpily. “As soon as bloody Tommy-boy is dead, I expect to be taken somewhere quiet and have at least a week of Harry Potter time to myself – clothing optional.”

Harry shifted slightly, trying to hide just how much he liked that idea.

Ginny’s hand wandered casually over his chest. “So I’m not the only one who likes that idea?”

“Witch,” Harry sighed.

“Your witch,” Ginny agreed. “And don’t forget it.”

“No chance of that,” Harry said.

“Good.” Ginny pushed herself up his body and lightly kissed him. “I need a shower,” she sighed.

“Me too,” Harry agreed.

“We could share one?” Ginny offered.

Harry felt torn. On one hand, he wanted to see Ginny naked. He wanted to touch Ginny naked. He pretty much wanted to do everything Padfoot had told him about naked. But on the other hand, he was really hungry, having skipped a meal yesterday, and he had a Potions class first thing.

His mind was settled for him when Ginny’s stomach rumbled. “Shower alone,” he said firmly. “Then eat, then we can talk about water conservation.”

“A subject that sounds very interesting,” Ginny smirked. “And that would require a lot of action on our parts.”

“Absolutely.” He wrapped his arms around her and Apparated them to the Gryffindor common room. It was empty, with all the students at breakfast.

“Be quick,” he smiled.

She nodded and bounced away cheerfully.

He shook his head as he watched her go, and walked into the boys’ showers, casually throwing his clothes towards the hamper in the corner.

A quick shower later and he felt much more awake, if even more hungry. He walked to his dorm room and looked at his uniform. After a second of deliberation, he decided not to wear it just in case anything happened today. He pulled on a dark green shirt and a pair of trousers, pulling his school robe over the top.

He ran his fingers through his hair, and walked back down to the common room, waiting for Ginny.

She appeared a few minutes later, her robes undone, showing her school uniform.

He got to his feet and kissed her slowly. “Mmm, minty fresh,” he whispered.

She laughed softly. “Kissing later, food now.”

“Of course,” he grinned. “I know better than to stand between a Weasley and food.”

“What are you saying here?” Ginny demanded.

Harry casually Apparated them both to the Great Hall. “Nothing,” he said innocently.

“Right,” Ginny said to him. “Morning,” she smiled at Ron and Hermione. “I recommend getting Harry to transport you around Hogwarts, so much easier than walking.”

“Do we get to sleep with him as well?” Lavender smirked from further down the table.

“No,” Ginny said firmly. “That’s reserved for me.”

“What about not-sleeping with him?” Parvati teased.

“Chance would be a fine thing,” Ginny grumbled.

Ron had a look on his face that was half a laugh, half complete relief, and half regret. “You two really need to get away,” he mumbled.

“Damn right,” Ginny agreed.

“And as soon as Voldemort finds out exactly how many different ways a pitch fork can be used, we’ll do so,” Harry said.

“But you know what’s really strange?” Ron asked. “That fact that it’s Monday, we have Potions first thing, and I’m looking forward to it.”

Hermione and Harry laughed, and Hermione gave him a kiss on the cheek. “Don’t ever change,” she said fondly. “Are you going to be in class today?”

“I hope so,” Harry smiled. “The Butterbeer takeover should go well today.”

“I can’t wait till we can get that stuff in Hogsmeade,” Lavender said. “I never want to touch the old stuff again.”

“Good,” Harry grinned. “The twins will be delighted to hear it.” He reached over and quickly filled his plate.

“Hungry?” Ron asked.

“I skipped a meal yesterday,” Harry shrugged. “And did a lot of magic. I could eat a raw deer.”

Hermione frowned at him. “Do you mind? I’m eating.”

“Sorry,” Harry smiled, feeling a little disturbed that the idea of eating a raw deer was actually kind of appealing. He put it down to the wolf inside him and settled for four sausages.

He lightly hugged Ginny to him for a second, and then got down to the serious business of eating. He was ravenously hungry, and he had to concentrate hard to make sure he didn’t eat like an animal.

He finished his plate and exhaled slowly. “That’s better,” he smiled.

“I don’t think I’ve ever seen you eat that much,” Ginny said, sounding awed.

“I was hungry,” Harry explained, again.

“As everyone saw,” Hermione laughed.

“Harry,” Professor Dumbledore said, interrupting them. “Your rooms are now ready. I shall show you them after dinner tonight, and we’ll set your teaching schedule then as well.”

“Thanks,” Harry grinned.

“You better get a move on, you don’t want to be late for class.”

Harry looked around, a little surprised to see that they were the only ones left.

“Come on,” he said to the others. “I’ll see you at lunch,” he said to Ginny.

She nodded and gave him a quick hug, before jogging off.

Harry vaulted over the table and grabbed his two friends’ shoulders, and smoothly Apparated them both to the Potions dungeon.

“Ginny was right,” Ron smirked. “It is better to take the Harry.”

“Take the Harry?” Harry asked. “What am I, a taxi?”

Hermione sniffed. “Nope, you smell a lot better than a taxi.”

Harry groaned and lightly pushed them away, opening the door.

“Sit down,” Snape said casually. “I expected you to be late, considering the size of the meal you were eating.”

“Nah,” Ron smiled. “He burnt off half of the meal when he jumped over the table and Apparated us here.”

“I *am* here, you know,” Harry pointed out.

“We know,” Hermione said. “But we’re talking about you, not to you.”

“Gee, thanks,” Harry complained.

Snape sniggered. “Go on, sit down.”

Harry sat down and quickly glanced as his email notification went off.

From: Super-spy

To: Spy master

Subject: Spy

Harry, you've got a bloody spy at Hogwarts – someone who must have heard something this morning. Voldemort just got a message a few minutes ago and has ordered a load of Death Eaters to go help Lucius at something. I don't know where they're going, as there's a Portkey involved.

Bella

From: The twins in trouble

To: Harry

Subject: Help!

Harry, we need help, now! We're at the first Butterbeer factory and loads of Death Eaters have just shown up. We're fighting with the Goblins. Get here now!

--

Weasley's Wizard Wheezes – coming soon to Diagon Alley

From: Lord Voldemort

To: Nott

Attachment: directions.pmt

Subject: Revenge

Nott,

Take a squadron of Death Eaters to this address tomorrow. Capture Potter's relatives and kill the parents of Dean Thomas – we'll show everyone what happens when you stand up to me.

When you have them, I shall send a message to Potter, demanding he come begging for the life of his family.

--

Victory or Death

This Means War

10a - Werewolves, Goblins and Dragons, Oh My! (Part 1 of 3)

From: The one in the window

To: He with Velcro gloves

Subject: Back to work

Moony, ol' boy, ol' pal, ol' friend, ol' buddy. The weekend was fun – more fun than I've had in dog years, but now I'm back to work, and it feels wonderful!

I'm in Cornwall at the moment (great scenery) chasing down a lead (no pun).

Siri.

--

Woof

From: I'm not Welsh

To: The one with the waggle-y tail

Subject: Re: Back to work

I understand the general gist of your message, even if your grasp of English is slipping.

Actually, is it even possible to have something that you don't have a hold on slip?

One for the scholars, I think.

I'm in Kent. I spotted someone who might be a DE (we need to talk to Harry about a scanning charm so we can be sure from a distance).

Remus.

From: Not for sale

To: Grumpy Gus

Subject: Re: Re: Back to work

So, someone obviously got up the wrong side of the bed this morning.

Oh, wait; it's nearly full moon again isn't it? And it's going to take Harry and the rest a while to find this damn cure.

Okay, I'll stop Mmailing now, things to do, etc.

I'll come and find you on Wednesday. We'll go into the Forbidden Forest as we used to.

Sirius.

From: Remus

To: Sirius

Cc: Harry

Subject: Full Moon.

Thank you. I'm going to be staying at the Shrieking Shack tonight if you need me.

Remus.

From: Harry's chief person in the Ministry

To: Harry's chief person in the Aurors

Cc: Dragon Man and Curse Man

Subject: Inspection

Just to let you know that I'm going to want you both on Wednesday around lunch time. I've got a Portkey that will drop us straight in.

Kingsley, bring Tonks and any other Auror you trust implicitly.

Bill, Charlie, I need you to recall your rougher days, and walk over anyone who gets in our way.

We need to hit them hard, fast, and apologise later if we've made a mistake.

I'll bet my hind teeth that they're hiding something.

Percy

--
The information in this Mmail is confidential and may be legally privileged. It is intended solely for the addressee. Access to this Mmail by anyone else is unauthorized. If you are not the intended recipient, any disclosure, copying, distribution or any action taken or omitted to be taken in reliance on it, is prohibited and may be unlawful.

From: Brothers Two

To: His High-nosed-ness

Cc: Kingsley

Subject: Re: Inspection

We'll be ready. Charlie's gonna break out some of his dragon gear for added affect.

Doesn't your neck hurt?

B&C

--
Draconis dominium

From: Auror-Man

To: Political-Man

Cc: Dragon and Curse Man

Subject: Re: Re: Inspection

Nah – his neck doesn't hurt like that anymore – with enough practice you can put up with anything.

I've got a list of Aurors and I've cleared it with Amelia. As long as we don't actually kill anyone who is innocent, we'll have no troubles.

Kingsley

--
Aurors do it right, first time and every time

From: Percy

To: The others

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Inspection

Hah-bloody-hah-hah.

You try dealing with these vipers on a day to day business. Some of them make me want to check my fingers after shaking hands.

Politics is an adult's game, children; you all solve problems with curses and fists, I have to use words and intimidation – and I'm very good at it.

P.

--
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From: “The Others”

To: Percival

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Inspection

We know, we love you, too.

C&B

--
Draconis dominium

Harry’s immediate response to the Mmail from Fred and George and Bellatrix was short, sharp and had Hermione frowning at him in displeasure. He jumped to his feet. “We’ve got a bloody spy here,” he said with a scowl. “Severus, when I get back, we’re going to need to put our heads together and see what we can come up with. Someone’s passed my plans for today over to the Dark Tosser.”

Severus nodded. “Anything I can help with now?”

Harry paused for a second. “Stick by your Mmail. I’ll shout if I need help – I’d rather not give away our strengths at the moment if I don’t need to.”

“Where are you going?” Hermione asked.

“Until this place has anti-listening charms, I can’t say,” Harry replied. “I trust nearly everyone in this school, so I’m guessing there is an external spy – I could be wrong. Anyway, I’ll try and be back for lunch.”

He almost smiled at the peeved expression on his friend’s face as he Disapparated. He appeared in Professor McGonagall’s classroom.

“Sorry, Professor,” he apologised. “I’ve got an emergency and I need Ginny’s help.”

McGonagall raised her eyebrows inquiringly.

“Talk to Severus when you can. He’ll explain,” he said as he walked over to his future wife and put his hands on her shoulders. A second later, they were in the Void.

“Where are we?” Ginny asked.

“The only safe place to talk,” Harry said with a sigh. “This is the place you travel through when you Apparate. We’re here because there’s a spy in Hogwarts – Bellatrix told me a few minutes ago. Fred and George are in trouble. They’re currently battling some Death Eaters with the Goblin Guards. We’re going to land in the middle of a battle. Keep your head down; remember to duck, and fight hard!”

She looked at him, tilting her head. “Why did you come and get me?” she asked softly.

“Because I promised I wouldn’t run off without you again, after last time.”

She smiled brightly at him, before reaching up and kissing him softly. “I love you,” she whispered, and released him. She took off her robes, showing that she, too, had decided not to wear the school uniform.

Harry took it and cast a spell, sending it back to her room in the Gryffindor Tower.

“Ready?”

“Always,” she said, nodding her head.

Harry took her hand once more and they reappeared outside a large warehouse. Harry raised his wand and created a shield, then looked around. They had missed the fight by about twenty yards, as masked Death Eaters were throwing curses at a group of Goblins off to Harry’s left. In the centre of the group were two tufts of red hair, signifying Fred and George’s location.

Ginny started to move toward them, but Harry reached out and put his hand on her shoulder. “They’re not expecting us,” he said quietly, and cast another spell. “We’re now invisible, so why don’t we go behind the Death Eaters?”

Ginny turned and smirked at him. “I love it when you get sneaky,” she whispered back, and started to jog forward, moving in a strange crouch to keep the noise down.

He watched her for a second; taking a moment he probably shouldn’t, before he started to copy her.

The Death Eaters seemed surprised by the curses that the Goblins were throwing at them, and had resorted to throwing Killing Curses as they held a conversation about what to do next.

“Ready?” Harry asked, as quietly as he could.

Ginny nodded.

He took a deep breath, hoped that he knew what he was doing, and cancelled the invisibility spell.

They were about fifteen yards from the back of the Death Eaters. “Now,” he whispered, and started to launch as many curses as he could.

The curses slammed into the backs of the Death Eaters before they even knew that someone was behind them.

“Behind us,” one of the Death Eaters shouted, and showing an intelligence that would make a dog snigger, all of them turned to face the new threat – which left them completely open to a volley of spells from the Goblins, and the Weasley Twins.

“Retreat,” one of the Death Eaters shouted. They activated their Portkeys and everyone was gone a second later.

Harry turned, running his eyes over Ginny to make sure she was all right. She smirked at him and raised her arms and turned slowly.

He grinned at her as the Goblins walked over to them.

“Interesting start to the job,” one of the Goblins grunted. “I think we managed to kill a few of them.”

“Harry,” Fred said cheerfully. “You seem to have forgotten to mention that the guards you have happened to be one of the elite Goblin divisions.”

“Yeah,” George agreed. “We were covered before they had finished Apparating in and their shields are brilliant.”

Harry turned back to the Goblin that had spoken to him. “Thank you,” he said simply.

“We’re paid to do a job,” the Goblin grunted, before his face twitched slightly, “and besides, most of us have wanted to kill Death Eaters for a while. My sister gets very upset when the money stops pouring in and they’re really bad for business.”

Harry grinned at the Goblin. “Good to know. Voldemort will probably torture the ones that left. He dislikes cowardice. If you could let Mackrack know that he’ll be receiving a visit from Malfoy soon, I’d appreciate it – they will mention that we had Goblin guards first, to try and save their skins. It won’t work, which is a good thing.”

Ginny elbowed Harry in the stomach gently.

Harry shrugged at her. “Fred, George, we’ve got a spy problem at Hogwarts, so make sure that you don’t say anything you shouldn’t in Mmails, and address them to me personally.”

“Any idea who it is?”

Harry shook his head. “I trust everybody that was at the table with me this morning, so I’m thinking that someone used a listening charm.”

Fred nodded. “Make a note, my dear brother.”

“Note made,” George said, as he whipped out a pad and scribbled something. “When we’ve got a moment we’ll come up with something that’ll stop that. We can do something with the spells we used for the Extendable Ears, only have it do the opposite.”

“Good plan,” Harry said in praise. “Now, I think we have some documents to deliver?”

The lead Goblin smirked and walked over to the door of the warehouse. He took out his axe, and slammed it into the door. The door collapsed. “Knock-knock,” he called.

Harry laughed under his breath.

“What do you want?” a tall man demanded as he appeared in the hole created by the Goblin.

“On behalf of the true owners of Butterbeer, we hereby demand that you cease and desist all production of this infringing product immediately.”

“You can’t do this!” he sputtered.

Fred walked over and handed over some parchment.

The man stared at it, sniffed once, and tore it up. “Do you have any idea who you’re playing with?” he sneered.

“Why yes,” Harry said as he stepped forward. “And if Lucius wants to play, he knows where I am.”

The Goblin made some obscure hand gestures and the others shouted – a harsh guttural cry that raised the hairs on the back of Harry’s neck. Then, the Goblins started to move.

In perfect synchronisation, they charged the door, axes in hand. The man made a small eep!-ing noise and dived out of the way.

Harry followed the Goblins in and watched as they started to smash up all the machinery, ignoring the shouts and screams of the workers.

"Did you know that tearing up official Goblin parchments like that is against the Goblin Accord of 1872?" Harry asked the fallen man. "They were kinda hoping that you'd do that."

"Stop them," he cried.

"Why?" Harry asked. "You're making an illegal drink for a Death Eater, and as you know who you are working for, I have absolutely no sympathy for you. Fred, be a dear."

"Of course, sweetie," Fred said and jumped on the man on the floor. "Sorry," he apologised with an insincere smile as his knee landed on the man's stomach. He grabbed the man's arm and examined it. "Damn, no Dark Mark."

Harry pouted. "Sadly, we can't arrest you for associating with known Death Eaters."

"How about we stop him from reporting to them?" Ginny asked.

"How?"

"Make him into a bomb. If he contacts a Death Eater, he explodes, taking them with him."

The man on the ground turned completely white.

"Ohh, good idea," Harry said, pointing his wand at the man. Fred jumped out of the way as a bright blue light covered the man for a second. "Okay, you can go now," Harry said dismissively.

"You can't do this to me!" he protested.

"I just did," Harry pointed out and wrapped an arm around Ginny.

The man stumbled to his feet and glared at them, before he Disapparated.

"Bluff?" George asked.

"Yep," Harry agreed. "It's amazing what a simple light spell can do. If you two can handle it from here, we'll get back to school."

Ryan Crys growled to himself as he Apparated to his nearest contact's house. If the stupid kid thought that a silly light spell was going to stop him making a report, he dumber than he looked. Still, at least his acting skills had allowed him to escape to make his report.

He hadn't had a bad day like this in years. Not since Lucius had hired him to run the Butterbeer plant. It was a licence to mint money, and he'd been raking it in. He'd even been honest, for a change, and not skimmed off the top. Admittedly, Lucius had pointed out that the Dark Lord disliked people who tried to defraud him, and tended to deal with it personally. Being cursed to death wasn't high on his list of things to do.

He'd been a little surprised when his main door had been blown open; it was one of the downsides of the silencing charms that were all over the building. Making Butterbeer on an industrial scale was a very loud and smelly business.

"Mr Crys?" his contact, Matthew Viridian, asked. "What are you doing here?"

"I need to talk to Lucius, Matt," he replied. "It's urgent."

Matt nodded and turned to the Floo, throwing in the powder and calling out Lucius' name.

"Matt, Ryan, what's going on?" Lucius asked.

"Just had a run in with bloody Potter," Ryan said. "Damn kid tried to stop me reporting what happened by using a cheap light show and telling me that I would explode if I contacted a Death Eater."

Sadly, those were his last words, as an explosion rocked through his body, killing him and Matthew in the blink of an eye. The Floo connection absorbed most of the blast before it shut down, leaving a stunned and slightly blinded and deafened Lucius Malfoy a few hundred miles away.

Harry Apparated them both back to Hogwarts, dropping them near the lake. "I figured we'd have a nice walk back," he said.

Ginny nodded and slid her hand into his. "Why was the fight so easy?"

"I suspect because Voldemort didn't expect the Goblins, and he didn't have many important people to hand. Most of his senior Death Munchers are still part of society, so they have to show their faces from time to time."

"So we were lucky."

"Yeah," Harry sighed. "We're going to have to do something about that. Relying on luck is a little foolhardy."

"Good thing to have though."

"Absolutely!"

They walked in silence back into Hogwarts, neither seeing the need to fill the air with pointless chatter. They just enjoyed some of the simple pleasures in life – holding hands and walking alongside a scenic lake.

Inside, they separated again, with a quick kiss, as Harry went to rejoin his Potions class.

"Crisis averted?" Snape asked as he re-took his seat.

"For now. The Goblins killed a few Death Eaters," Harry said, "and I'm sure a few more are currently experiencing what happens when you fail the Dark Tossers."

"I'd feel sorry for them," Snape said with a slight smile, "if they didn't deserve it."

Harry grinned at him. "So, where were we?"

"Healing potions, Harry. Instructions are on the board."

Harry nodded and squinted at the board, before he grumbled and cast a spell. The instructions on the board seemed to fly apart, before reforming in a more legible script.

"Did you have to use that handwriting?" Snape protested.

"It's the best I've seen yet. I'm hardly going to use my mother's; she had worse handwriting than you."

"It's against my principles to use James' handwriting for anything," Snape muttered darkly.

Harry grinned at him. "Perhaps you could take some lessons."

"Silence, you," Snape ordered.

"Yes, Professor."

Now that he could actually read what he was supposed to be doing, Harry followed the instructions precisely, and it wasn't long before he was at the simmering stage. He looked around; Draco was at the back, a lack of expression on his face, as he worked silently and alone.

The blond looked up and met his eyes for a moment, before he blushed slightly and looked down.

Harry prayed to every deity he could think of that the blush was not one of attraction. With a slight shudder, he got back to work.

From: Regal Beauty

To: Dark and Dangerous

Subject: My son

This is what I get?

I let Lucius take the lead in raising my son, and he turns him into a... a... a... one of those!

I suppose that sort of thing runs in the family; it certainly explains why Lucius needs magical help in the bedroom.

I should be grateful that he has never asked me to dress like a man.

What on earth am I going to do now, Belle? Despite this perversion, he is still my son, and we both know that LV isn't exactly the most tolerant of people.

Narcissa

--
More than just an anything

From: Black Rose

To: White Rose

Subject: Male Malfoy Man-eaters

What is wrong with that bloodline? Why can't they do things traditionally, a few affairs here and there, visiting brothels and the like? No, they just have to be different.

I suppose it's the hair. They are both far too proud of it.

I told you, Cis, that a blonde should never marry another blonde. He probably only liked you because you had nicer hair than he did.

So, judging by the tone of your email, you wouldn't be shocked if I was to intimate that I might have a way out of this mess?

B.

From: Ivory

To: Ebony

Subject: Oh?

Do tell.

N.

--
More than just an anything

From: Dark Queen

To: Blonde Princess

Subject: Re: Oh?

I might have made a deal with someone who can remove the Dark Mark, and I might have negotiated your freedom as well.

Price isn't cheap, but what is?

B

From: Pale Rider

To: Dark Eagle

Subject: Re: Re: Oh?

I love you, Belle; did I ever tell you that?

What does Potter want from me?

Narci

--
More than just an anything

From: The cunning one

To: The Smart one

Subject: Spy Games

At the moment, it's just a little bit of spying that I can take care of. However, he is going to ask us to make sure that we influence LV/LM to do what he wants. We do that, I get the Mark removed, and to live afterward – you get to live as well.

Belle – I love you, too

From: The pure one

To: The tainted one

Subject: And after that?

Not to be a downer or anything, but well, you've been a little enthusiastic in your support of LV over the years. What happens when this is over?

N.

--
More than just an anything

From: The blind one

To: The seeing one

Subject: Re: And after that?

I should have followed your advice.

I didn't.

To be honest, I don't know. I'll bet Galleons to Knuts that Potter's already decided. And the worst thing? It's probably going to be honourable and just, and I'll have no reason to hate it.

Bloody Gryffindors.

B

From: The reflective one

To: The impulsive one

Subject: I hate to say I told you so

But I did.

I'll Mmail Potter and tell him I'm in. I'll see what I can find out about you.

Gryffindors might have numerous problems, but at least they are (generally) honourable.

N.

--
More than just an anything

From: Draco's Mum

To: Lily's Boy

Subject: Offer.

Mr Potter,

It has come to my attention that I might be able to offer you some assistance.

Perhaps we could discuss terms?

Narcissa Malfoy

--
More than just an anything

From: HJP

To: Mrs Malfoy

Subject: Re: Agreement

Can you dance?

H.

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

From: The polite Mrs Malfoy
To: The abrupt Mr Potter
Subject: Brevity is not always the soul of wit

Mr Potter, a few more words would not have killed you.

Of course I can dance, I am a Pureblood.

Narcissa Malfoy

--
More than just an anything

From: Rather too busy to play with people who are in a bad situation
To: The person in a bad situation
Subject: A pureblood that knows Shakespeare?

- 1) Contact Lucius, tell him that you've found a way to infiltrate the school – one of your friends mentioned that someone at Hogwarts was looking for a private dance tutor, and your friend found out that it was me.
- 2) Come to Hogwarts at 3:15. I'll meet you at the door. We can spend an hour with you teaching me how to dance, while we discuss things in person.
- 3) Tell no one at Hogwarts what you are here for.
- H.

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

From: Slightly stunned
To: The stunner (no pun intended)
Subject: Oh.

Are you sure you shouldn't be a Slytherin?

Narcissa Malfoy

--
More than just an anything

From: Narcissa
To: My husband
Subject: Infiltrating Hogwarts

Lucius, it has come to my attention that there is an opportunity for me to infiltrate Hogwarts if I act quickly. One of my contacts was asked to place an advert for a Dance Instructor to give private lessons at Hogwarts. My contact did a bit of sneaking, and found out that it was for a certain Gryffindor who has been in your way a time or two in the past.

If I work quickly, I should be able to get the 'job' before anyone else knows that it is available.

I await your direction.

Narcissa

From: Lucius

To: My Lord

Subject: Potter

Attachment: mml.mml

My Lord, please find attached a message I just received from my wife.

Your servant,

Lucius

From: The Dark Lord Voldemort

To: Narcissa Malfoy

Cc: Lucius

Subject: Opportunity

Narcissa, infiltrate Hogwarts immediately.

I am pleased with your initiative. It is good to see that at least someone in your family has a brain.

L.V.

--
Victory or Death

Fred and George looked at each other. "Ready?"

"Absolutely," Fred replied.

They stood outside the Three Broomsticks, almost unwilling to open the door. The pub looked packed with people enjoying lunch.

"No time like the present," Fred said and threw the door open, inviting George to step through with a flourish.

There was an absolute silence as they walked in, although that could have been due to the Goblins that were accompanying them.

"Madam Rosmerta," Fred said loudly, "On behalf of the owners of the Butterbeer trademark, we must insist that you stop selling that polluted rubbish immediately."

"Stop selling butterbeer?" someone from the crowd demanded. "You can't do that."

George jumped up onto the bar and surveyed the patrons.

"Of course we can, and it's for your own good! For far too long the Death Eaters have been controlling what you drink and forcing you to drink that pig's swill so that you could help fund their terrorism. They had a lock on the market, and you had no choice but to drink their poison.

"Well, no more. With the help of our good friend Harry Potter, and with the recipe for Butterbeer, as created by the original inventor, we've decided to do something about it." He nodded to one of the Goblins, who stepped outside, and then rolled in a barrel, heaving it on to the bar with a grunt and a stretch.

"You, good sir," Fred said, as he grabbed the first person who had complained. "Why don't you be the first outside of Hogwarts to try the liquid ambrosia that you should have been drinking all the time?"

The man sniffed and walked over to the bar; he took a tankard George offered and sniffed it a few times. With a shrug, he raised it to his lips and took several deep swallows.

"Well?" one of the crowd demanded.

"You say that Potter's involved with this?" the man demanded.

George nodded. "He found the man with the recipe and bankrolled the operation."

"I think," the man said firmly, "that Potter is a bloody hero! This stuff is brilliant!"

"Free drinks all around," George shouted.

Fred walked over to Madam Rosmerta. “To talk business for a second, we’re the legal holders of the Butterbeer trademark. We’ll supply you for the first six months at your current contract, and then we’ll negotiate for continued supply. To make things easier for you, we’ll also compensate you for the loss of some of your old butterbeer stock.”

“No need, Fred,” Rosmerta said, a slight smile on her face. “If Harry’s involved, we’ll make a fortune with this stuff, and I was due a delivery, anyway.” She reached behind the bar and pulled out an old green bottle. “Give this to your Goblin friends. They’ll appreciate it.”

“You’re a lady of rare talent,” Fred said with a slight bow.

She grinned at him. “A good barmaid ensures that she has drinks for all customers.”

Fred nodded. “How many barrels do you want?”

“Thirty a week to start with, but you better reserve me double that. I can see an upswing in business as everyone will want to try out the new stuff.”

“We’ve already got the product into Hogwarts, and the kids love it.”

She smiled. “This is going to be the start of a very profitable relationship.”

“We certainly hope so,” Fred agreed.

“Excuse me; can I have a few quotes for the Quibbler?”

“Mr Lovegood, I presume?” Fred asked.

“Horatio Lovegood, at your service,” he said, bowing deeply. “May I ask who your other partner in this venture is? The chap who concocted this commendable, copasetic comprehensively captivating consumable concoction?”

“Aberforth Dumbledore. Back when he invented this stuff, a member of the Malfoy family got a hold of an early recipe, and trademarked it, so that Abe couldn’t sell it himself – it was the main reason that Abe went away from the Wizarding World.”

“And Mr Potter found out about these vilified venal vermin and has vowed to vanquish them on behalf of the vox populi?” Horatio prodded.

Fred blinked for a second. “He did indeed. Harry investigated the link between the pig swill that is the fake butterbeer and the Death Eaters. Upon finding one, he embarked on a quest to save us from the slime and stumbled across Aberforth Dumbledore.

“Harry tasted this Butterbeer while he was there and instantly recognised its potential as a drink that Wizarding World would adore, so he introduced us and gave us the financial backing we needed to launch this exciting new product.

“Honest Abe’s Original Butterbeer will soon be available in all local outlets, and while you will be able to buy the old swill again soon, it will not be under the Butterbeer brand name.”

Horatio nodded and put away the Quill he had been using to take notes down. “You’ve dealt with the press before,” he said, dropping the alliteration.

“Actually, I haven’t,” Fred admitted. “But I’ve been taught by Abe, who has.”

“Ahh, yes,” Horatio said with a laugh. “I remember the time I last interviewed Abe. That was just after he had been arrested with Albus – something to do with the Brazilian Women’s Soccer team, 30 gallons of hot mud and a gambling syndicate.”

“What did Abe say?” Fred asked, his eyes going wide.

“I believe his exact words to me, when I asked what had happened, were, ‘My brother, both brilliant and bizarre, beguiled the beautiful Brazilian ball barnstormers to banish all banal bitterness, and in doing so breached buttresses and barricades, leaving bewilderment behind and benefiting a beloved brother.’”

“He said that?” Fred asked doubtfully.

“Indubitably,” Horatio replied solemnly. “I then asked him how he and Albus had been caught, and he had only this to say: ‘In my defence, I was very, very drunk.’”

“Come in, Harry,” Minerva called as he knocked on her door.

Harry smiled as he walked in and sat down on her couch. “How come your couch is so comfortable?” he asked. “The only one I’ve sat in that’s nicer is Abe’s, and he raided China for it.”

Minerva smirked. “This couch used to belong to Albus, but he was under the impression that his full house was going to top my four jacks. He sulked for a week over it.”

“A poker game among the professors at school?”

“What do you think teachers do over the summer holidays?”

“Get very drunk, go on wild holidays and generally celebrate freedom?”

“Well,” Minerva said after a pause. “We do that, too.”

Harry grinned.

“Have you changed into your wolf again?”

“A time or two,” Harry admitted. “It’s becoming easier.”

“So it should. Well, let’s see it.”

Harry nodded and stood, before falling forward in one movement. By the time he reached the floor, he was changed.

“Bravo, Harry,” Minerva applauded. “Now change back.”

Deciding to show off a bit, Harry turned and jumped back toward the couch, changing halfway. He landed awkwardly and overbalanced the couch, ending up on his back, staring at the ceiling.

Minerva laughed as he blushed and quickly righted himself. “It took me a week of practice to get the jump on to my desk right,” she admitted cheerfully. “So, are you ready to try for your hawk?”

He nodded eagerly.

“Well, you know what to do, this should be no different. You call forward the animal and merge.”

He nodded again and closed his eyes. The hawk seemed to fly into his consciousness, as if it had been jealous of the wolf, and wanted its own turn.

The pain as he changed was very different, and much more intense. The hawk was a smaller animal, and it meant that a lot more of his bones got crushed. He let out a shrill cry as the change finished.

“Oh, Harry,” Minerva said softly. “You’re a Harris hawk, with some quite unusual colours. Here.” She pulled out her wand and transfigured a piece of paper into a mirror for him.

He looked at himself. He was almost completely black around the head and shoulders, and his wings and legs had an emerald green cast to them. He frowned as he noticed a feather out of place and bent, nipping with his beak to get it back in to place.

“Do you feel all right?”

He looked at her and let out another cry, this one of happiness.

“Why not see if you can take off? Don’t go far, or try to fly properly. Let’s keep it simple for now.”

He stretched his wings slowly, trying to feel how they worked, and what muscles he was going to have to use. He brought his wings down and stumbled backward at the unexpected response.

He leaned forward a bit more and flapped again, bracing himself against the expected pressure. He moved forward and tried hard not to panic as he fell toward the floor. He flapped again and his descent stopped. He folded his wings in and landed, a little heavily, before nodding to himself.

As with the wolf, the less he thought about it, the better he functioned. His body knew what it wanted to do, and would do it if he’d let it. He spread his wings again and flapped several times, as hard as he could.

He squawked in embarrassment as he had to swerve violently to avoid the ceiling, then again to avoid a large clock. He reached out with his claws and settled down on the top of Minerva’s wardrobe.

“If I’d thought this through, I’d have done this somewhere with a little more room,” Minerva admitted.

He nodded at her, spread his wings, and drifted back down to the couch, where he turned back into his human form. “Ouch.”

“Painful?” she asked.

He nodded. “Brilliant, though. I find it funny that my eyes are better in both animal forms than in my human, although…” he paused as he tried to get his thoughts in order. “I don’t think these forms are lesser than my human one, if that makes sense? It’s more like they are just a different part of me. I’m not explaining myself very well here.”

“Actually Harry, you are indeed. I’ve often given thought to staying in my cat form a lot more than I do, and one day, when I’m old, I might just do that. People who aren’t Animagi can’t understand it the same way. When you find your animal, it’s like finding a part of yourself that was missing and you never knew it.”

He smiled at her. “Yeah, that’s it exactly. I hope Gin’s going to be able to do this. I would hate not being able to share it with her.”

“Well, when you’ve had a bit more experience, you could always try and teach her.”

From: Cat-girl

To: Gnome-boy

Subject: Oh yeah, I'm the daddy

One hawk successfully changed. The boy also understands what it is to be an Animagus.

I also gave him a challenge – teach Miss Weasley how to become one. I'll bet you that she is at least a wolf, if not both.

Min

--
Puuuuuumrrr

From: Fili

To: Minnie

Subject: Re: slang

I'm not even going to attempt to make sense of that subject line.

I suppose I have no need to point out that the chances of Miss Weasley being either is about as likely as Voldemort becoming a dentist?

F.

From: Minx

To: Felix

Subject: Re[2]: Slang

Just because you're not "with it" (whatever "it" is) doesn't mean that all of us aren't.

Of course the very idea is preposterous. There is no way that Miss Weasley should even be an Animagus; after all, there hasn't been a Weasley or Prewett Animagus for centuries.

Or there shouldn't be. However, as we've learnt, as soon as Harry is involved, the rule book gets burnt, and he gets what he wants.

And he wants to share this with her.

And frankly, if he can somehow get her giving out bursts of pure magic, then he can find a way to make her an Animagus.

It's that simple.

Min

--
Puuuumrrr

From: David (the Gnome)

To: Minnie the Minx

Subject: I can just see you in a striped jumper

You're probably right.

F.

From: Min

To: Filius

Subject: Pop culture references

Why Filius, all these years and you didn't tell me that you read the Beano?

Min

It was with a degree of trepidation that Narcissa Malfoy strolled up the legendary steps toward Hogwarts.

It had been a long time since she had walked this path, since leaving all those years ago. She found that she had missed the old school more than she had realised.

Things were much simpler then. She was in love with her boyfriend, had a mischievous sister that she adored, and her boyfriend's mentor, Voldemort, was going to stop all the nonsense about Mudbloods attending Hogwarts – after all, there were other, lesser, schools they could go to.

Twenty years later, her only son was gay, her husband spent a suspicious amount of time on his knees in front of Voldemort, stopping the nonsense about Mudbloods involved a lot of bloodshed she didn't really approve of and the loss of a lot of her money that she definitely didn't approve of, and her sister seemed to treat sanity as something that she could take or leave – and frequently left.

She paused as a house elf appeared in front of her. "This way," the elf said abruptly.

"Dobby?" she asked in surprise.

Dobby tilted his head and looked her up and down, before sniffing dismissively and silently leading her up a series of stairs.

"Thank you, Dobby," Harry said, as she was escorted into a large classroom. The room had a wireless to one side, and all the furniture had been pushed against the walls.

"Dobby is being happy to serve," the elf said solemnly, before vanishing.

"You should have words with your elf," Narcissa said icily. "That sort of behaviour sets a very bad impression."

"On the contrary, Mrs Malfoy, I believe that Dobby was remarkably restrained. He didn't once curse you."

"That filthy creature, curse me?"

Harry took a long look at her. "You really are a distasteful person, aren't you?"

"Excuse me?"

"No, I don't think I will. Arrogance is not an attractive trait, nor is living on the accumulated wealth of your ancestors."

Narcissa opened her mouth.

"Don't bother," Harry advised. "We're about to see how you survive in the real world. I'm sure it will be educational."

"What do you mean?" Narcissa demanded, her stomach suddenly tying itself into knots as she looked at the dark-haired young man in front of her.

"Your dear husband forgot to renew his ownership of the Butterbeer trademark and, well, let's just say that it's now owned by me, and we have a superior product in the marketplace. Your income has just been slashed, if not eliminated completely.

"Additionally, I'm afraid that while I was serving some documents to your primary Butterbeer plant there was a little altercation, and all your equipment was smashed by overeager Goblins. It was truly unfortunate, but then, your manager did tear up some very important documents. It will probably take a bit of time and money to replace everything."

Narcissa stared at him in absolute horror as she stumbled back against the door.

"All that support of Voldemort is expensive, isn't it? And without a steady cash flow, just how will you pay all your bribes?"

Harry walked over to the wireless and turned it on. Soft music with a classical air filled the room.

"What do you want?" Narcissa asked as she took a deep breath. She moved to the left and perched on the edge of a table, unconsciously moving her shoulders back and looking at him through her lashes. It was a look that used to get her out of trouble all the time, and was still useful when dealing with underlings. She used to use it on Lucius, but he had been far more interested in Voldemort recently and not paying attention where it was due – and losing their money like that was almost criminal.

"I'll kill him," she muttered to herself as the broader implications of what she'd just been told started to become apparent. "He's abroad until tomorrow. Careless idiot."

"Oh my God," Harry whispered.

"Pardon?" Narcissa asked.

"Oh no, Mrs Malfoy. Oh no."

"What's wrong?"

"Mrs Malfoy, you didn't... I mean, you didn't expect..."

"What?" Narcissa asked, starting to get really confused.

"I mean," Harry stuttered, "you didn't really think something like *that*."

"Like what?"

"What do you think?"

"Well, I don't know," she replied, now convinced that Harry was going insane.

"For God's sake, Mrs Malfoy. Here we are. You insult my house-elf. You don't ask for a drink. I've... put on music. Now you start opening up your personal life to me and tell me your husband won't be home for hours."

"So?"

"I think you're trying to seduce me."

Narcissa gaped at Harry, unable to think of a single thing to say to him. She opened her mouth, but couldn't think of the words that she needed to put him in his place.

Harry suddenly burst out laughing as he sank into a chair. He pulled out a drink. "Here's to you, Mrs Malfoy," he toasted. "Jesus loves you more than you will know."

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"That's the problem with you Purebloods," Harry sighed. "You're so insular it makes my teeth hurt. Muggles have wonderful entertainment, and this whole thing struck me as a scene straight out of one of their movies."

"A movie?" she asked, her voice rising.

"Yep. Fun, wasn't it?"

"I do not find this in any way amusing."

"No," Harry agreed. "You wouldn't. Don't get the wrong impression though. While you're still quite attractive, you don't hold a candle to Ginny."

Narcissa sneered and opened her mouth.

"Say it, and I'll make sure that you spend the night in Azkaban," Harry interrupted her calmly.

Narcissa growled under her breath. She pulled out her wand and conjured herself a drink. She took a deep swallow of the Firewhisky and looked at the boy in front of her with grudging respect. He had her off balance, had teased her, and stopped her from insulting the blood-traitor's daughter.

"Bravo, Mr Potter," she commended him as she put her glass down. She was going to get the upper hand in this conversation, even if it killed her.

"Harry, please," he invited, dipping his head in a mocking half-bow.

"Harry," she agreed, inclining her head. "You have me at a disadvantage."

"Me, Mrs Malfoy?" he asked, feigning shock.

She didn't like the way he said her name, he made it sound so insolent. "You know things that influence me that I do not."

"Ahh, that," he said slowly. "You see, the problem, Mrs Malfoy, is that I don't particularly like you, until recently I wanted to kill your sister, I detest your husband, and I only tolerate Draco's existence. Unfortunately, I need you. Well, I need Bellatrix, and she begged me to include you in the deal."

"So, why don't you tell me what you want, considering the facts I've just sprung on you, and we'll take it from there."

Narcissa slowly stood and walked over to him. She picked up a chair and sat in front of him, her back straight. "This is not what I expected," she admitted.

"No," he agreed. "But this bloody war is interfering with my love life, and I'm getting pretty irritated with it, and I've just had a painful lesson, and I found this morning that there is a spy in Hogwarts, so I'm not in the best of moods at the moment."

"That's a little too much information," Narcissa murmured. "Let me preface my statement by pointing out that while I might have supported some of Voldemort's goals originally, I have never personally killed or injured anyone physically, nor have I taken the Dark Mark."

"Support through inaction is a different matter," Harry noted, "but hardly relevant at this moment."

"Thank you," Narcissa said. "Despite my son's curious peculiarities, he is still my son, and I do love him. He will never take the Dark Mark now. He

would not be accepted if he tried, as Voldemort frowns on alternate lifestyles.”

“Voldemort frowns on pretty much everything,” Harry pointed out.

“Indeed,” she flicked him a slight smile. “I want Malfoy Manor, my son, and my inheritance from the Black family. Sirius denied it to me, to stop Lucius getting his hands on it. At the time, I was quite perturbed at that. However, I am now grateful. Lucius has proven his incompetence at handling money.

“In return, I will do as you ask, and will divorce him, if he survives.”

Harry looked at her thoughtfully. “You didn’t mention Bellatrix.”

“My sister, as much as I love her, has only a passing friendship with sanity. She has also killed numerous people. I have no wish to be tied to her fate. I will do what I can for her, but not at the risk of my own freedom.”

“A wise course of action,” Harry allowed. “I wouldn’t give you any guarantees for her future, anyway. I have a few ideas, but to be honest, dancing with the devil is not an enjoyable hobby. I believe, Mrs Malfoy, that you have a deal.”

Narcissa smiled slowly. “Thank you. You are not what I expected.”

“I rarely am,” Harry said with a careless shrug. “Lucius doesn’t think much of me, does he?”

“I believe he has called you a naive brat a time or two,” Narcissa replied.

Harry slowly smiled at her. “Of course, he knows about Ginny?” he continued.

She nodded once. “And he knows that you two are not, shall we say, intimate yet?”

Harry raised his eyebrows at her.

“During her altercation with Cho Chang, Miss Weasley made a very public statement of your current status.”

“Indeed,” Harry muttered. “Would you feel comfortable in shorter skirts?”

For the second time, Narcissa felt like the conversation was going in a direction she wasn’t prepared for. “Mr Potter, I would appreciate it if we could end this subterfuge, and you would get to the point.”

Harry smiled at her. “You’re going to seduce me, Mrs Malfoy.”

She gaped at him again, completely gobsmacked at the very idea. “I’m going to what!?”

“While you have been teaching me to dance, you couldn’t help but notice a reaction to the closeness that dancing induces, and as you don’t have a Dark Mark, and bad-mouthed Lucius as well, I actually trust you – a little. At the same time, you know my hatred of your son and husband, and can guess that I would be willing to get ‘one over’ on them. And of course, you know that I am frustrated.

“I’ll give you some decent information that you can pass on to Voldemort and your husband, stuff that I wouldn’t normally tell anyone, unless of course, it was my partner.”

“Very clever,” she said slowly. “Lucius would believe that, because it would, of course, be what he would do.”

“Quite,” Harry agreed. “You will, of course, reassure your husband that you would never let it get that far, but you will try and get all the information out of me that you can.

“I’ll want to keep it a secret on my end, so we’ll sneak you in and out, but if you dress correctly – to seduce a naive boy – you should have the perfect alibi to feed Voldemort the garbage I want.”

“Bravo,” she whispered. She was highly impressed; the plan he had concocted played on the minds of Voldemort and Lucius, and would ensure her safety. “And my sister?”

“Bellatrix will be safer because she won’t have to pass on any disinformation.”

“Thank you, Mr Potter.”

“Oh please,” Harry drawled, “you can definitely call me Harry now.” He paused. “Tell Voldemort that I’m a wolf Animagus.”

“Are you?”

He nodded. “Yeah. I’ll make it publicly known this evening. It should cement everything for you.”

She laughed under her breath. “This has been a most stimulating conversation,” she said. “But I think it’s time that we did what I came here for.”

Harry looked at her, a puzzled expression on his face.

“Dancing, Harry. I am going to teach you to dance. Every person in society should be able to navigate the dance floor, and I suspect that you are

going to be very important to society.”

She stood gracefully and walked to the middle of the room. She raised her left arm. “We shall start with a basic waltz,” she said firmly. “Come, stand in front of me and put your right arm around me.”

She was very relieved that, for the briefest of seconds, he blushed slightly.

“How the hell do I get myself into these situations?” Harry demanded of the air around him.

“What situations?” Blaise asked as she walked around a corner.

Harry looked at her and sighed. “You don’t want to know,” he muttered.

“Obviously, I do,” she pointed out. “I’d hardly be a Slytherin if I didn’t.”

“At least I don’t have to check my fingers after dealing with you,” Harry pointed out. “But let’s just say that a bit of grumpiness, a movie that I watched a few years ago, and an overactive imagination taken together are not necessarily a good thing.”

“I’d be delighted to listen.”

“Thanks, Blaise,” Harry said softly. “But I think that there is only one way to handle this properly – the Gryffindor way. But, let’s change the subject. How’s everything going?”

“Pretty well, actually,” she said cheerfully. “I’m ruling Slytherin, Parkinson’s scared to move, and Draco’s, well, a bit more flamboyant, but quite innocuous, version of his former self.”

Harry nodded. “I’m glad you’re on my side,” he said simply.

She smiled at him.

“I’ll catch you later. I need to go and grovel now.”

“Cast a charm on your knees, it makes it easier,” Blaise advised. “And tell Ginny, ‘Hi’.”

“Thanks,” he said dryly, and moved on.

Ginny was in the Gryffindor Common Room, he could feel her presence and the fact that she was relaxed. He walked in and over to her. “Can I have a few moments?”

“You can have more than that,” she said with a smile as she bounced to her feet.

“Your room?”

She nodded and jumped up the steps cheerfully. He laughed softly and floated up after her, thinking that it would be easier when he could turn into his hawk.

He shut the door behind him, and charmed it shut.

“You’re nervous,” Ginny said as she sat on the edge of her bed.

“I kinda let a good idea get the better of me earlier,” he confessed. “You know I talked to Bellatrix yesterday?”

Ginny nodded.

“Well, I talked to Narcissa today.”

“Good.”

“And I needed a way to give her information that she can pass to Voldemort.”

“What did you come up with?” Ginny encouraged.

Harry looked down at his feet. “She’s going to seduce me,” he whispered, waiting for the explosion.

The explosion came, but not as he expected it, as Ginny roared with laughter and fell back onto her bed. “That’s brilliant,” she choked through her laughter.

Harry looked at her in surprise.

She raised herself onto one elbow. “Harry, she’s old enough to be your mother, she’s a *de facto* Death Eater, she’s Draco’s mother, and I hardly think that you’re likely to be even slightly attracted to her under any circumstances.”

“True,” he agreed.

“But,” she said archly. “A little reassurance wouldn’t go amiss.”

“Oh?”

“We’ve got at least half an hour before dinner,” she said suggestively. “And you could spend that time persuading me that you’re only interested in one girl.”

He was about to verbally reassure her, when he stopped. “Perhaps you’re right,” he agreed, moving over to the bed and placing one knee next to her legs.

She grinned up at him and raised her arms invitingly. “I normally am,” she pointed out cheerfully.

From: Narcissa

To: Lord Voldemort

Cc: Lucius

Subject: Report

My Lord,

I met the Gryffindor as requested, and he was a little surprised to see exactly who his dance teacher was.

He was a little upset, but I soon managed to soothe his ruffled feathers.

He was, at first, unwilling to dance with me, and while I thought that it was natural reluctance, I soon found it was far more amusing than that.

It seems that our little Gryffindor is a tad frustrated in his relationship with the blood-traitor’s daughter, and his passion, if not his emotions, could be pointed elsewhere.

If I were, perhaps, to wear a slightly more adventurous wardrobe, and continue the lessons, I have no doubt in my ability to win his trust.

I did manage to worm one nugget of information out of him – he’s become a wolf Animagus.

Narcissa

From: LV

To: NM

Cc: LM

Subject: Re: Report

Narcissa, you shall expect an extremely grateful husband when he arrives home. Your actions have almost made up for his incompetence this morning.

I see that my doubts about you were misplaced.

Move as fast as you can, although don’t make it obvious. The sooner the boy trusts you, the better. Tell the boy that you’ve had a change of heart, and that you wish to join the other blood traitors. Perhaps you could use your husband’s financial incompetence to further validate your story.

LV

--

Victory or Death

From: Narcissa

To: Lord Voldemort

Subject: Re[2]: Report

Thank you, My Lord. I live to serve.

Narcissa

From: Mrs Robinson

To: Benjamin

Subject: Even a pureblood can look things up

Potter, your plan worked as expected.

Voldemort is pleased with me.

Narcissa

--
More than just an anything

"Harry?" Hermione asked.

"Hmm?" he replied, looking up.

"You're as distracted as an ant in a room full of anteaters."

Harry looked around slowly. The Professors' table had been expanded, giving the Weasleys and other guests somewhere to sit.

"I've got a feeling," he admitted.

"Quick," Ron teased, "everyone duck, our fearless leader has a feeling."

"I'm staying under the table until it goes away," Cho called from the Ravenclaw table.

"Me too," Blaise added.

"Comedians," Harry muttered with an amused look. "We're missing something," he stated.

"What?" Hermione asked.

"If I knew that, I wouldn't be missing it," he grumbled. "Things have gone too well today, not perfectly, but about as well as they could have."

"That's a good thing, right?" Ron asked.

"Harry dislikes relying on Providence," Ginny said with a fond look.

"Don't we all?" Hermione asked.

"I don't mind," Ron mumbled. "But I'm probably outvoted."

"A little," Harry agreed. "I've just got the feeling that I'm missing something important."

"Like what?" Hermione asked.

"I don't know," Harry said, sounding frustrated even to himself. "I've been feeling it all day."

"If I might make a suggestion," Dumbledore suggested from the Head Table. "Go with your feelings, Harry, and see what happens."

Harry nodded. "It's like a memory that's just out of my mind, or a smell that isn't quite there, but should be."

"Your food is being here, Harry Potter sir," Dobby said, placing a plate in front of him.

"Thanks, Dobby," Harry said absently and turned to eat.

"Harry?"

"Hmmm," he asked, as he took a bite.

"It's customary to have food cooked before it is brought to the table," Hermione pointed out gently.

"It *is* cooked," Harry said, looking at his plate. "It's just blue."

"No," Hermione corrected, "blue is still cooked. That steak is raw."

Harry waved his wand over it. "Better?"

"What did you just do?" Hermione demanded.

Made it look more socially acceptable," Harry said as he dug in.

"Okay, we need to talk, Harry," Hermione said firmly.

"Actually," Ginny interjected, "you don't."

"Why not?" Hermione asked her. "Something is wrong."

"Think about it for a few moments," Ginny suggested. "And take my word that it is completely natural."

"What do you..." Hermione started, before looking at Harry. "You're kidding me?"

"Would I do that, Hermione?" Ginny asked.

"I want details," Hermione pouted.

"Excuse me," Ron said, "but would one of you two be really nice and let the rest of us know just what the hell you're talking about?"

"You'll find out soon enough," Harry said.

"You could try thinking it through," Ginny offered.

"Ginny," Ron said firmly, "I have a specific amount of brain power that can be used throughout the day. If I thought about this, I'd forget something else, and I'm far too scared that I'd forget something important, like what broom cupboards are free this evening, or what charm frightens off cats, or just how to kiss Hermione the way that makes her pulse race."

"Ron!"

Ron grinned unrepentantly at his girlfriend.

From: Snuffles

To: Ought to become an Animagus

Subject: Progress

No luck so far, the lead I was chasing turned up blank.

I've got a plan to infiltrate the Death Eaters, though. I'll talk about it when I next see you.

S.

--

Woof woof

From: The Boy Who Surprises

To: The Snuffly one

Subject: Re: Progress

No need, I've got that covered.

Try Devon.

H

--

Audaces fortuna juvat

From: Free of cold

To: Gerny

Subject: Re: Re: Progress

You've got that covered? You can't be serious (because I am).

S.

--
Woofy woof

From: Groaning

To: Groan maker

Subject: Re[3]: Progress

Attachment: map.pmt

I shall ignore that.

You might want to look at the map provided – one of my sources tells me that it is important.

HJP

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

“That’s it!” Harry shouted. “I’ve warned him and warned him, now he’s going to pay!”

“Harry?” Albus asked, a slightly concerned expression wrinkling his forehead.

Harry shot a wide smile. “Of course, this is just what I need to lift my spirits,” he continued cheerfully. “Ginny, Hermione, Parvati, Susan, Blaise, Luna, Padma, Lavender, I need you in the library studying with the Weasleys and future Weasleys.

“Ron, Dean, Seamus,” he paused, “and Professor Snape, you’re with me. And remember,” he turned to face Ginny, “when asked, you *haven’t* seen me!”

Ginny’s eyes twinkled at him merrily. “Should I ask?”

“You’ll see,” he promised. “Come on, guys.”

He jogged out of the Great Hall and headed straight toward an abandoned classroom, followed by the male contingent from the Dining Hall.

“Gentlemen,” Harry said, “we need ideas and we need them quickly.”

“For what?” Snape asked.

“Payback, of course,” Harry grinned. “I’ve warned Sirius time and time again to stop the Sirius/Serious jokes, but he refuses, so we’re going to do something about it now. I’ve sent him a time-delay Portkey.”

Snape smiled eagerly. “How about we make him write lines?” he suggested. “He can’t leave the room until he writes something a hundred times.”

“Good one,” Harry approved. “Get to work.”

Seamus and Dean looked at each other. “Purple hair?” they suggested. “And maybe green skin.”

Harry nodded. “Attach it to the doorway on exit – so once he’s written the lines, he thinks it’s over and then gets hit while his defences are down.”

“Well,” Ron said after a few moments thought, “Sirius will just change into his Animagus form to avoid embarrassment, right?”

“Probably.”

“So we do something to that as well,” he suggested. “Maybe make the charms work that way?”

Harry summoned a charms book and passed it to Ron. “Get to work,” he grinned. “And I’ll do the other obvious thing.”

“Which is?” Snape asked from where he was charming a wall into a blackboard.

“Photographs, of course,” Harry said with a wide smile. “We need pictures of all of this stuff!”

Snape just laughed.

Sirius looked at the map thoughtfully. He’d already looked at this area and found nothing. It was only as he felt the familiar tug of a Portkey that he realised he’d been had.

He appeared in an old classroom. On the wall in front of him was a blackboard; on the blackboard was an inscription in James Potter’s

handwriting.

I will not make any more Sirius/Serious jokes!

Write this a hundred times, and you can leave.

Sirius rolled his eyes and pulled out his wand, moving toward the door.

"*Expelliarmus, Accio Sirius, Finite Incantatem*," Harry's voice shouted from the side, and before he could act, his wand was yanked out of his hand and he went flying toward a wall, before the second spell kicked in and pulled him toward Harry, and the last spell left him standing where he had been.

"Blimey," Ron said.

"Yeah," Harry agreed. "That worked far better than I expected."

"I'll get you for this, Potter," Sirius promised.

Harry grinned at him and took Ron's shoulder. "Not until you've done your lines," he smirked as he Apparated the two of them away.

"Goddamn son of a Marauder," Sirius muttered. He thought about trying to escape, but recognised that his godson would have covered that eventuality.

He picked up a piece of chalk and started to write.

When he had finished, the letters pulsed for a second, before they all vanished, and a new inscription appeared. "You may now leave. Your wand is outside the door."

Sirius grumbled to himself. His hand ached and he was sick of writing both his name and Serious.

He opened the door and was confronted with a mirror. As he looked at himself, admiring the fact that he was still a handsome man, even after the years in Azkaban, he was hit with several curses.

He looked about and then shouted, "I'm going to kill you, Potter!"

"You'll have to catch me first," Harry's voice echoed through the door.

He picked up his wand. He could see Harry running in the distance and changed into his Animagus form.

He'd catch him and teach him not to mess with a Marauder!

As he ran, he didn't even notice the last curse as it hit.

Harry ran through the corridors of Hogwarts. He could feel Sirius catching up with him, so he jumped forward, transforming as he ran.

He landed on all four paws and sniffed the air. The game was afoot. He sprinted as fast as he could, heading toward the Library.

He jumped up the stairs in almost a single bound, revelling in the freedom he had, his claws making a clicking sound as he scrambled for grip along the smooth stone floors.

Approaching one corner, he jumped and rotated in the air, used the side of the wall to cushion his turn, and sprang away at high speed.

He could hear Sirius behind him and slowed a little. It wouldn't do to lose his prey at this stage.

He sped up again as Sirius picked up his scent, and barrelled through the doors to the Library. He paused and looked around with interest – it seemed like most of the school had chosen to study in the library that night.

Harry caught his mate's scent and sprinted over to her – there were a few shrieks as people watched the large wolf approach – before he bounded onto the table in front of Ginny.

Hermione calmly lifted her book out of his way as he skidded past, not lifting her eyes from the page she was reading as she did so.

Harry jumped over Ginny's head and crouched behind her as Sirius bounded in.

Sirius shifted back to his human form. "Where is he?"

"Where is who?" Blaise asked politely.

"Potter. Where is he?"

"I've not seen Harry since dinner," Padma said politely and with complete honesty, although her face started to twitch.

There was a giggle from behind Sirius, and he turned dramatically, only to freeze as he remembered what he looked like.

He turned back into his dog form, and looked surprised as everyone started to laugh.

Harry decided to do something very nice for Ron the next time he saw him, as he'd outdone himself. He couldn't decide if it was the bow on the tail that was the nicest touch, or the lime green and purple colour combination.

With a straight face, Ginny stood up and conjured a mirror, allowing Sirius to see himself for the first time. Harry almost laughed out loud at Sirius' bug-eyed reaction.

Most of his body had been closely shaved, and his stomach seemed to have expanded, and his head was reshaped, so that he resembled a giant pot-bellied pig, only a pig in psychedelic colours.

Sirius whined and slunk backward.

"Padfoot!"

Sirius looked up as Colin took a picture of him. He growled at the boy and took a step forward.

Harry barked sharply and jumped from behind Ginny and in front of Colin.

Sirius blinked at him a few times, before placing his snout on the ground and covering it with his paws.

Harry padded over to him and sniffed him a few times, before nudging him gently.

Sirius woofed softly, asking if the prank was over.

Harry looked at him for a long moment, while Sirius whined plaintively. Eventually, he looked at Ron and nodded once.

Ron – whose eyes were huge as he looked at Harry – cancelled the spells on Sirius.

Sirius turned back into his normal form and cracked a slow smile. "You do, of course, realise," he said, "that this means war!"

Harry barked at him once and turned his back, heading toward his mate.

"Oh, Harry," Hermione said as she moved in front of Ginny and dropped to her knees "You're gorgeous."

"Hey," Ron protested mildly.

"That's what I said," Ginny agreed as she moved next to Hermione and hugged him, burying her face into his ruff.

Harry leant forward a little and sniffed Hermione. She smelled a little of Ron, a little of books, and a lot of the light perfume she wore, combined with her natural scent. She smiled at him and lightly petted his head.

He nodded at her, gently disengaged himself from Ginny and turned to Ron. He padded over silently and sniffed him as well. Ron smelled a little of Hermione, and a little of sweat and leather over his own scent.

He walked around, committing all his friends' scents to memory. He paused at Padma and sneezed before moving on, finishing with Blaise.

"Do you mind?" she asked Ginny, who shook her head.

Blaise knelt down as Ginny had, and hugged him.

Harry gently licked her nose when she had finished, causing her to giggle.

He stepped back a few times and reared up onto his hind legs, changing as he did.

"Since when have you been an Animagus?" Sirius demanded. He paused and swore under his breath. "That's why your scent changed when I was chasing you!"

Harry grinned at him. "A while," he said vaguely. "And I was hoping you wouldn't realise that until later."

"We need a new nickname for you," Sirius said eagerly, his earlier declaration of war obviously put to one side.

"No, he doesn't," Ginny said firmly. "He's far too macho for a silly nickname."

Sirius pouted at her. "All the Marauders had nicknames."

"Harry's not a Marauder," Ginny replied.

"But he should be."

"The Marauders were your generation, Padfoot," Harry said. "This is mine. I have to follow my own path." He looked around and smiled as most of the school trailed out the library, smiles on their faces as they discussed the prank. Minerva was standing with Albus, Severus and Filius, all of whom had slightly awed looks on their faces.

"Nice prank," Albus said jovially, "and I am quite impressed by your control of your form."

"Wait," Ron said, "this is why you've taken a liking to meat that's barely been introduced to fire?"

Harry laughed, "Yeah. Minerva said I should get out of that eventually, when I get used to it."

"How on earth did you work it out?" Ron demanded of his girlfriend.

"Ginny's words, actually," Hermione confessed. "She said it was natural. Well, the only way it could be natural for Harry to eat raw meat was if he was an animal – it wasn't much of a jump to work out what she meant from there."

"For a genius, perhaps," Ron muttered.

"Excuse me for a moment," Harry said, and walked up to Padma. He leaned in and whispered into her ear, "Can I suggest a new perfume?"

"What? Why?"

"A perfume is supposed to compliment your natural scent, and yours is currently fighting it."

He pulled back, as Padma blushed for a second, before nodding. She gave him a quick hug and whispered, "Thanks, and thanks for not making a scene."

He smiled at her and walked back over to Ginny.

"Well," Albus said, "as we are all here, I think it might be a good idea to show you your room now, Professor Potter."

Harry grinned. "Lead the way," he said with a flourishing bow. He looked curiously as more people than expected followed the Headmaster through the school.

Dumbledore stopped in front of a large statue of a knight in full armour and looked at Harry. "The password is currently *Hogwarts*, but you should change it now."

Harry looked at the group and raised his wand; he cast a silencing spell on each end of the corridor. "The new password is *Beowulf*."

"An interesting password," Hermione said. "What made you come up with that?"

Harry shrugged. "I liked the story when I was younger."

Hermione nodded. "Me, too."

Harry spoke the new password and the section of wall next to the statue swung inward.

"One second, Harry," Luna said, stopping him just as he was about to enter. "Dobby!"

The house-elf appeared. "Mistress Loony is calling Dobby?"

Luna smiled. "I told you that you should be here," she said to the elf, indicating Harry.

"Oh," Dobby said and nodded fiercely. "Dobby thanks you, Mistress Loony."

"Go ahead, Harry," Luna said with a bright smile.

Harry pushed the wall portal open the rest of the way and stepped in. He paused and blinked. "Crikey."

"You can say that again," Ron agreed.

"Crikey," Harry obliged.

Ginny groaned and pushed his arm. "Have a look around."

Harry looked up at the ceiling first and smiled. The representation of the late autumn setting sun shone down on him, with deep clouds all around.

"It's not as good as the Great Hall," Padma said quietly, "but it's the best we can do."

"It's amazing," Harry said honestly, as he slowly dragged his eyes away from the ceiling and into the room itself.

The room was separated into two distinct areas. To his left was a large fireplace, with two comfy looking couches arranged in front of it. To the right was a series of bookshelves and a reading corner with two arm chairs.

The floor was covered in brown oak parquet flooring, and the chairs and bookshelves matched it perfectly. The walls were done in a light cream.

He moved forward first, through the double doors, and stepped out onto the huge balcony overlooking the Quidditch pitch. He didn't say anything; he just shot a grateful look at the others. He could see himself spending a lot of time out here, and it gave him the perfect place to practice his flying when he changed into his hawk form.

He moved back in, running his fingers over the back of the couch as he entered a study. The floor was the same dark wood, but most of it was covered in a thick pile deep red patterned rug.

“There’s a filing cabinet hidden in the wall,” Hermione pointed out, “and everything you need to be able to run your classes.”

He nodded and turned, walking to his left and into the small kitchenette. Everything that he could need was here. “Dobby,” he called.

“Yes, Harry Potter, sir?”

“You do know that you’re going to have to teach me how to cook properly now, don’t you?”

Dobby gasped. “Dobby would be honoured,” the elf said seriously, dabbing at the corner of his eyes.

Harry smiled and moved back into the living room, and through it, into the bathroom.

He blinked; it looked more luxurious than the Prefects’ Bathroom he’d used in the second task during the Triwizard Tournament, only smaller. The bath looked big enough for a party of six, and had several overhanging showerheads, along with a series of gold taps that controlled it.

A large mirror dominated half of the room, with a marble top that had an inbuilt sink.

He turned toward his bedroom and swept the connecting door open. The brown theme continued into here, with another thick carpet, and a huge four poster bed. Three wardrobes stood next to each other on the far wall, as well as a dressing table. He knew, without a doubt, that this room was meant for dual-occupancy.

He turned again and walked back out to the balcony, perching on the edge as he looked at his friends and family.

“Thank you,” he said simply. “It’s perfect.”

“I’m afraid that we can’t take the credit, Harry,” Albus said cheerfully. “Dobby and the other house elves did all the work changing the size of your quarters, and Miss Patil, Miss Zabini, Miss Patil, Miss Brown, Miss Bones and Miss Lovegood did the rest.”

Ginny nodded in agreement.

“If there’s ever anything you need, just ask,” Harry said to them, “and that goes for you as well, Dobby.”

Dobby nodded and pulled out another handkerchief, too overwhelmed to actually say anything.

“There are two things,” Lavender said with a hopeful look.

“Name them.”

“The first,” Blaise took over, “is that you let us hang out here as well. We’ve kinda been using this balcony for the last few days, and we love it.”

“Of course,” Harry agreed. “Up to curfew, naturally.”

Minerva and Albus both smiled at this statement.

“And the second thing?”

“We’ll ask later,” Parvati said, “when there aren’t any other boys around.”

“Sirius,” Harry said, before his godfather could open his mouth. “Just remember what happened last time you made an off colour joke about this sort of thing.”

Sirius pouted. “You’re taking all the fun out of life,” he protested.

Harry laughed and shook his head. “On the contrary,” he said, “*I’m* enjoying life immensely.” He looked at Hermione for a second and smiled at her. “Yes,” he said, “you can use the study.”

“Thank you,” Hermione exhaled. “There are some books in there I’ve not read.”

“Come on,” Ron said, wrapping his arm around his girlfriend. “You can look at the books and I’ll do my potions homework.”

“You’ve not done it yet?” Hermione scolded as they walked off.

Harry laughed under his breath.

“I think,” Minerva said, “that it’s time for Albus and me to leave you in peace.”

“Thank you, both, for everything,” Harry said.

“Oh, you’ll earn it, Harry, you’ll earn it,” Dumbledore said as he offered his arm to Minerva and they both walked out. Dobby gave a deep bow and popped out as well.

There was a silence for a few moments, before Sirius said, "What?"

Harry looked at the faces of the girls, who were all frowning at Sirius. "I think they'd like you to leave," he said in a stage whisper.

"But it's not fair, that would just leave you and all these hot witches," Sirius said back in the same whisper.

"You're far too old," Harry pointed out, "and I only need one of them."

"We should talk," Sirius replied, shaking his head in a disappointed manner.

"Sirius!" Ginny shouted.

"Yes, Ginny?"

"Leave, now!"

"Can I at least have a Portkey out of here?"

Harry reached into his pocket and pulled out a coin. He concentrated for a second, and then gave it to his godfather. "It will take you to your own hot partner."

"But..." what ever Sirius was going to say was lost as the Portkey activated and whisked him away.

"So," Harry said, "what's the other thing?"

Parvati reached into her bag and pulled out Ginny's nightgown from the previous evening. "This," she said, handing it to him.

Harry blushed. "What about it?"

"Feel it," Lavender said.

He did, it was smooth and slightly warm. It felt quite nice, actually.

"Now try and tear it," Blaise told him.

He did, and frowned, before biting it and seeing if he could do it that way.

"What is this stuff?" he asked.

"That's what we wanted to ask you," Lavender said. "It's as strong as denim, as soft as cotton, as smooth as silk, and it shouldn't exist."

"Ginny, we put some identical clothes that you were wearing on Saturday in the first wardrobe," Blaise said, "go and get changed."

Ginny smiled and nodded.

Blaise followed her out and stuck her head into the study. "We're trying some stuff out," she said to Ron and Hermione. "Ron, you won't want to come out until we tell you – unless you want to risk the chance of seeing your sister naked."

"I'll not be moving from this spot, then," Ron replied.

Ginny returned a few minutes later in the same outfit, and Harry couldn't help smiling at her. "You are beautiful," he whispered as she approached him. He raised his fingers up and lightly touched her cheek.

As she smiled at him, everything faded into the background, everything changed, so that all he could see was the brown of her eyes, the pale freckles across her nose, the red of her lips, and the way they were slightly open, inviting him in.

He leaned forward and kissed her gently, before pulling away regretfully.

"We're going to try and scan your magic as you do it," Padma said.

Harry nodded. "Ready?"

"Always," Ginny whispered.

He closed his eyes again and reached out to her clothes, trying to get them to change as he had before, and merging the layers into place.

"Got it," Lavender said.

"Now what?" Harry asked.

"Well, now we've got the process," Padma said, "so we work from this point and come up with a spell that normal people can cast."

Harry laughed.

"We were afraid that you'd leave Gin naked if it went wrong."

“Damn,” Ginny pouted. “That would have been more fun!”

Harry just laughed.

From: Sirius the confused

To: Remus the unconfuser

Subject: Harry (How many times have I used this subject?)

First, Harry’s an Animagus! The little bugger’s only a wolf! And how did he tell me this? By making me, his own godfather, back down!

The problem is, Ginny wouldn’t let me give him a nickname, said he was too noble. Just how can we have an Animagus in the family without a nickname?

Siri

--
Woof

From: The protector of the English language

To: The butcher of the English Language

Subject: 117 by my count

Harry’s a wolf Animagus? That’s wonderful news. What does he look like?

Tell me, Sirius; just what were you doing that made Harry make you back down?

R.

From: The baker of the English Language

To: The proctor of the English Language

Subject: Re: 117 by my count

I’m sure that Harry is planning on showing you the pictures *sigh*. I don’t know; a godfather makes one Sirius/Serious joke and everyone acts like I was Voldemort or something.

And then Ginny made me leave Harry’s new den when things were getting interesting!

S

From: The guardian of the English Language

To: The candlestick maker of the English Language

Subject: Re: Re: 117 by my count

Sirius, why don’t we meet up tomorrow for breakfast, and you can tell me all about it, in great detail!

R.

From: Spy-der girl

To: Wolf boy

Subject: What the F&*&?

First. Wolf Animagus? Nice – a lot more practical than most animals people get.

Second: What the hell did you do today? Lucius is half-deafened and muttering about you turning someone into a bomb that would go off when they talked to a Death Eater?

Two idiots were killed when they ignored you. I'm impressed, Potter. I didn't even know that was possible, or that you had it in you. You're no longer an ickle boy, Potty.

B

Harry looked at the Mmail in disbelief. He turned and looked at Ginny. "I... I... I didn't," he stuttered, transferring it to some parchment he created and passing it to her.

He turned, leant over the balcony, and lost his lunch.

"Shit!" Ginny swore as she scrunched up the Mmail and chucked it through the doorway into one of the fires. "Hermione," she yelled, "Ron, get out here, quick."

Hermione and Ron ran out onto the balcony. "What's going on?" Hermione demanded.

He could feel Ginny rubbing his back, as Padma replied, "We have no idea. He got a Mmail, read it, and then his face lost all colour, and he lost his lunch. I hope no one was underneath the balcony."

Harry turned and collapsed onto the floor. "I didn't mean to do it," he said to Ginny desperately. "That wasn't supposed to happen."

"I know, my love," she replied, hugging him tightly.

"It was just a light spell," he told her, almost begging. "That's all."

"I know," Ginny repeated. "It was my suggestion, Harry, not yours."

"But..."

"Shhh," Ginny said gently. "Let me explain what's going on to the others, and then we'll talk about it."

He nodded, as she wormed her way into his arms and sat firmly in his lap, wrapping his arms around her.

"This morning, after we dealt with the Death Eaters, we were dealing with a piece of scum who was an associate of Lucius Malfoy, but wasn't actually a marked Death Eater. To stop him from reporting to a Death Eater, I thought we'd do one of our standard psychological tricks, and make a pretend spell so that if he went near a Death Eater, he would explode.

"Harry cast a light spell on him, and that was it. We've just found from one of our contacts that it kinda, well, worked," she shrugged her shoulders in reluctant acknowledgement. "Two people died and Lucius Malfoy was injured when the man contacted him."

"Bugger," Hermione said, and moved over to sit next to Harry, hugging him tightly.

A second later, Harry found himself surrounded by girls who were hugging him and Ginny.

"But it's not possible," Harry eventually said. "I only cast a light spell!"

Ginny moved out of his arms, and turned, kneeling in front of him. Hermione joined her a second later. Blaise moved so that she was hugging him from the left, Padma from the right. Ginny swallowed hard, and Harry felt something tense up in his stomach as he saw the expression on her face.

"What?" he asked her softly.

"We've been keeping something from you," she said softly.

Those six words seemed to freeze his insides like they had been dipped in liquid nitrogen.

"What?" he croaked again, hardly recognising his own voice.

"Harry," Hermione said, "it is impossible to attach a spell to a Mmail, just as it is impossible for you to Apparate into Hogwarts."

"But I do that," he pointed out.

"That's because you don't know it was impossible."

"That makes very little sense."

"Harry, we've all been raised with strict rules on what is and what isn't possible," Ginny said, "even Hermione, who knew exactly what was possible because she read *Hogwarts: a History*, and because she grew up in a culture that placed limits on her imagination. You didn't, despite everything you went through, growing up. You believe that anything is possible with magic, unless told without a doubt that it can't be done."

"I don't understand," Harry whispered.

"We've known since you made the first Portkey for the Mmail attachment," Ginny continued, her eyes locked on his. "We didn't know there were any down sides to this, until you and Severus tried to battle Voldemort, and Voldemort told you that you couldn't escape from his mind-trap, and you believed him. That was when we knew we had to be careful.

“Harry, your belief in what you can and can’t do is greater than the so-called laws of magic,” she told him solemnly.

“So what happened this morning?” he asked.

“You listened to me, and did as I suggested without thinking. You took the idea and your magic responded.”

“So why didn’t you tell me this before I accidentally killed two innocent people?”

Ginny paled, as did Hermione. “Because,” Ginny said as she swallowed nervously, “because you were doing so much for the good side, we didn’t want to stop it.”

“So you used me?” Harry asked, focusing completely on the girl in front of him.

“Yes and no,” Ginny whispered, her eyes tortured. “It allowed you to become an Animagus, to Apparate around the country, to change the fate of the world for the better, and all we had to do was watch what we said. And we didn’t.

“I didn’t,” she added sadly.

“Who knew about this?”

“The senior teachers, Ron, Hermione and me, and a few others. I was the one that identified it. We took it to Albus and the others immediately, and we decided to try and guide you.”

Harry reached up and touched his necklace as he looked at her. She touched her own and opened herself to him, completely and without reservation, letting him see her soul.

He closed his eyes and exhaled in relief; there was no sign at all that she was using his love for her, or that her love was anything other than what she had said each time.

“I need some time,” he whispered.

She nodded.

He stood abruptly, took a couple of steps to the left and vaulted over the balcony. He changed into his wolf form half way down, and used the wall to slow his descent.

A second later, he was running as fast as he could toward the Forbidden Forest.

Ginny leaned back against her heels and sighed.

“What’s going on?” Blaise asked in a confused voice.

“He’ll be fine,” she whispered, her voice sounding tortured. “He was afraid that I didn’t really love him. The rest he’s upset about, but he’ll deal with it.”

“The necklaces?” Ron asked.

“Yeah, I let him see whatever he wanted, whatever he needed inside me. I think it worked. He’s confused, upset, and still doesn’t really understand, but he’ll run off his anger and he’ll allow himself to think.”

Ron sighed. “Nothing’s ever easy for him, is it?”

“It’s got to be a nightmare to realise that you’ve killed two people by accident,” Hermione added sadly.

“I don’t think that anyone else needs to know this,” Ginny said softly.

Everyone nodded in agreement.

“At least they deserved it,” Blaise added.

“And tomorrow,” Luna added, “he’ll be distracted by Daddy’s report on the new Butterbeer, and he’ll have the time to get over it.”

“Okay, guys, I think it’s time for you to all leave,” Ginny said. “I’m going to crawl into his bed and try to sleep while I wait for him.”

“You’re worried, still?” Parvati asked.

“Terrified,” Ginny whispered, “because despite all the logic, despite all the good intentions, I kept something really important from him, and he tells me everything as soon as he can. I’m the only person who knows what he was doing today, and who he was dealing with. I know his hopes and his dreams, his love and his fear, I know how scared he is about what he has to do, and the decisions he has to take.

“And how do I deal with that?” she asked, as tears ran down her face. “I hid something from him, something that if he had known, he wouldn’t have come close to death with Snape, he wouldn’t have done so much that he has.”

“But it’s been for the best,” Blaise pointed out.

“The best for whom?” Ginny asked.

“Everyone else,” Blaise answered for everyone, a stricken look on her face, her voice barely audible.

“I’m *supposed* to look after him first, and everyone else second,” Ginny pointed out.

Blaise crawled forward and took Ginny in her arms, hugging the smaller girl tightly.

Ginny closed her eyes and cried on Blaise’s shoulder. She felt Blaise pick her up and carry her, and a few seconds later she was placed in Harry’s bed.

She tried to stop crying, but the bed didn’t smell like him, and that made it worse.

Harry ghosted silently through the Forbidden Forest. This was his first real excursion as a wolf, and everything seemed so much simpler.

He had killed to protect his pack. That was right. That was good. That was what the pack leader was *required* to do. Honour dictated that he do everything he could to secure his pack’s future.

What was not as simple was his Mate’s actions. She was supposed to be there for him, to be his strength. And it hurt that she had been keeping the truth from him, when he had been telling her practically everything he was doing.

The one exception was that he was actually learning to dance, but that was a surprise, for her.

He looked up as the air seemed to turn silver and sniffed silently. The moon was almost full and he’d be spending some time with Moony and Padfoot soon, replacing his father in their pledge to their friend. It was a pity that they didn’t have anyone to replace Wormtail. He was just a shell of a man now, his soul sucked out by Death Eaters, which wasn’t exactly a big loss.

He jumped up onto some rocks and sniffed again. There was a scent present that raised the hackles on the back of his neck.

“Well, well, what do we have here?” a voice demanded.

Harry looked up and saw a large man with matted grey hair and whiskers standing a short distance away, staring at him. He growled softly in warning, but the man disregarded it.

“You’re not a real wolf,” the man rasped, as he lightly licked his long yellow nails. “You’re a little too big and a little too uneasy. You’re an Animagus.”

Harry contemplated transforming, but decided not to for now. His instincts were urging him to stay as he was.

“I wonder,” the man said, “what would happen if a wolf Animagus was bitten by a werewolf.”

Harry blinked at him.

The man looked up at the moon. “It’s a bit early,” he said thoughtfully, “but I think that, with enough of my own magic, I can pull it off.” He leaned back and roared, and Harry could almost feel the magic pouring off him as his jaw started to elongate.

It was the second time he’d seen a werewolf transform, and it looked just as painful as before. He wondered if it was the wizard’s body fighting the transformation, rather than embracing it as he did when he changed.

The werewolf had grey fur and bright yellow eyes that spoke eloquently of madness and obsession. It stared at him for a few seconds as it stood there and then growled. The growl was a challenge, and a slur on his honour.

Any thought of changing back to a human vanished in that instant. He could not let this cur insult him like that, this was *his* range, and Hogwarts and its surroundings was his pack’s home. He would not back down, he would not lose. As long as there was breath in his body, he would fight for what he believed in and the people he loved.

Harry stood erect, holding his tail aloft and his ears up and forward. He bared his teeth and growled at the interloper.

Without warning, the werewolf jumped at him. He skipped to one side easily, just enough to avoid the beast and its flying claws.

Harry threw his head back and howled his own challenge – this was his territory and he was ready to fight for it. He crouched, bunching his muscles, and then jumped at the werewolf.

He might not have been a wolf for long, but he wasn’t an artificial curse in a vaguely wolf form. He *was* a wolf. It was deep inside him and always had been, and now was his chance to show this impostor what a *real* wolf could do.

The werewolf stood his ground, an almost human-like expression on his face -- an expression of contempt.

Harry touched his paws to the ground and used them to subtly change his direction. He might be a wolf, but he had the experience of a year of hard

duelling and teaching his pack-mates to duel, and he could call on that experience now.

The touch ensured that he avoided the outstretched claws of the werewolf, and was able to swipe his own out, raking down the left flank of the werewolf who was either too slow or too clumsy to dodge away in time.

The werewolf howled in pain, but Harry didn't stop. He'd stop when his enemy was forever vanquished, and not before. He touched down and dug his claws in, throwing himself back against the werewolf.

The werewolf jumped, narrowly avoiding Harry's snapping jaws this time. He twirled faster than Harry expected, and tried to swipe him with his claws.

Harry jerked out of the way and skidded across the tops of the rocks.

The werewolf and the wolf stared at each other, both panting softly, steam coming from their mouths as they both took dominant positions.

Only the werewolf's pose wasn't truly dominant, Harry noticed. It was a fake, a mockery, how a human would view the pose, but his body language was wrong.

It was an insult to him, that this ignorant savage would invade his home and challenge him, with such disregard for a wolf's customs.

They launched themselves at each other at the same moment. The werewolf had the size advantage, but Harry had the strength. His muscles were not those of a human forced into a werewolf's shape; his muscles were his own, created by willing the mixture of his magic and will, and he was stronger.

They met with the sound of flesh on flesh, and he could sense the werewolf's surprise as the werewolf changed direction and bounced painfully onto the stones. He jumped on top of the werewolf, raking his claws along the werewolf's stomach and was rewarded with a scream of pain.

The werewolf kicked at him, throwing him against a tree. He shook himself as he bounced off and dived back into the fight without hesitation. The werewolf scrambled away, turning slightly.

Harry charged him again, barely noticing as the werewolf's claws raked his chest. He was too busy using his own.

He bounced away and circled the werewolf, darting in and out, testing his opponent's reactions. Harry already knew he was going to win. The werewolf was fighting as a human, as an enhanced and powerful human in the shape of a wolf, but still as a human, whereas *he* was fighting as a wolf truly would.

He faked to the left and jumped right. The werewolf turned toward his fake, exposing his rear, and in the manner of wolves throughout time, Harry opened his jaw, bit hard against the exposed tendons of the werewolf's rear leg, and ripped sharply.

Harry jumped away, avoiding the retaliating attack, and spat the flesh from his mouth. The taste made him almost sick; it was polluted and tainted flesh. His hatred of his enemy grew as he detected other tastes, tastes no real wolf would infect his body with.

The werewolf was whimpering, unable to move as he had. Harry moved closer, dancing in and out of range, waiting for the right moment.

It came soon enough. The werewolf overextended, and Harry moved without hesitation, aiming for the werewolf's throat.

He didn't miss.

Harry howled into the darkness, a howl of triumph and warning to anyone else who might dare enter his domain.

He looked down at the werewolf's corpse and watched as it slowly changed back into the man it had once been. He turned away slowly and started to run. He was pretty sure that he was going to need some help dealing with this dead werewolf, and there was only one person he knew nearby who might be able to help him.

He sprinted, a part of him marvelling at the stamina he had, and quickly covered the distance to the Great Lake, where he dipped his head in, washing the blood from his fur and rinsing the foul taste from his mouth. He shook himself and then sprinted toward the Shrieking Shack in Hogsmeade.

He barked, a soft, almost sub-vocal whuff, and scratched at the door until it opened.

Remus opened the door. He was wearing pyjamas and looked bone tired. He stared down at Harry for a long second.

"Harry?" Remus guessed.

Harry nodded once and turned, bouncing away, before he stopped and looked at Remus. He barked again.

"Let me get my shoes," Remus said, and disappeared.

Harry sat down and waited patiently for him.

Remus returned after just a moment or two, now fully dressed.

Harry started to trot back toward the forest, waiting every few seconds to make sure Remus was following.

Remus started to jog as well, a distance-eating stride that allowed Harry to run alongside him.

As soon as they entered the forest, Harry took the lead, and guided Remus through the trees to the moonlit clearing.

"Sweet Merlin," Remus whispered. "Fenrir Greyback!"

Harry looked up at his pack mate.

Remus smiled slowly and looked at Harry. "This is the werewolf that turned me when I was young," he explained.

Harry nodded, even more pleased that he had defeated this false wolf that had harmed one of his pack.

Remus knelt in front of him and met his eyes. "Harry, of all the things you could have done for me, this is undoubtedly the best. Fenrir felt it was his mission in life to infect everyone with the curse."

Harry growled very softly at Remus - his pack mate's posture wasn't quite as submissive as he wanted.

Remus blinked slowly, and then backed away, making his body smaller. "The Ministry is looking for him," he said quietly. "So I'm going to cast a charm to keep him as he is overnight, and we can deal with him in the morning."

Harry settled back and watched as Remus did what he had said. He yawned; the fight had taken more out of him than he had expected. He padded softly in front of Remus, leading him back to the Shrieking Shack.

Inside, Harry found the fire that Remus had lit earlier. He moved over to the prime position in front of it and settled down, placing his head on his paws after licking his wound. It wasn't long before he was asleep.

From: Ginny

To: Friends, Family, and Sirius

Subject: Harry

Has anyone seen him this morning? He didn't come back last night.

A worried Ginny.

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

From: Blaise

To: Ginny's family, friends, acquaintances, and everyone else involved in Harry's wellbeing

Subject: Re: Harry

No one here's seen him since last night.

B

From: Molly

To: Ginny

Cc: Ginny's distribution list

Subject: Re: Harry

I've not seen him here, what's happened?

Molly

From: Dragon Master Flash

To: Snapdragon

Cc: Everyone else

Subject: Re: Re: Harry

No sign of him here – do you need a search party?

C.

--
Draconis dominium

From: Remus

To: Ginny and Sirius

Cc: The extended family

Subject: That's 118

I've got him. Or is that he's got me?

Sirius, I need you at Hogwarts immediately. Apparate to Hogsmeade, then sprint to the school.

Ginny, I'm bringing Harry in now. Find Minerva, we're going to need her help as well.

And before you ask, Harry met Fenrir Greyback (the werewolf that infected me) last night, and Fenrir found out what happens when a werewolf meets a real wolf.

R.

From: Percy

To: Remus

Cc: Weasley clan + others

Subject: Re: That's 118

So I'm inferring that a) Greyback is dead, and b) Harry's a wolf Animagus.

You do like to put me against my duty to the Ministry, don't you? Don't worry, I won't report him.

I will say how pleased I am that Greyback is deceased. That man was a complete menace to society, and gave all werewolves a bad name.

Percy

--
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From: Bill and Fleur

To: Munchkin, Remus

Cc: You lot

Subject: Re: That's 118

Fleur and I are already in Hogwarts - if there is a curse involved, we're here to help. And if not, well, we're bloody curious.

B & F

Ginny burst into the Great Hall, her eyes flashing, slightly out of breath.

"Miss Weasley?" Albus asked.

"Professor," Ginny said, looking straight at Minerva. "Remus and Harry need your help. Something happened last night, Harry got into a fight with some werewolf called Fenrir Greyback, and now Remus is bringing Harry here and has ordered Sirius to help as well," she said in one breath.

"Oh my," Minerva said.

Who's this Greyback character?" Blaise asked.

"He's a Malfoy family friend," Draco answered, to the surprise of most people. "He gets his kicks out of turning people into werewolves. He is the Dark Tosser's link to the werewolves."

"Not any more," Ginny said. "He found out the hard way not to mess with Harry."

There was the sound of paws hitting the ground, and Padfoot entered the Great Hall at full sprint. He changed back into Sirius as he slowed to the stop. "What's going on?" he demanded.

"A question I expect we'll find the answer to shortly," Albus said. "Harry and Remus have just entered Hogwarts."

Harry padded silently into the Great Hall, followed closely by Remus.

"Harry," Ginny called, and ran over to him. She stopped abruptly as she saw the wounds on his chest.

He sniffed her and then nuzzled into her.

"Remus?" Ginny asked, as Harry sat down on his haunches next to her.

Remus looked up at Minerva. "Did you know he was becoming an Animagus?"

Minerva nodded. "I helped him."

"You did warn him about overexposure?"

Minerva looked back steadily. "As with everything else concerned with Harry," she said, moving down from the Professor's table, "he had an unusual introduction, and I'm afraid that I was a little too taken with the natural talent he showed. I honestly didn't think, with his schedule, that it would be an issue."

Remus sighed softly. "He fought Fenrir last night, wolf to werewolf, and he won, as a wolf."

"Bugger," Sirius muttered. "Okay, let's try it the hard way first."

"The hard way?" Ginny asked, moving protectively in front of Harry.

"Yeah, talking him out of it. There's a spell we can use that would force him out of his Animagus form, but Merlin only knows what would happen if we used it on him."

Minerva moved toward Harry, but stopped as he growled.

"Your body language is all wrong," Remus snapped. "You're threatening his dominance."

"He is Alpha then?" Minerva asked.

"Was there ever any doubt?" Sirius replied irritably. "You think I back up for just anyone?"

"He is," Remus agreed, ignoring Sirius' comment. "He makes the werewolf part of me feel very submissive."

Minerva nodded and adapted her body language. She moved slowly, hunching herself over until she could kneel in front of Harry.

Harry gently nudged Ginny to one side, and bared his teeth as he moved slightly in front of her.

"Harry," Minerva called. "Listen to me, Harry. It's time to turn back into your other state."

Sirius moved next to her. "Harry, I know how easy it is to stay, how natural it is to be in your other form, but we need to be able to speak to you properly."

"Your mate needs to speak to you as well," Minerva added.

Ginny reached down and lightly stroked Harry's fur. Her eyes widened as she saw the claw marks on the side of his chest. "Harry," she called, alarm clear in her voice.

He looked up at her, and she could see the confusion in her eyes.

"I need to apologise to you, Harry, and I need to see you as you so I can do it properly."

His eyes changed slightly, and he looked torn.

"Please Harry," she whispered, not looking away, "for me."

Harry slowly reared back and stood, changing as he did. As he turned into a full human, the wounds on his chest seemed to grow, the skin split and he started to bleed.

Ginny was already moving as he fainted, and she caught him and placed him on the ground. "Get him to the infirmary," she ordered Minerva, as she turned and started to sprint.

Minerva grabbed Harry and popped out, just missing the stampede of Harry's friends following Ginny.

"Stand back," Poppy Pomfrey demanded as she got to work. "What caused these wounds?"

"A werewolf."

Poppy shook her head and started to cast a series of charms. "We need to get the poison out first. Werewolf claws have an anti-coagulant that stops them from healing properly. The good news is that these are claw marks, and it doesn't look like he was actually bitten."

"What would happen if a wolf Animagus was bitten?" Hermione asked breathlessly as she arrived a few minutes later.

"Do I look psychic?" Poppy demanded irritably. "Now be quiet and let me get these wounds closed."

Everyone went deadly silent.

Eventually the nurse stepped backward and sighed softly. "Do I want to know who he was fighting?"

"Fenrir Greyback," Ginny answered.

"How is he?"

"Dead."

Poppy nodded slowly, a faint smile on her lips. "Good. I've had to deal with too many families he's ruined." She lightly stroked Harry's hair back from his forehead. "Harry will be fine," she announced. "He's in great shape, especially for a wizard, and that will help him."

"When will he wake up?" Ginny asked.

"Should be before lunch. I'll suggest that you all finish breakfast and get to lessons."

"A capital idea," Albus said from the back.

"You too, Ginny," Poppy said with a soft smile. "I'll stay with him, I promise."

Ginny took one long look at her unconscious boyfriend and nodded slowly. She kissed him gently and turned away.

She was followed by all of their friends.

Percy walked through the Forbidden Forest, Kingsley close by him.

"I still find this place creepy," Kingsley muttered.

"As do I," Percy agreed calmly. "But we need to get to the scene first, before someone else might stumble across it, and then we can decide what we're going to do. Remus said it should just be up here."

Kingsley nodded, keeping his wand at the ready.

"Through here," Percy said and smiled. "Care to cast the spell, oh Auror?"

Kingsley nodded and concentrated. "*Tempus Acclaro!*"

Percy moved back out of the clearing so he could watch what happened without interfering with it. He shook his head in admiration at the fight.

"Well?" Kingsley asked when it was over.

Percy walked over to Fenrir. He looked down at him and pointed his wand. "*Diffindo*," he said as he aimed at the werewolf's neck. He then aimed a bit further down, at the leg, and cast the same charm.

"I think," Percy said cheerfully, "that Harry battled Fenrir Greyback, the wanted werewolf, and through judicious use of the Cutting Charm, managed to defeat him. He will, of course, receive a hefty reward for his actions."

"And his Animagus form?" Kingsley asked.

"I see no credible evidence of such a thing," said Percy, blithely ignoring the preponderance of paw prints. "Besides, it's preposterous to think that a boy his age could become an Animagus, wouldn't you say?"

"Preposterous," Kingsley agreed. "No sign at all." He also didn't bother to look at the prints in the disturbed earth.

Percy grinned. "Then might I suggest that you levitate his body and we'll get back to the Ministry. I know several families that will be celebrating

now that he's dead."

"Why do I have to do it?" Kingsley whined.

"Because I'm the brains and you're the brawn," Percy replied simply.

"Git," Kingsley muttered.

"I heard that," Percy responded. "And you can thank my family for that, too."

"There's too many of you," Kingsley grunted as he cast the spell and they started to walk out of the forest.

"Comforting, isn't it."

Kingsley just grunted again.

Harry groaned as he opened his eyes. "This feels worse than normal," he muttered.

"I thought you were just going to stop by for a cuppa next time?" a voice he recognised as the school nurse said dryly.

"Tell that to arrogant werewolves who challenge me on my territory," Harry replied. "I didn't really want to come back," he admitted. "Everything was much easier as a wolf."

"In what way?" she asked.

"Killing people is easier. Doing what I have to do is easier. Wolves don't feel regret. If something is necessary, it is done, and you move on."

"Minerva should have told you to go easy on your transformation," Poppy said. "At least to start with, as nearly all Animagi feel like that. It's like you've not been whole for all your life, and you suddenly found yourself."

"Yeah, that's it exactly," Harry agreed.

"The problem is," Poppy continued, "that until you have a balance, it can get harder and harder to come back to the other form. Everything needs to be balanced. If you stayed as a wolf, you'd eventually forget how to be a human, and you'd spend the rest of your life like that."

"The strange thing is," Harry said slowly, "that is quite attractive."

She laughed softly. "I think, Harry, that you need to try and merge the personality of the wolf into your human personality. When you do, you will be happy, no matter what form you are in."

"Are you an Animagus?"

"I'm afraid not. I always wanted to be, though. I didn't have an animal come to me."

"I'm sorry."

"I got over the disappointment a long time ago," she said quietly. "I did all the research and found out everything I could. When I failed, I decided to go into medicine."

"Have I ever really thanked you for the care that you give me?" he asked, slowly opening his eyes again so that he could look at her.

She smiled at him. "There's no need, Harry."

"When this is all over," Harry said slowly, "it might be nice to spend some time with you and learn a bit about healing people. I think I'd like that more than killing people."

"I think that you would as well," Poppy replied with a smile. "Do you want to try standing?"

Harry nodded and swung his feet over the edge of the bed. He stood and swayed, grabbing the edge of the mattress. "It feels a little strange only using two legs," he explained with a laugh.

"I think you'll find that kissing is a lot easier in this form, and you have a very worried girlfriend in class at the moment."

Harry smiled. "That's true. I think I'll head on down to lunch." He frowned. "I'm going to have to spend the night as a wolf tonight."

"Why?"

"Because I need to help Remus. It's the full moon."

"I wouldn't recommend it," Poppy said softly.

"Would it help if I spent the afternoon meditating and trying to do this merge you suggested?"

Classes?"

He grinned at her. "This is more important. I suspect that this year is going to be a bust for me, anyway. I'll just do it again when Voldemort is dead."

"In that case, it's probably a very good idea."

Harry smiled and reached for his shirt. He held it up and looked at the bloodstained and ripped garment. "I think I really need to buy my clothes in bulk," he said offhandedly.

Poppy just laughed and reached into a cupboard. "Here. Your spare set."

"Thanks. I'll get Dobby to replace it later."

He slowly got dressed and walked down to the Great Hall. It was nearly lunchtime, and that was the best place to meet up with everyone.

He sniffed, getting the same feeling that he was remembering something that he had forgotten a long time ago.

He shook his head and tried to dismiss it. He stretched and smiled slightly. He was starting to remember what it was like to be human again, and that it wasn't nearly as bad as he had thought when he woke up this morning as his Animagus form.

He entered the Great Hall and sat down at his place and smiled slightly.

From: P Weasley, Ministry for Magic

To: Harry James Potter

Cc: The Wizengamot, Cornelius Fudge

Subject: Fenrir Greyback

Dear Mr Potter:

On behalf of the Ministry for Magic, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your defeat of Fenrir Greyback.

According to the official report, our investigators found that your use of the Cutting Curse caused his death. We congratulate you on avoiding the use of the Unforgivable curses.

With regard to your ongoing confrontation with Lord Voldemort, the Minister for Magic convened the Wizengamot this morning, and has granted you a temporary licence to use the Cruciatus curse, the Imperius curse, and the Killing Curse against the Dark Lord and his associates. This licence is normally reserved for Aurors, but it is recognised that you are a leader in the fight for justice, and as such, should not be concerned with repercussions over your use of magic while protecting yourself from our enemy.

Once again, the Wizengamot and the Minister for Magic would like to congratulate you on your defeat of the seventh most wanted man in England.

Sincerely,

Percy Weasley.

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From: Percy

To: Harry

Subject: Official letter

Harry,

By now you should have seen my official letter. Kingsley and I decided that we'd not mention your Animagus form yet, and keep things nice and legal.

We've also got another thousand galleons for you. Might I suggest donating it to the Werewolf Fund? It's a charity that helps families deal with the effects of a member being bitten, and also tries to support werewolves with Wolfsbane.

P.

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From: Harry

To: The manipulative one

Subject: Re: Official Letter

Do I want to know how you managed to get me that permission?

Good idea on the charity. Keep it quiet, but I'll start giving them a regular donation until we can do something about werewolves.

H

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

From: He who fights with words

To: He who fights with everything

Subject: Re[2]: Official Letter

I might have mentioned to the Wizengamot that it was unlikely that you'd be able to kill Voldemort (although I had to use that stupid You-Know-Who pseudonym) with a smile and a hug.

They saw sense after that.

Percy

--
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From: Harry

To: The Girl Who Knows All

Attachment: List.pmt

Subject: Mmails

Hermione, sweetie, dahr-ling, do you happen to have the Mmail addresses for the attached?

HJP

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

From: The Girl Who Admires

To: Sneaky Git

Attachment: List-completed.pmt

Subject: Re: Mmails

But of course. I would hardly be the Girl-Who-Knows-All otherwise, would I?

I had wondered who you were going to have on your team.

Of course, I got my bet in when the odds were still good.

Hermione

From: Sneaky, but not really a git

To: Oracle

Subject: Re[1]: Mmails

Hermione, gambling?

What ever next?

H.

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

Harry looked up as the doors to the Great Hall opened, and the students started to stream in. Most of them dropped him a smile or a little wave, before Ginny came in.

She paused, hesitating for the smallest moment, before she shot him a hopeful look.

He smiled warmly at her, and a smile lit up her face and she ran over to him and embraced him, burying her face in his neck.

“It’s okay,” he whispered. “We’re okay – we do need to talk later, but I’m fine.”

“About everything?” she asked.

“Yeah, everything.”

Ginny sniffled softly, and then squirmed around so that she was as close to him as possible. Hermione and Ron joined them soon afterward.

“Recovered, then?”

“I’m a little sore,” Harry confessed, “and I’m going to have to do some meditating this afternoon so that I don’t get the urge to stay as a wolf again.”

“What’s it like?” Ron asked.

“Being a wolf?”

“Yeah, that.”

“Natural, more than anything else.” He looked at Hermione. “You know that werewolves are not wolves?”

“What do you mean?”

“When I was fighting Fenrir last night, I *knew* that he wasn’t a real wolf the moment I saw him. He was a human in a wolf’s form. He didn’t understand the subtle things that you know if you are a real wolf. Body language, posture, facial expressions, and everything else. They can mimic it to a degree, but it’s not natural for them.”

“Fascinating,” she said slowly. “That might open up a different avenue for research if we can’t find anything on the charm.”

He turned back to Ron. “When I’m a wolf, I think differently, more directly. Things that I don’t like as a human, the wolf doesn’t mind. Killing, for example – when I’m a wolf, it’s a natural thing for me to do to protect my pack and my range. As a human, I have a lot more moral objections to it. That’s why I’m going to meditate, to try and merge the two.

“There’s also my senses. As a wolf they’re much more acute. I could smell Hermione on you, and vice versa, I can see so much further, and my hearing is unbelievable.” He smiled. “In short, it’s brilliant.”

Ron laughed. “When are you going to teach us?”

“I’ve already promised Minerva that I’m going to teach Ginny, so I don’t think it will be a problem if I extend that a little. Of course, getting time when we’re all free might be a bit of an issue.”

“As always,” Hermione sighed. “You’ve not managed much in classes recently.”

“I think I might have to repeat a year,” Harry said. “Voldemort takes precedence over my education.”

Harry wondered exactly why Ron and Hermione chose that moment to exchange a pointed look and a small smile.

“I’m not hanging up ‘til you hang up,” Dudley said.

Dudley Dursley,” Sheryl Thomas said with a sigh. “You’re more of a girl than I am at times.”

“Hey,” Dudley protested. “I’m a modern man. I’m just showing my emotions.”

“Modern man, my arse.”

“Is that an invitation?” Dudley asked.

Sheryl laughed. “Maybe,” she said. “You’ll have to wait and…”

“Sheryl?”

“Dudley,” her voice was suddenly full of fear, “I’m looking out the window, and a bunch of Death Eaters have just appeared.”

“Get the hell out of there,” Dudley screamed into the phone. “Use the Portkey.”

“Mum, Dad, Jenny,” Sheryl screamed. “I’ll be safe,” she promised as she hung up.

Dudley hung up as well, and immediately ran to the front window.

“Dudley?” Vernon, who was home for lunch, asked. “What’s the problem?”

“Fuck.”

“Dudley Dursley,” Petunia yelled. “I will not have that language in my house.”

“So what would you say when you see a bunch of Death Eaters walking toward your house?”

Petunia paled.

“Freaks,” Vernon said as he got to his feet. “I’ll show them,” he promised, his moustache quivering.

“Dad, you’re an idiot,” Dudley groaned.

Petunia screamed as the front door exploded open, the splinters driving into the opposite wall like shrapnel.

Dudley groaned again and grabbed his mother, pulling her close, then grabbed his father’s hand, and as he grabbed the necklace, was glad that he had lost enough weight that he could contort himself like this.

“Hogwarts!”

“Dudley!” Petunia and Vernon screamed as they fell through space.

Harry looked up from his meal and frowned. He pulled out his wand and hopped over the Gryffindor table. “Incoming Portkey,” he called back to Albus.

Four people appeared, one of them clutching a bleeding arm.

“Mum! Dad! Sheryl! Jenny!” Dean Thomas shouted as he leaped up and dashed over to them.

“Someone go and fetch Madam Pomfrey,” Harry ordered, as he took a look at the man’s arm. “Nice to meet you, Mr Thomas,” Harry said. “I’m Harry Potter.”

“The person we have to thank for our safety?”

“Nah,” Harry said absently. “We should be able to get this cleaned up pretty easily.”

Sheryl took a step over and hugged him as he stood up. “Thanks.”

“It was nothing,” Harry said. “I’m just glad you’re all alright.” He paused. “Bugger.”

“What?” Sheryl asked.

“The other Portkey has just activated.”

“Dudley?” Sheryl asked.

Harry nodded and took a few steps back. A second later three individuals appeared and Harry fought a smile.

Dudley had his arm and head around Petunia’s waist, and was clutching his necklace, while he was holding his father with his right hand.

Dudley let his parents go with a mild expression of distaste.

Sheryl," he said with a look of relief upon seeing her, and hugged her.

"What is going on?" Vernon demanded loudly and angrily, glaring at Dudley. "How dare you bring me to this freak house?"

"And you," he yelled, turning on Harry. "We should have stamped the freakishness out of you when we had a chance. This is your fault, you useless, good for nothing idiot! I was happily enjoying my lunch when a bunch of you dirty freaks destroyed our door and then our son kidnapped us before I could do anything. I thought we were rid of you for good, and that you and your disgusting unnatural ways were forever out of our lives." He took a deep breath, his face purple. "And..."

Before he could continue his tirade, Dudley took three quick steps forward and launched a vicious punch that started somewhere near his knees and continued through Vernon's chin.

Vernon rose up onto tiptoe, before he fell backward like a large tree, producing a loud thump as he hit the floor.

"Dudley!" Petunia shrieked. "What are you doing?"

"Saving the moron's life," Dudley snapped irritably. "Again."

"What do you mean?" Petunia demanded.

"Take a good, long look around you," Dudley suggested, "and pay attention to the red-haired girl to the left of Harry."

Harry looked around as Petunia did. Practically every student had their wand out and most of those wands were pointed at one of the Dursleys. Without exception, there were furious expressions on all their faces. Ginny looked particularly incensed – her hand was glowing and she was practically shaking in anger. Ron and Hermione, on the other hand, were looking implacable as they pointed their wands at the Dursleys.

"You wouldn't dare..." Petunia stuttered. "You'd be expelled."

"I wouldn't be," Snape pointed out silkily, "but then, cursing vermin like you would be considered a public service."

"Are you calling *me* vermin?" Petunia demanded, outrage in her voice.

"Without any doubt, whatsoever."

"*Silencio, Petrificus Totalus, Incarcerous* ." The three spells rocketed from the Hufflepuff table before Petunia could say anything in reply.

Harry looked up in surprise.

Susan shrugged. "I figured that someone who hadn't lost their temper should do something to protect them." She wandered over to the stationary Petunia. "I'm a Hufflepuff," she announced proudly. "We try and treat everyone fairly, and I've done so now. But if I ever hear you talking to Harry like that again, you won't have to worry about everyone else, because *I* will make what's left of your life a living hell."

"Twenty points to Hufflepuff," Snape said quietly.

"Well," Harry said with a sigh. "This was a little unexpected. It's good to see you, Dudley."

"Yeah," Dudley agreed. "Erm, why is the ceiling moving?"

Harry grinned. "Magic."

"Right," Dudley laughed. "Sorry, stupid question. Okay, a not so stupid question. Considering that dear old dad is a racist bully, just why did you come home every summer, when you could have stayed here?"

"I had to. The charms that protected your house were keyed to me. It's what gave you the time to get here," Harry explained.

"You mean that you put up with us for our benefit?"

"It wasn't totally altruistic, but it wasn't my idea, either."

"Well, that's more that I owe you," Dudley said earnestly.

"Actually," Harry said slowly, "you're alive because of your own actions, not because of me. If you hadn't sent me that apologetic email, I'd have never found out that you'd changed and would never have given you the Portkey." He paused, "Tell me something; how long have you been waiting to hit him?"

"About from the time that he called Sheryl a wog," he replied with a fierce scowl. "She wouldn't let me hit him, there and then."

Harry looked at his relatives and shrugged; he pointed at them and levitated them into a corner.

"That is going to take some getting used to," Mr Thomas muttered. "Don't you have to use a wand?"

"Dad," Sheryl said with a teenager's roll of her eyes audible in her voice. "He's Harry Potter, he can do anything."

"Oh, right, yeah," he said. "Graeme Thomas," he introduced himself, offering Harry his now fixed arm.

Harry shook his hand solemnly.

“This is my wife, Mary. You know Sheryl, and my youngest daughter, Jenny.”

Jenny was a small girl with huge brown eyes. She looked to be around five or six. She squirmed out of her mother’s arms and walked over to him. She looked scared at everything that had happened to her.

“Hello,” he said.

“You’re magic?”

He nodded. “So people tell me,” he said dryly.

“Like Dean?”

Dean snorted from next to his parents. “Yeah,” he muttered, “just like Dad’s job as a taxi driver makes him like a race car driver.”

Harry nodded.

“Are you better than Dean?”

Harry shook his head. “Dean’s a very good wizard.”

She frowned and looked up at him and sighed.

“What’s the matter?”

“Dean couldn’t fix my teddy,” she said sadly, holding out a bedraggled, limp teddy, missing half of its stuffing and an arm.

“Ahh,” Harry said as he sat down on the floor in front of her. “It wasn’t that Dean *couldn’t* fix your teddy, he wasn’t allowed to. All wizards have to follow rules.”

He ignored the simultaneous sniff of disbelief from the crowd.

“However,” he continued, “I happen to be a teddy-specialist. Does he have a name?”

“*She*,” the girl said with a glare, “is named Matilda.” She had a look on her face that announced that she doubted his claim that he was a *real* teddy-specialist.

“Jenny!” Mary scolded.

“It’s okay,” Harry said to her, before looking back at the girl. “You see, I bet there are things about Matilda that you didn’t know.”

Jenny shook her head firmly.

“May I?” he asked, holding out his hand.

She reluctantly passed the teddy to him. “You see, you don’t need me or Dean to fix Matilda.”

“Huh?”

“Look,” Harry said. “This is my wand. I use it to do magic.” He showed it to her, and then threw it at Ginny, who caught it neatly.

“Now, the problem is that you’ve never tried to fix Matilda in Hogwarts, this wonderful castle.”

She shook her head, her eyes started to grow wider. “So why don’t you try it?”

“Matilda,” Jenny said, her voice wavering. “Do you want to be fixed?” There was a pause, and then she shrieked as the teddy’s eyes slowly started to move, before finally fixing on her.

“Don’t be afraid. Tell her you love her,” Harry suggested. “Everyone needs love.”

“Matilda,” Jenny’s voice was a little firmer. “I love you, and I need you fixed.”

“Hogwarts is a wonderful place,” Harry said softly. “Some even say this castle is alive, and that she can help others. But look,” he pointed at the teddy, who started to sway.

“She’s moving,” Jenny whispered in awe.

“She loves you,” Harry said solemnly. “Now, I need you to concentrate hard on her. What are you going to fix first?”

“Her arm, her arm,” Jenny said, as she dropped to her knees.

“Look,” Harry whispered. From the stump a small brown bud appeared that slowly grew into a full arm.

“It’s happening,” Jenny said in excitement. “Come on, Matilda,” she cheered.

Matilda turned her head and watched the new arm grow. When it was in place, she waved it around a few times.

“Her body,” Jenny said next, and clapped her hands as the teddy started to fill out until she looked like a miniature cuddly bear again.

“I think she could do with a bath,” Harry suggested.

“Can that happen?” Jenny asked.

“If you believe enough, anything can happen.”

“I believe,” Jenny stated. “Come on, Matilda, clean yourself up.”

Matilda’s toes started to change colour, from a dirty dark brown to a soft honey brown. When she was fully changed, the teddy looked at herself, and then at her owner, and opened her arms wide.

“Matilda!” Jenny screamed and hugged the teddy hard, crying with delight.

Harry smiled softly, “You see,” he told her gently, “I do know about teddies.”

Jenny nodded fervently.

“I also know that as long as you are in Hogwarts, Matilda will be able to show you how much she loves you, but when you leave, she’ll fall into a deep sleep.”

Jenny nodded again.

“But Matilda will always love you, and if nasty men ever come and try and get you again, all you have to do is hug Matilda and they will never, ever, be able to hurt you.”

She gasped and looked at her teddy. She then leant forward and gently kissed the floor. “Thank you, Hogwarts,” she whispered.

A bright light illuminated them both, and they floated into the air.

“What’s happening?” Jenny asked, clutching Matilda.

“Hogwarts is saying ‘You’re welcome,’” Harry explained as they floated up.

Jenny looked at him closely. “You’re not like Dean,” she said eventually, as they started to float back down.

“I am,” Harry protested.

“Hogwarts loves you more than Dean,” she said firmly. “That’s what she was telling me. Hogwarts likes Matilda as well.” She frowned and her eyes crossed. “She says that she trusts you.”

Harry blinked. He reached out with his hand and lightly stroked her hair. “I think your brother would like a hug.”

“All right,” Jenny said and climbed to her feet. She hugged Harry tightly for a second, before she ran over to her brother. “Hug?” she asked.

“Come on,” Dean said, as he picked her up, “you can sit with us.”

Harry climbed to his feet, a thoughtful expression on his face. He looked around, “What?” he asked.

Most of the girls were looking at him with smiles that he didn’t understand.

“Ron?” Harry asked, “What’s going on?”

Ron laughed softly. “Sorry, mate, I can’t tell you.”

“Can’t or won’t?”

“Won’t,” he grinned. “You just made the biggest mistake a boy can make.”

“Huh?”

“Quiet, Ron,” Hermione barked.

“Yes, Ma’am,” Ron said with a smirk, clearly enjoying Harry’s discomfort.

“Ginny?” Harry tried. She took a few steps forward and hugged him tightly.

He hugged her back, and looked, bewildered, over her head at the Professors. Severus and Albus were smirking at him, while Minerva had a smile similar to the other females’ on her face.

“What?” he asked.

Ginny just smiled and pulled him back over to the table, where Hermione hugged him.

“Please?”

Ginny gently kissed him on the cheek and rested her head on his side, wrapping his arm around her.

Harry gave up trying to work out what he had done when a thought struck him.

“Dobby?”

“Harry Potter is calling Dobby, sir?”

“Can you get a couple of rooms ready, one for Dean’s family and one for them?”

Dobby nodded and turned, before he stopped suddenly.

“*Them* is being Dursleys,” he pointed out, staring at the two on the floor.

Harry nodded.

“Dursleys are not being worthy of living in rooms,” Dobby snapped. “Dursleys need to be in cupboards.” and before Harry could act, the elf popped over to Vernon and Petunia and grabbed them both, and popped out.

“Hey, Harry,” Seamus said, “can you award points to house elves?”

Harry grinned at him.

Seamus grinned back. “And as no one else has the balls to say this, you were great with Jenny. She normally doesn’t like strangers.”

Harry met Dean’s eyes for a moment, and then waved his hand. Jenny leant against her mother and closed her eyes.

“In case you don’t already know, she’s a witch,” Harry said.

“Cool,” Dean cheered.

“But I’m a little concerned about the Hogwarts remark she made.”

“Why?” Ginny asked.

“Well, it was all my magic,” Harry said, “all but the last part when she was floating in the air.”

“Harry,” Albus called.

Harry looked up, and Albus smirked at him. “Some even say this castle is alive,” he quoted, “and if she’s alive, why can’t she have favourites?”

Harry wasn’t quite sure how to respond to that, so he turned back the Thomases. “You’re going to have to stay here for a bit. The Ministry will turn up to fix your house and mind-wipe your neighbours. An unsavoury element here at Hogwarts mentioned Dudley’s burgeoning relationship with Sheryl, which is why Voldemort targeted you – well, that and because you’re Muggles.

“You’ll find the quarters are very nice here, and you will, of course, be compensated for the time you’ll have to take away from your jobs. Will there be any problems with that?”

“I’m a taxi driver,” Graeme replied. “I can set my own working hours. My wife looks after the kids.”

“That makes it easier,” Harry admitted. “Why don’t you look at this as a chance to see how Dean spends his life away from home, and have a bit of a fully catered holiday? Dean, take the afternoon off to get your family settled.”

“Yes, Professor Potter,” Dean teased.

Harry rolled his eyes at him. “Right, people, it’s time for class. And let’s hope that we’ll be able to have a less exciting meal this evening.”

This Means War

10b - Werewolves, Goblins and Dragons, Oh My! (Part 2 of 3)

From: Harry

To: Rapacious Werewolf

Cc: Doggy

Subject: This evening

Moony ol' boy, several things came up last night. I want you at Hogwarts before it gets dark, so we can try a few things out before you change.

Sirius, you too.

H.

From: Wolfenstein

To: Padrick

Subject: Higher than you can count

Paddy ol' boy, I think it's going to take some getting used to the idea that Harry instinctively considers himself my boss.

Remus

From: Sinister Sirius

To: Reposed Remus

Subject: I can count higher than that...

I think I worked that one out when he forced me and Severus together.

Hopefully, as he grows, he'll grow out of it a little and you can go back to mothering him.

S.

From: Not reposed on the afternoon of a full moon

To: Sinister? Try benign

Subject: Without taking off your socks and shoes?

True.

And I do not mother him! I'm far too masculine for that.

Remus

From: Pacifist Padfoot

To: Jumpy wolf

Subject: Yes!

Remus, we're good friends. We've been friends for as long as I can remember. And as your friend, I have to tell you...

That moustache makes you look like you prefer the company of other men.

So yes, mothering.

grins

S.

Woof woof

From: Parental Figure

To: The Boy Who Isn't Quite An Adult Yet

Cc: Metrosexual Man

Subject: Re: This evening

I'll be there.

R.

From: The Boy Who Hates Capitals

To: Grumpy Gus

Cc: Him

Subject: Re[2]: This evening

How shy are you?

H.

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

From: You'd be grumpy too

To: the boy who lived (happy?)

Cc: That one

Subject: Re[3]: This evening

Not very, why?

R.

From: Probably

To: Definitely

Cc: What-on-earth

Subject: Re[4]: This evening

I just had an idea for something educational. I'll see you tonight.

Harry

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

From: Harry Potter

To: All Students

Cc: All staff, everyone in Hogwarts, Sirius and Remus

Subject: Extra curricular activity

All,

I'd like to invite everyone who is curious to see an actual werewolf transform to meet tonight in the Great Hall.

For too long werewolves have been treated like pariahs because of how they act when they are under their curse.

I feel it would be highly educational for you to see first hand the effects that this curse has on the individual involved. To see the pain they have to go through, through no fault of their own.

Remus Lupin, a former Professor at Hogwarts, has graciously volunteered.

Professor Lupin was bitten as a child by Fenrir Greyback, the werewolf I fought last night, and I do not know a kinder, gentler and more respectable man.

I hope that you will be there at 7 tonight, and that you will leave your prejudices at the door.

Harry.

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

From: R
To: S
Subject: Re: Extra curricular activity

I didn't expect that!
Do you think it will be safe for them?
Remus

From: S
To: R
Subject: Re: Re: Extra curricular activity

Never mind them, how do you feel?
Sirius

From: RL
To: SB
Subject: Re: Re: Re: Extra curricular activity

What – the demonstration? Harry's right, it could do a lot of good. As long as people are safe, and Harry wouldn't even suggest it if he didn't have it under control, I've not got a problem with it. It's not exactly a secret, is it?
R

From: Albus
To: Harry
Subject: Constantly

Every time I look around, you surprise me.
I will be there.
Albus

--
Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot and Chairman of the International Confederation of Wizards

From: Harry

To: Unca Albie

Subject: Re: Constantly

Good – because I'm going to need your help protecting everyone who turns up this evening.

Harry

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

From: Harry

To: Sev

Subject: My relatives

Can you do me a favour and move them from wherever Dobby stuffed them into a room for now?

We'll have to let them go sooner or later, but I'll repair their house first – it's not exactly their fault it got destroyed.

H

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

From: Severus

To: Potter

Subject: Re: My relatives

You owe me.

S.

--
Working for the downfall of the Dark Tosser for fifteen years

Harry opened his eyes and slowly smiled.

"That," Ginny said softly, "is the most wolfish smile I've ever seen on a human."

"Hey," Harry greeted her. "When did you get in?"

"About twenty minutes ago," she replied with a soft shrug. "Did you know that you're floating?"

He nodded. "It's easier to meditate when you've not got any external stimulus."

She laughed under her breath.

"I've got something to tell you," he said with a grin.

"Oh?" she asked, matching the grin.

He nodded. "I'm an Animagus."

"I know."

He shook his head and concentrated, forcing his hawk self to the fore. The pain this time was less than before as he shrank down to the smaller bird.

Ginny looked at him and burst into tears.

"Ginny?" he asked, transforming back immediately.

"I'm so sorry," she mumbled as she barrelled into him and buried her face into his chest.

What for?" he asked, his hands going around her automatically.

"Not telling you." Her voice was muffled by the shirt he was wearing.

"It's okay," he said. "I've accepted it and moved on. You did what you thought was best, and I've accepted that."

"You have?" she asked doubtfully.

"You think about things differently as a wolf," he explained. "Part of me was slightly mad at you for going against me as pack leader, but I could smell your sadness and regret this morning, and, well, you *are* my mate, and if you can't forgive your mate, who can you forgive?"

She sniffled against him.

He lightly stroked her back. "Although I do think you're wrong."

"Mmfppf," she mumbled.

"I believe that I am powerful, and I believe that if I stop hiding it, there's nothing I can't do. But I believe that of you as well."

"I can't."

"Yes, you can," he insisted. "Look at me, Ginny."

She raised her head. Her face was blotchy from her tears, and her nose was red.

He conjured a hankie and pressed it to her nose. "Blow."

She did.

He wiped and disposed of the hankie with a shake of his wrist.

"I'm going to enter your mind."

She nodded.

He silently cast Legilimens and entered her mind. He didn't hang around as he headed toward the part of her mind that corresponded with the part that his wolf had come from. He was going to prove that she could do anything by making sure that she was going to be an Animagus as well.

'Come,' he ordered into the darkness of Ginny's subconscious. *'I know you're there, and I know what you want. I can smell you!'*

There was a soft sound, followed by silence.

'Help me, Ginny,' he said into her mind. *'Order it to come forth!'*

There was another silence, before a lurch that seemed to shake everything occurred. From the dark recesses of her mind, a she-wolf padded out slowly. She sniffed him slowly and then bowed.

He nodded to her and retreated out of Ginny's mind.

"Who is she?" Ginny whispered.

"Your Animagus form."

"That's not possible," she whispered again.

"Oh, it's possible, if you just forget what you know."

"That makes no sense."

"There are no limits on Magic, Ginny, but the limits that we impose. With enough power, we could accomplish anything. Spells, charms, curses, they are nothing but focusing tools for what we want to do.

"They are the structures and guidelines that we play in, but they aren't needed, not if we go beyond them and refuse to accept them." He paused and created a chair with a wave of his hand. "Make the chair float."

She reached for her wand, her eyes not looking away.

His hand shot out and grabbed hers. "Don't use a wand, just make it float."

"How?"

"Wave your hand, make it float."

"That doesn't make sense."

"I do it," he pointed out.

"But you're Harry Potter, you can do anything," she protested.

"And you're my mate," he snarled angrily. "You're my love, my partner, my future. Now bloody well prove it, Ginny, make that damn thing float."

She looked at him, shocked.

"Do it," he snarled again, "or are you just a weak willed little girl?"

"You bloody git!" she yelled as she slashed her hand at the chair. It splintered into a thousand pieces.

"Not *quite* a Levitation Charm," he said with a grin in his voice, "but I think I proved my point. If you can do it when you're angry, why not when you're calm?"

She took a deep breath and glared at him for a full thirty seconds. "Because I lose my temper?" she eventually asked.

"And when you lose your temper, are you thinking what you can and can't do?"

She shook her head. "I just do it," she confessed.

"Like with the raw magic?"

She nodded again.

"So you accept that you can do this sort of thing?"

"When I'm mad, yes."

"If you can do it mad, you can do it normally," he pointed out. "And while I'm out with Remus tonight, I want you to think about that, and I want you to practice calling your Animagus form to the front of your mind, but no transforming until I'm here to help you through it."

Ginny nodded. "Can I tell Hermione?"

"Of course. I'm going to go through this with her and Ron as well. Then maybe a few other people. All we have to do is convince people that their limits are self-imposed, and we'll see all sorts of things."

"Harry," Ginny said softly, "this won't be a panacea."

"Why not?"

"Because there are probably forty people in the whole school who have the power level needed to do this. Did you ever think about why spells are needed?"

He shook his head.

"It's because normal people don't have that much magic. It's why they can't fight back against Voldemort. It's not that they don't want to, it's that they can't. They can do a few cleaning charms, do a bit of Apparating, but when it comes to pushing the boundaries, they've got nothing there to help push."

"Oh," Harry mumbled.

"I'm a powerful witch. I can grasp what you are talking about, more so now you've just proved it to me. Most of my family are powerful. Percy isn't, magically, but he knows enough shortcuts so that it doesn't matter – but it's why he's never been that interested in defence, which is more of a power based subject. A good strong wizard will always beat a good weak wizard. Most of the classes here talk about theory and techniques to compensate for power. The people who are the top of the D.A. are there not just because of the desire, but because they have the power as well, and they're the ones that you might be able to persuade. We might be able to do new things with magic, but others won't."

"So we'll invent spells to make their lives easier then."

"I love you," Ginny laughed softly and moved back into his arms.

"I love you too," he replied. "What brought that on?"

She inhaled deeply. "Nothing ever keeps you down for long, does it?"

"I guess not."

"You're a fighter, my love, and you'll never stop," she said.

He lightly ran his fingertips over her back.

"You've still got my wand?"

"Your fake one, yes."

"Start using it."

She laughed against him. "I'll try," she promised.

"Ginny," he said as he tilted her head up. "Didn't you tell me that my belief was what made everything work?"

She nodded.

"Then don't try, *do it*. I believe you can, because I know that I am not that special. I know that I'm just a powerful wizard, like Albus, like Severus, even like Voldemort. But I believe I can do anything I set my mind to, and I believe you can as well."

She looked at him searchingly before she nodded.

"No doubts, Ginny, because that will stop it."

"Okay."

"Now, I think we should go and see what your family has managed to research."

Hand in hand, they walked to the library. Charlie was on the floor, stretched out, a book hovering above his eyes. Bill and Fleur were sitting next to each other, as were Molly and a slightly tired looking Arthur. Ron and Hermione were opposite Bill and Fleur. They all seemed slightly despondent.

Harry reached around and cast as many silencing and privacy charms as he could. "I've been thinking," he announced.

Ron dived over Hermione, taking them both to the floor, and rolled under the table.

"You're a comedian," Harry said dryly.

"I know," Ron said from under the table.

"And just what do you think you're doing?" Hermione demanded of Ron. "I'm going to have a bruised hip now."

"I could kiss it better," Ron purred.

"Ronald Weasley!" Molly yelled.

"Bugger," Ron muttered. "I forgot she was here."

"*She* is the cat's mother, and not a proper form of address" Molly said firmly.

"If I could interrupt this family bonding moment," Harry said firmly, "I think it's time you guys had a change of direction."

"Oh?" Arthur asked.

"Yeah, Remus and the werewolves can wait. What I need from you is your skills. Charlie, you're going to spend all of Thursday with me – we're going to crack Legilimency, and tomorrow you're with Bill and Percy. Until then, you, Ron, Hermione and Arthur – as available – need to help Bill and Fleur.

"Bill, Fleur, I need you to research everything you can on Hogwarts' wards, and how to make them more," he paused, "destructive, or if that's not possible, to reinforce them from the inside."

"Destructive?" Bill asked dryly.

Harry grinned at him. "Molly, I need you with the Twins tomorrow, getting as many ideas from them as you can. I want as many automatic curses as we can develop."

"Okay, but why?" Molly asked.

"For now, trust me," Harry said. "Until this spy is caught, the only safe place to talk is the Room of Requirement, which I can totally control. There are things you don't know, and the pace is picking up rapidly. As soon as I can tell you, I will." He paused and looked at his watch. "And anyone who wants to see the werewolf, we need to get down there now."

"Absolutely," Hermione said, scrambling out from under the table. "I'm looking forward to it."

Together, they trooped down to the Great Hall. Most of the school seemed to have turned up, and were sitting on benches. There was a circle in the middle of the hall. Sirius was perched on the side of a table, a frown on his face.

Remus was talking to Albus. He looked tired and nervous.

"Bill, Fleur, protective wards with Albus, please."

They nodded and walked over to Albus, as Harry went to talk to Remus. "Have you taken the Wolfsbane potion yet?"

He shook his head. “Severus is bringing it now,” he said as the Severus walked through the door to the Great Hall.

Harry nodded, and took the goblet from Severus. He uncorked it and took a sniff. “That’s possibly the most repulsive thing I’ve ever had the misfortune to smell.”

“Agreed,” Snape sighed. “And it tastes worse than it smells. Any attempt I make to get it to be more palatable ends up ruining the potion.”

Harry reached out and handed it to Hermione. “Smell for yourself and then pass it around.” He cast a *Sonorus* spell on himself and continued. “Thank you all for coming. The potion that is slowly going to make its way around the Hall is Wolfsbane. Imagine having to drink that every four weeks, and imagine knowing that the potion, as foul as it is, is nothing compared to what is going to happen next.”

“Err, Harry,” Remus pointed out. “I’m going to need that right now.”

“Not tonight,” Harry said firmly.

Remus and Snape gaped at him.

“Tonight,” Harry said, subtly shifting his body language, “you are going to do exactly what I tell you.”

“But, without that potion, I become a beast,” Remus almost yelled.

“Silence,” Harry ordered, “do not question me.”

“Yes, sir,” Remus replied instantly.

Harry flashed him a quick smile. “How are the wards coming?”

“Almost ready,” said Bill.

“And the moon?”

Remus shuddered. “Not long.”

“Take out your wand.”

“What?”

“I said, take out your wand,” Harry snarled. “Everyone who isn’t an Animagus or a stupidly powerful old man get behind the wards.”

“And if I’m both?” Albus asked quietly.

Harry just grinned at him. “Hermione, can you take over the commentary for me? You’ve seen this before. You know what to expect.”

“Of course,” she said, and she cast a charm so that she could be heard, as Harry added a silencing charm to the wards.

“Remus, I want you pull your magic up to the front. Sirius, you might want to change.”

Sirius nodded and moved into his Padfoot form.

Harry squinted at Remus. “More, Remus. Don’t hold back. I want all of your magic available.”

Remus grunted and his eyes started to glow.

“Albus,” Harry continued, not taking his eyes off the werewolf. “Can you create an illusion of what Remus looks like as a wolf?”

Albus raised his wand and muttered under his breath. A life-sized replica of Remus’ form appeared in front of them.

“Look at it, Remus,” Harry ordered. “Recognise it?”

“Yes,” Remus hissed.

“Take all that magic and turn, *now*,” Harry ordered again.

“But,” Remus started.

“Do it,” Harry demanded. “Change! Now!”

Remus screamed as he released the magic and started to shift. When he had finished, the werewolf howled as it shook its head, before he looked at Harry and slinked over to him.

Harry looked down at the werewolf, whose eyes seemed full of malice.

The werewolf reared back a little, preparing to attack, and Harry changed, dropping easily into his wolf form. He stared at the werewolf, taking a dominant stance.

The werewolf growled at him, and like Fenrir the night before, adopted a faux-dominant stance before he attacked.

Harry jumped out of the way easily, before pouncing and landing on the werewolf’s back. The werewolf howled and wheeled on the spot, throwing him off. Harry closed in again and dipped his head under the werewolf’s body, throwing him hard into the wards.

Harry bared his teeth in a wolfish smirk at the werewolf, and stalked forward until he was nose to nose with him. The werewolf seemed confused before it retreated as far as it could before it was checked by the wards.

Harry nodded and walked around the werewolf, nudging it here and there until his posture was better. He walked back in front of the werewolf and stared at it again. The faux-pose wasn’t as offensive now.

The werewolf growled softly, so Harry reached out and cuffed his face, making sure he didn’t scratch him with his claws.

If he had been human, he would have laughed at the look of shock on the werewolf’s face.

Harry nodded as he saw the wolf accept his dominance. The hard part was over. With a howl of triumph, Harry turned toward the door and raced down the tunnel formed by Bill and Fleur’s wards. He could feel Padfoot and Moony beside him, as they raced out of the school and into the Forbidden Forest.

There was a sense of freedom and joy in the movement, as the two remaining Marauders, and the son of the other, recaptured the essence of what used to happen all those years ago.

From: Hermione Granger

To: Fleur Delacour

Cc: The girls

Subject: Veela Bible

Fleur,

Page 76, position 19.

Exactly how does one get into that position?

Hermione the curious

From: Experienced Veela

To: Inexperienced Witch

Cc: My sisters (and NOT my sister)

Subject: Re: Veela Bible

Why, one removes one’s left thigh bone.

Fleur

From: Sane

To: Insane

Cc: Siblings

Subject: Re[2]: Veela Bible

How silly of me not to think of that... wait, Fleur, are you serious? Harry said that the Skele-Gro potion was horrific, why on earth would you go through that, just for a bit of pleasure?

Hermione

From: Ginny

To: Fleur and Hermione

Cc: Katie, Angelina, Penny, Tonks

Subject: Re[3]: Veela Bible

First, do you have to include me, when I'm the only girl not getting any?

Second, Hermione, if I'm reading the position right, well, I can see the benefits... and what's a little pain anyway?

Gin

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

From: Satisfied

To: Unsatisfied

Cc: Other satisfactory girls

Subject: Re[4]: Veela Bible

Ginny, dear, are you sure you're trying hard enough?

And you're quite right, but there is a bone charm on page 215 that is only temporary and doesn't hurt.

We Veela are nothing if not efficient.

Fleur

From: Sure?

To: Questioner

Subject: Harry

I could probably be doing a little more to seduce him, but I don't think it would work. He wants everything to be perfect our the first time.

Sometimes I do wonder, if only a little, about him. Like tonight, he's out in a forest with a werewolf, and last night he fought another werewolf.

It's just hard to accept that, at the moment, I come second to the rest of the world.

Ginny

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

From: Older

To: Younger

Subject: Re: Harry

Ginny, my dear, at the moment, Harry needs your support. You know this, and you also know that when this is over, you will be the first for the rest of your life.

Besides, a little patience can spice things up. Just because you are supporting him doesn't mean that you can't make it a little difficult for him.

Casually undress in front of him, flash him, press yourself against him, make him hard (literally and figuratively).

Besides, can't you feel it?

F.

From: Curious

To: Cat

Subject: Feel what?

What, exactly, can you feel?

And if you say my brother, I shall have to poke your eyes out with a stick *grin*.

Ginny

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

From: Persian

To: Alley-cat

Subject: Re: Feel what?

That it will be over in weeks, not months. He keeps dropping large hints....

Fleur

From: Cat-girl

To: Bird-girl

Subject: Cats eat birds

Actually, yes, I can feel it. When I met Harry earlier he had the most wolfish smile I've ever seen on his face. I was a little distracted and forgot to ask him, but I know that he has plans.

Ginny

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

From: Veela

To: Human

Re: Cats eat birds

Why Ginny, I didn't know you swung that way.

Fleur.

From: Blushing furiously

To: Teaser

Subject: Re[2]: Cats eat birds

That wasn't what I meant!!!!

G.

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

From: Ginevra Weasley

To: Marge's Secret Lingerie Store

Subject: Catalogue order

Attachment: payment.pmt

Page 35, items two and three in forest green, size 34B; please deliver to Hogwarts.

Severus looked in to the mirror and sneered. He sighed and tried again. Blasted Potter had ruined his sneer.

There, that was it.

With a look of supercilious evil on his face, he pulled out his favourite cape and marched through the halls to the expanded first floor cupboard that housed the Dursleys.

He yanked the door open and loomed in, his cape flapping around him. There was a satisfying squeak from the female, and an angry grunt from the fat one.

Vernon got to his feet. "Now see here," he said aggressively.

Snape stared at him like he was a first year Gryffindor.

Vernon gulped, before he started to turn red.

"You," Snape hissed, "will follow me."

"I won't stand for this!" Vernon stated. "You freaks can't treat us like this."

Snape almost smiled. "I think you're missing something," he purred. "You see, everyone in a fifty mile radius can use magic. Everyone can do things that would make your eyes fall out and your mind retreat to its deepest and darkest corner. From our perspective, it is you who are the freaks, and do you know how we deal with freaks?"

"H-h-how?" Petunia stuttered.

"Why, we beat it out of them," Snape smirked. "We put them to work, and we do everything we can to ensure that their freakishness doesn't contaminate all the hard working witches and wizards that are producing their wonderful magic and potions."

"But we're normal!" Vernon yelled.

"You? You are a fat, oafish ignoramus who hasn't seen his feet for several decades. You are quite clearly not normal, why, you can't even cast a simple unlocking charm to let yourself out of a cupboard. But not to worry, it should only take eleven years before someone from your world will come and rescue you."

"You can't do this to us!" Vernon yelled again.

"If you don't stop yelling," Snape said softly, "I shall rip out your tongue and use it an ingredient in one of my potions."

Vernon's face went deathly pale.

"Now, you will follow me."

"But we don't want to be here," Petunia whined.

"Did you know that I once worked for Voldemort?" Snape asked icily. "Let me tell you what he does with people like you." He took a deep breath and recounted some of the horrors he had seen while spying on Voldemort.

As he talked, the Dursleys slowly went paler and paler.

"If it was up to me," he finished, his voice back to a hiss, "I would take you back there now, and let Voldemort play with you. Even that wouldn't come close to what you deserve for how you treated a relative. You call us freaks, but I can guarantee that any *normal* family would look after a member of their own blood, without thought for reward or thanks, because it is the right thing to do."

He opened a door to their quarters and directed them in. "And here's something more to think on," he finished. "The boy, who has allowed you to stay here, is already richer than you can imagine, and has started several businesses already that are going to revolutionise our world, and spill into yours. If you had been nice, if you had treated him properly, just imagine how grateful he would be, and how rich you would have become."

He paused and gave them his best patented sneer, "But money doesn't mean anything to you, does it? Not when it comes from freaks."

He slammed the door shut, cast a locking spell and took a deep breath, and then smirked.

"Care for an escort?"

Snape almost jumped and turned to glare at Blaise.

"Miss Zabini."

She grinned at him, “That was nicely done,” she said as they wandered down to the Slytherin common room.

From: Remus Lupin

To: Werewolves (All)

Subject: Meeting

Ladies and Gentlemen, we need to meet, today.

I know you’re mostly stiff, sore, grumpy, and generally peeved at the entire world.

Well, I’m not, and I’ll explain exactly why later.

Two o’clock in the Forbidden Forest meeting point.

Remus

From: Blaise

To: Gin-gin

Subject: Fat-boy and the amazing giraffe Animagus

Attachment: dialogue.pmt

Hey,

This is what Professor Snape said to Harry’s relatives last night.

B.

From: Gin

To: Spy-girl

Subject: Snape

I have warned him and warned him. Now he has to pay!

Ginny

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

Harry sat at breakfast with Sirius and a cheerful looking Remus, waiting for Ginny.

Most of the school seemed to be at breakfast, including the Weasleys, Dudley and Dean’s family.

The doors to the Hall burst open and a fiery looking Ginny stood in the morning light.

Harry had to swallow a gulp; she had that look on her face that stated louder than words that she was about to do something dramatic. She was beautiful, her long hair seeming almost charged with energy, her large brown eyes dominating her pale face.

“Severus Snape, front and centre,” she called.

Harry was pretty sure that even Dumbledore would have started moving if Ginny ordered him like that.

Snape paled dramatically, an impressive feat for the sallow professor, and reluctantly walked down from the Professors’ table and paused, as Ginny stalked toward him.

“I have warned you,” she told him, “and now you have to pay the price.”

She pulled out her wand and cast a spell on the floor in front of him. It formed a slightly translucent block. She stood on the charm and wrapped her arms around him tightly, before kissing him on the cheek. “Thank you,” she said loudly enough to be heard around the hall.

And Severus Snape, the aloof self-contained spy, the man who had played Voldemort for a fool, the man who had stared death in the eye, blushed like a schoolgirl.

Ginny smiled softly at him, gave him another hug, before releasing him, dismissing her charm, and skipping over to Harry.

Harry laughed under his breath, while next to him; Remus and Sirius were killing themselves with laughter, a laughter that was slowly spreading around the Great Hall.

Severus shook himself, groaned, and retreated back to the Head table, although a small smile still played across his face.

“So,” Ginny said as she wrapped Harry’s arm around her comfortably. “How was last night?”

“Brilliant,” was Remus’ simple rejoinder.

“Now,” Percy said, “I’m going to give a complete rundown before we start, so everyone please sit down.”

Charlie, Bill, Tonks, Kingsley, and a few other Aurors they trusted sat around his office.

“What we know is that Fudge has been receiving large scale bribes from the Death Eaters, and the most recent corresponded with Sirius’ freedom. What we don’t know is exactly why. It doesn’t make sense. On top of that, when we inspected Azkaban, it was spotless. Far too spotless - the place is a prison, and as you all know, prison guards tend to be the people who fail to become Aurors. Not the most meticulous of people.

“So, the plan for today is that at exactly eleven thirty we will launch a surprise inspection. We want to catch them unexpectedly, and hope that we find something.”

“What are we looking for?” Tonks asked.

“I don’t know,” Percy admitted. “Something that looks off, something that makes your nose twitch. Bill, Charlie, I really want your outsider perspective. Don’t be afraid to ask any question, no matter how inane.”

“Inane?” Charlie asked, “I resemble that remark!”

Percy grinned at him. “I know. But seriously, the problem is that we all know Azkaban. It’s part of the Auror training, and I’ve inspected it a few times. So we might overlook something due to familiarity.”

“How are we getting there?” Bill asked.

“Ministry Portkey. Normally you have to Apparate to the nearest dock before taking a boat to there, but Fudge gets seasick.”

“Travelling in style then,” Kingsley said.

“We can but try.” He rolled out a large map onto his desk. “Bill, Charlie, this is Azkaban island in all its glory. It’s a damp, feculent hell-hole, and frankly, as soon as we get rid of Fudge I’m going to close it down. We need to have some human rights in the Wizarding World and this abridges most of them. I’d rather we executed people cleanly than sentence them to a lifetime of torture. If we’d done that a few years ago, Bellatrix would be dead and not the vicious, crazed attack dog that she is now,” he finished coldly.

Harry paused at the door to the History of Magic classroom and shook his head. “Sorry guys,” he said to Ron and Hermione, “but I don’t need a nap at the moment.”

“Damn it, Harry,” Ron complained. “What is it this time?”

“The twins have been suspiciously quiet, so I’m going to go and check on them and Abe.”

Hermione sighed. “I don’t like it that you always have good reasons.”

“I know, but if it helps, I’m learning more in an out-of-class-room environment than I would be napping in here.”

“But goblin history is important.”

“If it’s so important, why isn’t a goblin teaching it?” Harry asked flippantly.

Hermione stamped her foot. “You stop that, Harry James Potter.”

He grinned at her and shook his head.

“Come on, dear,” Ron said, taking her hand. “I’ll have a nice nap on your shoulder, and you can finish your research into rune magic while you pretend to listen.”

“Hermione!” Harry said in mock horror.

“Ron! That’s supposed to be a secret!”

“Time for you to go, Harry,” Ron said with a laugh. “I need to do my grovelling now.”

“Here,” Harry said, casting a spell on Ron’s knees. “Knee pads.” He tossed them both a casual salute and Apparated to the Butterbeer factory.

“Harry!” Fred yelled from across the floor. “Change into something you don’t mind getting dirty and come and help us.”

Harry looked down at his robes and shrugged them off. He was wearing his standard jeans and a t-shirt underneath. He jogged over to where Fred had vanished and headed down into the basement, where the industrial scale production was done.

“We’ve been working flat-out,” George said, bypassing the standard dictates of politeness. “Demand has been higher than expected. We’ve sold out of our first week’s supply already. And this morning, after the Quibbler article, we’ve got orders coming out of our ears.”

“Delightful to see you,” Abe said as he rolled a barrel by. “We’ve got a commercial Floo delivery service going, but we need to get the barrels there, and we can’t use magic – we tried that and it interfered with all the machinery.”

“So,” Fred continued, “grab a barrel from over there, fill it up over there, and roll it to the fire. When there’s ten barrels in, look at the order form above and send them on their way to the next order.” He had pointed out each corner of the room as he talked. “It’s a good job we got enough stock in for a month, it should last us until we can restock.”

Harry smiled and walked over to the barrels. “We’re a success then?”

“Oh yeah, word of mouth was even better than planned,” Abe replied as he worked next to Harry. “Fred and George told the press that the old butterbeer had been a plot by the Death Munchers to keep them down. It proves that you can mess with people’s money through illegal taxes, you can torture them, you can kill them, but when you mess with their favourite drinks, the good wizards of England finally stand up for themselves,” he finished in a deeply cynical tone.

Harry filled his barrel with the dark brown liquid and nailed the lid on, following Abe’s example. He rolled it over to the fireplace and started again.

“Why aren’t we hiring people to do this?” Harry asked Abe.

“Because we’ve not got time! If we slow down to hire someone we’ll never catch up. Grown wizards don’t like physical labour, and all the kids are at school.”

Harry rolled his eyes and moved to the Floo fireplace. “Mackrack,” he called.

“Harry?” the leader of the goblins asked.

“Have you got any teenagers who have some free time and wouldn’t mind a bit of manual labour in return for some gold?”

“Hundreds,” he replied instantly, “including several of my own family who are still ‘finding themselves’ before they take up a proper banking career.”

“Well, send them over then, as soon as you can. We’ve got work coming out of our ears and the gold is running like a river.”

Mackrack nodded at Harry. “They’ll be there in a few minutes,” he promised.

“Thanks,” Harry replied and closed the Floo.

“Fred, George, Abe, front and centre,” he yelled at the top of his voice.

“What?” Fred snapped as they stopped their frantic work and moved in front of him.

“Is this the total list of all the orders for this morning?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“Right, I want you three upstairs, showered, and having a nap. I’ve got workers coming through in a minute or two. I’ll need you back down by twelve, as I have an appointment this afternoon.”

“Where on Earth have you got workers coming from?” George demanded.

“Goblins.”

Fred and George looked at each other and groaned. “We missed the obvious, didn’t we?”

Harry smiled angelically, “Then there’s no need for me to say anything, is there? Now get out of here, all of you.”

A minute after the oddly matched trio left, the Floo flamed into life and five goblins walked through. “I’m Elder Blutwood,” one of them growled. “I’m here to make sure they don’t embarrass us.”

“I’m sure they won’t,” Harry said. “We’re paying a galleon for every two barrels transported. Barrels are in that corner, they need to be filled at that tap, and rolled to the Floo.” According to the sheets, the businesses were getting this butterbeer at fifty eight galleons a barrel, which worked out at a profit of around twenty one galleons a barrel. As the late Mr Crys had said, it was the nearest thing to a licence to mint money.

The goblin teenagers perked up at the amount of gold involved, and quickly got to work.

Harry watched them for a few minutes before he shrugged and joined in.

At twelve, three sheepish looking wizards returned, all clean and looking a lot more alert than they had before.

"Elder Blutwood," Harry called to the seated goblin, "would you mind joining us?"

The goblin nodded and shuffled over.

"You three are too valuable to be doing manual labour at the moment," Harry said, deciding not to sugar coat it. He turned to the goblin. "Would you consider an official role as supervisor?"

The elderly goblin looked surprised for a second before he nodded.

"Right, Abe, I want you to show Elder Blutwood what needs to be done, and then leave him to do it."

"Elder Blutwood," Abe said, "if you'll step this way, I'll show you the order list." The two walked off to survey the work site.

"Fred, George, I'm pretty sure that Molly has been trying to contact you this morning," said Harry. Both twins looked guiltily at their Mmail notifiers. "So I want you and Abe, when he's done with Elder Blutwood, upstairs, working with Molly and coming up with things that we can use to defend Hogwarts. And don't forget that you have Quidditch practice tonight."

"Yes, Harry," Fred said and smiled. "We got so caught up in what we needed to do, we didn't step back to see how we needed to do it efficiently."

"Defend the castle?" Fred asked.

Harry grinned and tapped his nose. "Anything and everything, gentlemen. I'll be shocked if this whole thing isn't all over by next weekend."

"Oh?"

"I can't tell you at the moment – too many things are in the air. All it needs is a nudge." He frowned. "I just don't know where that nudge is coming from."

From: Harry

To: Narcissa

Subject: This afternoon

Can you make Hogwarts for another session this afternoon, at three?

Oh, I'm going to send another Mmail along that you can forward to the Dark Tosser.

H.

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

From: The Boy Who Lived

To: The Lady who Charmed

Subject: Dancing

Dearest Narcissa,

I had the best time ever with you, learning the basics of how to move, while holding a beautiful woman.

I was wondering if you would mind continuing my lessons this afternoon?

With eternal thanks,

Harry

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

From: Narcissa Malfoy

To: Lord Voldemort

Cc: Lucius

Attachment: mml.mml

Subject: Fwd: Dancing

My Lord,

Please find attached the latest missive from Potter.

Narcissa.

From: The Eternal Dark Lord

To: Faithful Malfoy Servants

Subject: Re: Fwd: Dancing

Excellent news.

Keep up the good work.

L.V.

From: Narci

To: Harry

Subject: This afternoon

L.V. is pleased with your email – I'll be there at three.

N.

--
More than just an anything

Percy shuddered as the Portkey deployed them in the middle of Azkaban. The place was set up like a castle, with a large keep that housed the jails and the Dementors, a large courtyard, and the outer walls.

They were on the top floor of the keep, in the administration offices.

"Mr Weasley?" the warden, a slightly slimy woman by the name of Claudia Striven, asked.

"Surprise inspection," Percy sneered, dropping back into his old personality with an ease that depressed him for some reason. "We're going to do a spot check of everything, and you're going to sit there and do nothing."

"You can't do this!"

"Of course I can," Percy replied, acting bored with the conversation. "And the Aurors here completely agree, so unless you want to be arrested and put in one of your own cells, you'll do exactly as you're told."

"I'll get even," she promised.

"No," Percy replied. "You won't. You might try. But if you do, I'll see to it that your next job is road sweeper in Diagon Alley."

Claudia sat back in her chair and scowled at him.

Percy motioned to one of the Aurors. "Keep a close eye on her. If she moves, stun her first and ask questions later."

"Aye, sir," The Auror growled.

"Okay, you know what to do," Percy said. "Get to it." He headed out with Charlie, and headed toward the records department.

Bill was with Kingsley as they went to check on the prisoners, while Tonks and the last Auror went to talk to the other guards.

It was a frustrating hour later that he had to admit that there was nothing here, at all. The records were perfect, and to the Ministry guidelines. And that was the problem – no one, not even the Ministry itself, followed the guidelines.

"What are we missing, Charlie?" Percy groaned.

“I’ve got no idea,” Charlie replied.

“We’re not going to find it here. Come on, we’ll meet the others back in the office.” The woeful faces of the others told him instantly that they hadn’t found anything either.

“What happened to her?” Percy asked, seeing the unconscious woman behind the desk.

“She moved,” the Auror shrugged.

“Good work,” Percy said with a smile and absently woke her with *Ennervate* . She looked around and then smirked.

“I run a tight ship,” she boasted. “You got nothing, and I’ll expect your apology in writing.”

“Expect it all you like,” Percy sneered back. “Tonks, how were the guards?”

“Didn’t seem to be hiding anything,” Tonks said, as she changed forms into a breathtaking, rather top-heavy blonde. “I even asked like this,” she said in a breathy sort of voice.

“And they didn’t have a chance,” the Auror who had accompanied her added.

“Kingsley?”

“Prisoners all accounted for and in their cells.”

Percy sighed and pulled out the Portkey.

“The only thing we didn’t check,” Bill added, “was the Kissed prisoners.”

“We never check them,” Percy said absently. “They’re mindless creatures who just wander around aimlessly in their holding area until they die. Everyone take hold.”

“Err, Percy,” Bill interrupted. “You know you mentioned inane questions earlier? Well, this is one of them. Why haven’t you checked them?”

“Because there’s no po…” Percy trailed off as he looked at Claudia and caught the momentary slip in her expression.

Things suddenly started to click in his head – the payments to Fudge, the other thing that had happened on the day of Sirius’ freedom. He felt himself going pale.

“Percy?” Charlie asked.

“I missed it,” he whispered. “I can’t believe I missed it!”

“Missed what?”

“Arrest her,” he said abruptly. “Then get down there and do a head count.”

“Huh?” Bill asked.

“It will be short, won’t it, Claudia? And there’ll be a lot more burial records than expected, right?” The look of rage on her face was all the confirmation he needed. “I’ve got to tell Harry. The WizardNet doesn’t reach out here. I’ll be back later.” Without waiting for a reply, he activated the Portkey. As soon as he arrived at the Ministry, he ran to the nearest Apparation point and Apparated to the outskirts of Hogwarts.

As he ran up the long drive, he alternately cursed his own lack of fitness, the length of the driveway, and the fact that he had missed something so *bloody obvious* . It all made sense as soon as Bill mentioned the prisoners that had been Kissed. He now knew exactly what Claudia had been hiding.

He ran into the school, pushed open the doors to the Great Hall, and looked around wildly. Harry was sitting next to Hermione, Ron and Ginny. He ran over to them and dropped to his knees, trying to get his breath back.

“Percy?” Harry asked.

“Spy,” Percy wheezed. “The spy is,” he coughed, as he tried to get it out.

“Take a deep breath,” Harry ordered. “Talk slowly.”

Percy found himself doing as he was told. “I’ve found the spy,” he said and took another deep breath.

“It’s Wormtail.”

Harry didn’t hesitate. “*Accio Wormtail!*” he shouted, his magic flaring dramatically.

There was a strange clinking sound from the corner of the Great Hall, and a small rat with a brightly glowing silver paw ran toward the exit.

Harry vanished from in front of Percy, and appeared in front of the rat – which squealed and ran into a hole in the wall.

“Everyone outside,” Harry yelled. “Surround Hogwarts. Don’t let him get clear of the wards.”

There was a mass exodus as Percy found himself moving with the others.

“This is what I’ve been smelling,” Harry growled as he dropped down into his wolf form. He sniffed once, before he growled again and sprinted down a corridor.

“So why didn’t the spell get Pettigrew?” Ron asked, as they lined up around the border of the school ground.

From: Hermione

To: All students, all staff

Attachment: Spell.pmt

Subject: Rat catching

As I’m sure you’re all aware, the rat that Harry is currently chasing is an Animagus by the name of Peter Pettigrew.

The spell attached should be cast in front of you. It will help you see the rat if he should scurry toward you. The second spell will garner our attention. If you are not a fifth year or above, do not try to apprehend him! Call for one of us and we will catch him.

Hermione

From: Dragonius

To: Cleverus

Subject: Azkaban

Just to let you know, you’re right. Headcount is down by fifteen, and we suspect a lot more have been “buried” before their time, so to speak. All are known Death Eaters. It’s no wonder the Dark Tosser hasn’t raided this place, he had no need to.

Kingsley is irritated, and has been taking it out on the charming Claudia. I’ve learned several new curse words; however, I don’t think I have the necessary gravitas to say one of them.

Charlie

--
Draconis dominium

“His paw must be charmed against it,” Hermione replied as she put away her Mmail parchment. “There’s Harry,” she said, pointing to the top of one of the towers.

From the distance, they could see the wolf prowling along the parapet before he looked over the edge and howled.

He disappeared from sight.

“Don’t tell me,” Hermione muttered. “Doing it from a low balcony is one thing, but from up there?”

“What?” Ron asked.

There was another howl, and Harry appeared, still in his wolf form, as he bounded onto the parapet, and then launched himself into space.

“Harry!” Hermione yelled.

Half way down, Harry started to change, shrinking as wings sprouted either side of his body.

“Ladies and Gentlemen,” Minerva’s voice rang out. “The world’s first Dual Animagus!”

“Very well done,” Filius said quietly to Minerva.

Harry flapped his wings and soared into the sky, his head moving as he scanned the ground in front of him.

“Poor Peter,” Ginny smirked. “A Harris’ Hawk can dive at over two hundred miles per hour.”

With a screech, Harry flapped his wings hard as he dived down at an awe-inspiring speed. At the last second, almost like a Wronski Feint, he changed his angle and his claws flashed out, before he was high in the air again, a small form struggling between his claws.

“Got him,” Ron cheered as Harry squawked in triumph.

“I’m impressed he didn’t kill him,” Hermione remarked. “That move is designed to kill. He must have pulled out at the last second.”

“Can you help me create somewhere for Harry to drop him?” Ginny asked. The combined force of most of the professors and senior students at Hogwarts soon had a large topless cube made up of wards ready.

Harry swooped down and dropped Pettigrew from a height, before following him down. As he got near, both Harry and Pettigrew transformed.

Pettigrew landed heavily, screaming as he did so. Harry landed gracefully, like a cat, with a sword in his hand. With an effortless swing, Harry removed the silver hand from Wormtail’s body and then used the sword to toss it out of the cube. He paused, and then cast a spell to cauterize Wormtail’s bleeding stump.

Dumbledore walked over to the silver hand and looked at it thoughtfully for a second before he incinerated it.

Wormtail wailed again, both from the pain and from seeing his hand destroyed.

“H-h- –H-Harry,” Wormtail snivelled, getting to his feet, clutching his arm to his chest.

Harry swivelled, whirling in a complete circle before he jumped, his right foot lashing out and catching Pettigrew straight in the face.

The rat-like man crashed into the wards and collapsed into the floor, unconscious.

Harry walked over to him, and placed his sword against the man’s neck, before he cast *Ennervate* to wake him.

Pettigrew looked at Harry, before his eyes rolled into the back of his head and he fainted again.

Harry sighed and banished the sword. “Do you have anything that will keep him asleep?” he shouted to Severus Snape.

Snape nodded and started to jog back toward the school.

Harry took one more long look at the man who had betrayed his parents, before he turned into his hawk form and flew out of the cube, landing next to them.

“Think you can handle him?” Harry asked after transforming back again.

Percy nodded. “I can,” he said.

“Percy,” Harry said, looking at him. “I’m really proud of you. Without you, he’d still be ruining my plans. If you ever wanted to prove that you’re a Weasley to the core, today is the day you have done so, and done so with style.”

Percy found himself standing taller and took a deep breath, as Ginny hugged him tightly and Ron pounded him on his back.

“J-just doing my bit,” he said back to Harry, feeling inordinately proud of himself. “I should have realised earlier,” he confessed.

“We all should have,” Harry agreed. “We all had the same information. We just got so hung up on Sirius’ freedom that we forget that Pettigrew was sentenced to death on the same day.”

Percy smiled.

For the first time, he truly felt he was back as part of the family. He had been given his forgiveness freely from his family, but now he felt like he had earned it, that he had proved his heritage beyond doubt, and that he could now move on.

Harry looked around at the gathered students and cast a *Sonorus* spell on himself. “Thanks for your help, everyone, but now it’s time for school again. We’ll deal with the rat, and he won’t be able to cause trouble again. I knew that it wasn’t one of you that had been doing the spying, and this just proves it.”

The children and some of the Professors started to make their way back to school.

“If you want to apportion blame,” Harry continued absently, “you could blame me, Remus and Sirius. We all caught his scent, but we didn’t trust our instincts.”

Ginny wormed her way into his arms.

“I think,” Harry said slowly, “that we need an Order meeting this evening. I’ll let you know what’s going on, and we can prepare.”

“For Voldemort launching an attack during the Quidditch match on Saturday?” Percy asked.

Harry smiled wolfishly. “Oh no, Voldemort won’t be attacking then,” he said with such belief and confidence that no one questioned him. “If you’ll excuse me,” he continued. “I think it’s time I taunted Tom. This plays into my plans on so many levels I almost can’t believe it.”

He dropped a kiss on Ginny’s lips, before he wandered off, almost skipping in happiness.

Ginny?" Percy asked.

She smiled at him. "He's in a good mood. I think it's because he didn't kill Pettigrew. He had the choice and he didn't take it, so he now knows that he is still good."

From: Harry

To: Lord Volde-monkey

Subject: Oh it's such a perfect day

Tom, me old mate, me old buddy, me old pal. Long time no Mmail, don't you love me anymore?

It's been a bad few days, hasn't it?

First you lose some Death Eaters, then you lose your cash flow, and now you've lost your worm. Life's a bitch (for you), isn't it?

Oh yes, did you really think that Pettigrew could escape me for long? He's now come down with a serious case of unconsciousness, and was caught silver-handed. Sadly, the hand got destroyed, but you know how it is when you get careless, don't you?

The good news is that we've put new wards up at Hogwarts that will intercept any Death Eaters, and will, at the same time, keep out any Animagi.

I'll see you soon,

Love,

Harry

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

From: Harry

To: The Weasley

Subject: Fudge

Percy,

Please bury this news for now. I need things to stay as they are over the weekend. Talk to Amelia tonight and tell her what has happened, and prepare the paperwork, but wait until the Wizengamot is in session on Monday to do anything with it.

I want someone else in charge of the Ministry until we can have a fair election.

Harry.

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

From: The Boy who regained his honour

To: The Boy who is running everything

Subject: Re: Fudge

Not a problem, Harry.

I don't suppose you'll give me a clue as to whom I'm going to be working for?

Percy

--
The information in this Mmail is confidential and may be legally privileged. It is intended solely for the addressee. Access to this Mmail by anyone else is unauthorized. If you are not the intended recipient, any disclosure, copying, distribution or any action taken or omitted to be taken in reliance on it, is prohibited and may be unlawful.

From: HJP

To: PIW

Subject: Re[2]: Fudge

smirk

Nope.

H

--

Audaces fortuna juvat

From: Lord Voldemort

To: Narcissa Malfoy

Cc: Lucius Malfoy, Marcus Flint

Subject: Spying and Wormtail

That idiot Wormtail has just got himself caught by Potter. I will be killing him the next time I see him. He's outlived his usefulness.

You are, no doubt, wondering just why I'm not upset about this.

The boy sent me an Mmail, and when I capture him, I will make him write the Mmail out in his own blood and then make him eat it! But, he did reveal that he has blocked any marked Death Eater from arriving at Hogwarts, and that he feels safe now, as he believes that I have no spy at Hogwarts.

Sadly, in his naïveté and childishness, he has massively underestimated my genius.

Narcissa, you will seduce the boy today and "prove" your loyalty to him. No more playing, I want him in love with you.

Flint, as my youngest Death Eater, you will accompany Lucius to ensure that his wife is dressed appropriately for seducing the brat.

L.V.

--

Victory or Death

Narcissa wrapped her cape around her as tightly as she could, moved through the halls of Hogwarts unsteadily, and into the classroom without pausing.

Harry looked up at her as she entered, and she felt herself blushing. "I am going to kill him," she promised.

"Who?"

"My darling husband," she ground out through gritted teeth. "And then I'll kill Marcus Flint for good measure!"

Harry tilted his head. "If you do," he offered casually, "I'll make sure you get a reward from the Ministry."

"I'll take you up on that," she muttered darkly.

"Exactly why are you contemplating a more extreme form of divorce?"

She looked at him for a long second, and then shrugged off her cloak in a challenging manner.

Harry looked at her for a long moment, and his face went blank.

She sighed softly. "Let it out," she said dejectedly.

Harry met her eyes for a second before he slowly started to snigger.

"Laugh it up," she mumbled.

"Am I supposed to find this attractive?" he asked.

"I have never felt so utterly humiliated in my life," she stated angrily. "And I'm not sure if I'm more enraged at this outfit, the fact that Flint was doing the advice, or that my dear husband wants me to become a whore for the Dark Lord."

"Tosser," Harry said.

“Excuse me?”

“Call him the Dark Tosser; it will make you feel better.”

“Look, Harry, are you any good with clothing? Because I can’t wear this much longer – it’s cold, and I’m about as comfortable as a house-elf at a Ministry ball, and Lucius has my wand to ensure that I don’t chicken out.”

Harry looked at her for a long moment. “Flint chose that?” he asked as he pulled out his wand and looked at her thoughtfully.

Narcissa looked down at herself in disgust. She looked like a caricature. Her breasts had been enhanced to an almost ridiculous level with a couple of spells, and the tight blouse she was wearing was unbuttoned, displaying her lack of underwear.

Her skirt was no-such-thing, and was enhanced by the purple fishnet stockings she had been forced into at wand-point. The fact that the purple clashed with the green of her belt and skirt had been ignored by her husband and Flint.

She had refused to look at herself in the mirror, fully aware that her makeup was far too heavy for her features.

All her attempts to protest had been cut short, and the fact that she had been forced to be naked in front of Flint was yet another item she was going to take out of her dear husband’s hide.

“I think I’m insulted,” Harry said as he summoned some of his own clothes and started to transfigure them. “Do they really think that I would be attracted to someone dressed like a cheap whore?”

“Yes,” Narcissa said with a deep sigh. “Or rather, Flint does not have the imagination to place himself into your shoes, and so pieced together his own fantasy.”

“He has some serious issues,” Harry noted. “Colour-blindness, for one.”

“Can you do something about these?” she pleaded, indicating her chest. “My back is hurting, they look completely fake, and they don’t suit me.”

“Finite Incantatem,” Harry said, pointing his wand at her chest. She sighed in relief as the pressure on her back lessened, her breasts coming back to their normal size.

“This is slightly your fault.”

“Oh?”

“You caught Wormtail, so the Dark Tosser has ordered me to seduce you. And then he ordered those two to show me how. As if I would need help on how to seduce anyone!”

“How *would* you seduce me?” Harry asked absently as he concentrated on the clothing.

“It wouldn’t be by dressing up like a pantomime whore!” Narcissa replied firmly.

Harry smirked at her and offered her the clothing he’d transfigured, a quite nice dress made out of a strange material she’d never seen before.

“May I borrow your wand to do some underwear?” she asked, feeling her abject humiliation return with a vengeance.

“This?” Harry asked. “It’s a stick, not a wand.”

Narcissa raised her eyebrows in surprise. “Oh.”

“Could I get you some?” he eventually offered, after a long pause.

“Where from?”

Harry rolled his eyes. “Malfoy Manor, where else? Think of where you keep them.”

Narcissa nodded and thought of the chest of drawers in her dressing room. She felt Harry’s mind brush against hers, before he vanished. She smiled as he returned with the complete chest of drawers. “The Malfoy Manor wards don’t appear to have stopped you?” she asked as calmly as she could, hiding her shock.

Harry shook his head. “I think your darling husband scrimped on them. I’ve seen better wards at the Ministry.”

Narcissa frowned; she could remember Lucius boasting about how much he had spent on them. She was now wondering where that money – her money – had really gone.

“I’ll be back in a few moments,” Harry said, as he pointed his hand at a wall and created a sink for her.

She moved as fast as she could to divest herself of the disgusting clothes she had been forced to wear, and dressed in the clothing he had left behind. She walked over to the sink and shuddered at the layers of caked-on makeup. She picked up one of the bottles and smiled faintly, deciding that she owed him one for this.

Two minutes later the normal face of Narcissa Malfoy, completely free of makeup, stared back at herself from the mirror. She smiled faintly.

Despite being on the wrong side of forty, she was still an incredibly beautiful woman. Her wizard heritage made sure that there was no grey hair and no hint of a wrinkle.

She moved over to her chest of drawers and opened the middle one. She was about to pull out some of her normal underwear when an idea hit her. She smirked to herself and opened the bottom drawer, the drawer that contained her lingerie. She pulled out a semi-translucent off-the-shoulder chemise and some matching knickers and pulled them on quickly. They had been procured in an attempt to relight the fire with Lucius, but the first time she had worn them, he had vanished for a Death Eater meeting, barely even noticing what she was wearing. She had placed the lingerie away and never touched it again.

She looked into the mirror and smiled at herself again. The ruffled lace top of the chemise hid everything it should while hinting at it, while her knickers took care of the rest.

There wasn't much she could do with her hair – not without a wand – so she tied it back into a simple ponytail, and smiled innocently at herself. She nodded approvingly. She looked years younger, which was just what she wanted.

Harry arrived back with a pop, and she turned to face him slowly, standing with one foot slightly in front of the other and on her toes, a fake expression of surprise on her face.

"I'm s-sorry," Harry muttered, his eyes going wide.

"Wait," Narcissa called huskily, before he could Apparate again. "I've never really said thank you," she continued softly as she walked over to him, ensuring that each and every step was smooth and controlled, and that she kept on her toes to emphasise her legs.

"Y-y-you're welcome," Harry gulped.

Narcissa stopped in front of him, just slightly closer than propriety normally allowed. She reached out and softly touched his arm, stroking him as lightly as she could.

He swallowed, before his eyes flashed for a second and his expression changed.

She smirked at him and took a step back.

Harry slowly started to laugh. "You *are* dangerous," he said firmly.

"I am a Black," she agreed. "That is how I would seduce you."

Harry nodded. "It would work, too, if I didn't have Ginny, and you weren't old enough to be my mother."

"It's rather academic, Harry; there is very little attractive about a teenage boy, unless you're a teenage girl. In ten or fifteen years, when you've grown into your body and your mind, I might be interested, but right now, it's more than just a little disturbing for me too."

She turned and walked over to her chest of drawers, and with her back to Harry, pulled off the chemise and pulled on a white bra, before getting dressed in the dress he had created for her.

Her mood had improved greatly. She still had it – even if Lucius didn't want it, and after this mess was over, she knew she would have no problem at all in finding a worthy consort. His first reaction proved that she was still desirable, even if he had regained control of himself faster than she would have liked – she had wanted to be the one to break the spell, not him. Still, he had her grudging respect.

"Better?" she asked. Turning to him again, she found him sitting in a chair, looking through some parchment.

He looked up at her and nodded.

She raised an eyebrow inquiringly. "Shall we dance?"

Harry moved over to her, and took her in his arms as she had taught him in the previous lesson.

"Better," she eventually praised, after an intense ninety minutes had passed. "You keep this up and you won't embarrass yourself in public."

"You're a good teacher."

"I know."

"What do you think of the material of your dress?"

"I like it, although I don't recognise it. What is it?"

"It's something that I came up with. It's as soft as silk and as tough as denim.

"I have friends who are both incredibly good designers, and we're going to be bringing out a new range of clothing, both regular material with magically enhanced features, and this stuff."

Narcissa nodded slowly. "I'd buy some decent outfits made out of this," she admitted. "And charmed clothing does sound interesting. There hasn't been a dedicated store for that since 1949."

Harry nodded, and as she watched him, she could almost see his mind return to the business of her husband and Voldemort.

“Okay, you managed to seduce me, but we didn’t actually have sex. It was my first time, and well, things came to a head before we could get that far. I was dreadfully embarrassed that you’d think less of me, and blurted out something I shouldn’t. I’m playing Quidditch on Saturday, and I’m planning a load of surprises for Voldemort, as he won’t be able to resist making a statement by attacking. Amelia and the other Ministry officials think I’m being ridiculous, and I really need him to attack or I’ll lose some credibility. Fudge isn’t an issue, as we know he works for Tommy. Do you know any Legilimency?” Harry asked.

“Enough to get by.”

“You managed to sneak into my head and discovered that the goblins are annoyed at something I said, and will be staying neutral.”

Narcissa nodded. “Do I get to know what you are planning?”

He looked at her for a long moment. “Voldemort is going to do what I want, and this will all be over soon.”

“That wasn’t much in the way of detail.”

“No,” he agreed. “It wasn’t.”

She rolled her eyes at him. “One last issue; I hardly look like I’ve been successful.”

“Do I have to think of everything?” he asked no one in particular. “Here,” he handed her the skirt she had discarded. “Think of your bathroom at home, I’ll Portkey you there and send your chest of drawers back.”

She felt him brush against her mind again.

“Portus.” With the Portkey spell cast, he said, “Go home, have a bath, and then report to the Dark Tosser.”

“I will.”

“Narcissa,” Harry said, before she activated the Portkey. She looked quizzically at him. “After the war is over, you will have a chance. The more you think for yourself, the better the chance will be. Think about your prejudices and where they got you, and then decide if they are worth everything that has happened to you.”

She nodded slowly and activated the Portkey. As she ran her bath, a slow, evil smile settled on her lips.

From: Harry

To: Secret Spy

Subject: Tonight

Suggest Thursday at the meeting tonight. You’ll know when.

H

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

From: Donna

To: Busy boy

Subject: Re: Tonight

You’re making some serious waves. I’m intrigued. I’ll do as you ask.

Sorry I didn’t know about the worm – the Dark Tosser didn’t see fit to tell any of us about his secret escape route from Azkaban. And I did note that the bastard didn’t see fit to rescue me like that!

Bellatrix

From: Black haired sis

To: Blonde haired sis

Subject: Lord Volde-Monkey

I thought that I couldn't hate Voldemort any more than I did – and yet, today I realised that he could have gotten me out of Azkaban years ago – as he did for most other people.

Bastard.

I will show him what happens when he crosses a Black!

B

From: Blondie

To: Blackie

Subject: Re: The Dark Tosser

You do know that is what Harry is calling Volde-monkey these days? I approve.

I will be personally reminding Lucius that I was a Black long before I was a Malfoy.

But here's something for you to think about.

According to my research over the past few days, in the UK there are over 50 million Muggles, compared to a little over 1 million wizards. Those Muggles use something called Electricity to mimic most everything that we can do with magic. They are lying, conniving, deceitful, creative, and talented and increasing in knowledge at an alarming rate.

The idea that they are behind us is, well, just wrong. They might have been four hundred years ago when anyone with intelligence last looked, but if we're not careful, they will be ahead of US! Times have changed – the purebloods have to change as well. Look where the old strategy has led us.

We are Blacks. We are not second to anyone. And if that means allowing the Muggle-born into Hogwarts and using what they produce, so be it.

N

--
Not just an anything

"So is there a cure?"

Remus shook his head. "I'm afraid not."

"Then why in the name of Loki are you cheerful today?" another werewolf demanded aggressively.

"Because last night, I took a leaf out of Greyback's book and embraced being a wolf. Only, instead of trying to fake it like he did, I learnt to actually be one."

"Explain!"

Remus moved closer to the fire and looked around slowly. There were just under fifty werewolves gathered around. Most of them were dressed as poorly as he was, and they all had serious bags under their eyes from the night before.

"I didn't take the damn potion last night," Remus explained. "And I forced my magic to help me change. Greyback was right, that does make it easier. With me was Harry Potter, who is a wolf Animagus. When I changed, I tried to express my dominance, as I'm a werewolf, but do you know what feeling I got from the wolf?"

"Irritation and contempt," one of the other werewolves spoke up. "I've met a wolf once, and he sniffed and walked away as if I was nothing."

"Well, that's because our body language is completely wrong. Harry explained it as a human imitating a wolf. He wasn't pleased at all, and every time I got in a position I thought was correct, he'd correct my posture until he was happy."

"But then a funny thing happened. The more I embraced being a wolf, the more clear everything was, and this was without the Wolfsbane potion. Last night I learned how to be a real wolf, and it was good. Today, for the first time, I've woken up with very little pain, and I feel refreshed and invigorated."

"I truly believe that if there isn't a cure, this is the next best thing."

The other Werewolves were nodding slowly. "So, who do we join? Voldemort has offered us revenge. Albus has offered us gratitude," Alex Saxon, the current head of the werewolves, asked.

"Me," a new voice said, interrupted them. Remus looked up to see Harry casually leaning against a tree, his arms crossed.

"I offer you freedom, lessons on being real wolves, not this mockery you become every full moon, and my personal guarantee of decent employment until I've had all the stupid anti-creature laws stricken from the books."

“Umbridge won’t accept that.”

Harry shrugged. “After I’ve killed Voldemort, petty Ministry officials will be a walk over.”

“You think you can do all this, boy?”

Remus watched as Alex, a huge man who seemed to be made completely of muscle, approached him. Harry bared his teeth and growled at him. His eyes didn’t show an ounce of fear, and his posture screamed that there was no threat nearby. Remus almost smiled as his Alpha stated clearly that he was the pack leader.

There was a staring match for a few seconds, and the longer it went on; the more Harry started to look irritated. After a minute of having his dominance challenged, Harry took a step forward and made a sharp growl.

Alex took a step back automatically, before he realised what he was doing. He looked at Harry and nodded slowly.

“I need you to do something for me,” Harry said – he was back against the tree as if nothing had happened. “I want you to join Voldemort tomorrow.”

“What!?” Remus demanded.

Harry growled at him, and Remus adjusted his body language and backed away slightly.

“Voldemort will be pleased,” Harry continued, “when you tell him you’ll join his fight, as you’ve heard rumours of even more restrictive laws being put in place and you’ve had enough. He’ll ask you to gather all of your pack together and wait for him. He’ll promise you as much mayhem as you want.”

“You have a plan,” Alex stated.

“I am pack-leader,” Harry agreed. “Wolves are cunning and smart, and we will act that way. You are in charge in my absence.”

Alex stood taller and nodded; a proud expression on his face.

“I have given my word,” Harry stated. “I’ll be back tonight for the change.” He vanished.

Alex turned to Remus. “He *is* Alpha.”

“He is.”

Alex smiled slowly. “He can do what he said?”

“He is Alpha for a reason.”

“That’s what I thought,” Alex said cheerfully. “I’ll go and see Voldemort tomorrow. Do you think there really will be a fight?”

Remus laughed. “Let me tell you the story of how Harry took down Greyback.”

Narcissa stood at the back of the hall, keeping her contempt to herself. She was surrounded by black robed wizards – Voldemort’s inner circle.

“Well,” Voldemort hissed toward her. “Did you succeed?”

She knew she was standing out. She was wearing grey robes – black was reserved for his marked followers. “Not quite, Milord,” she said.

Voldemort’s face turned sour and he raised his wand.

“But,” she continued without hesitation or sign of fear. “I think you’ll like what happened more.”

“Oh?” the threat was left hanging in the air.

She allowed her slightly evil smile to grace her features. “First, my Lord, I had to overcome the incompetence of Lucius and Flint.”

“What?” Lucius demanded.

“Indeed,” Voldemort added. “Explain yourself.”

“They dressed me like a cheap whore, with no class at all. I tried to explain, but they wouldn’t listen.”

“And the problem?” Voldemort demanded in a bored tone.

“Potter may be a boy, but he has more taste than that. He laughed at me.”

Voldemort sat up in his chair.

I thought fast, and explained that Lucius demanded that I dress like this around the house, and that I hadn't had time to change. I was very apologetic and downbeat about it. I even cried a few Veela tears to show how upset I was. He couldn't help comforting me. So I told him about how distant Lucius was, unless I dressed like that travesty."

"And?"

"Potter lapped it up," she crowed. "He even lent me his wand to sort myself out." She paused and looked at Voldemort. "I thought about taking him prisoner, but you said I was to be your spy – did I do right, my Lord?"

Voldemort nodded. "The boy is skilled at wandless magic, not as much as I am, but he has some ability. You would have been defeated and I would have lost my last spy at Hogwarts. You did well. Continue."

"Yes, my Lord. I quickly removed the appalling makeup from my face, returned my chest to my normal size, and summoned my finest lingerie from my wardrobe. Potter turned away, but I moved so that he could watch me in a mirror as I changed – and he couldn't take his eyes off me. I won't bore you with the details," she said airily, "but in my normal form and clothes that weren't an abomination, I soon managed to get the boy naked. I was about to do as ordered, when, well, the boy came to a premature end."

Voldemort looked at her for a long moment, before, to her horror, he started to laugh. The laugh was dry and rusty, and seemed very wrong coming from his throat.

"My Lord," she continued, "Potter expects and is hoping that you will attack during the stupid Quidditch match."

Voldemort stiffened and looked at her. "Hoping?" he hissed.

"He was embarrassed and started talking before he could engage his brain," she explained. "His credibility is on the line. When you attack, he will have proven his case to Bones and the Ministry, and they will back him."

Voldemort frowned.

"My Lord?" Bellatrix's voice rang out.

"Bellatrix?" Voldemort asked, a new threat in his voice.

"We have the plans to attack," she continued, a dreadful eagerness for pain and suffering in her voice, "and we should do so, but not on Saturday."

"You think I am afraid of the Ministry?" Voldemort demanded.

"No, my Lord," Bellatrix shouted as she dropped to her knees and crawled to him, kissing the hem of his robes. "But if it will weaken Potter, I think that we should hold off, and then attack on Thursday."

"Do you indeed?"

Bellatrix shook in fear as Voldemort pointed his wand at her.

"The boy will have lost face," Bellatrix said quickly, "and he won't be expecting you to move so fast. You'll catch him unaware, and with the Ministry thinking he is a joke, we can take out Hogwarts quickly, and then all will bow before you."

Voldemort was very still for an endless moment.

"Dolohov," he eventually whispered. "Warn our allies. We attack on Thursday."

"My Lord," Narcissa called. "I did manage to get one more piece of information out of him. His attempts at a relationship with the goblins have failed. They will be staying neutral."

"Excellent. You are all to prepare for Thursday. I'm sure I don't need to remind you what the punishment will be if you tell anyone. You may all leave. Except for you, Lucius, and you, Flint. You will stay, and we will have a very long discussion about your competence. There are times, Lucius, when I believe that the only thing you have done right in your miserable life is to marry your wife."

Narcissa shot her husband the same evil smile, and Disapparated, back to her rooms in Malfoy Manor, pleased with her evening's work.

Harry wandered into the Great Hall and paused to look around. The urge to charge full steam ahead with his plans was overwhelming, but he resisted. He couldn't accidentally tip his hand to Voldemort early; this was far too important.

Over at the Gryffindor table, the entire Weasley family was together, along with their partners, and seemed to be having a very merry time. Dean, Sheryl and their family were over at the Hufflepuff table, and seemed to be enjoying themselves.

"Harry!" Jenny was the first to notice him, and she ran over to him, tackling him around the waist.

"Hey," he greeted her as he raised her up to eye level.

"You turned into a wolf!"

He nodded. "I do that."

She shot a look at her brother. "See, I told you that you were better than Dean!"

"Not better," Harry explained, "just different."

"Right," she sniffed. "Can you turn into a pony?"

"Jenny!" Dean shouted.

Jenny turned and stuck her tongue out at her brother.

"No," Harry said, shaking his head. "Only a wolf and a hawk."

"Only," someone from the Ravenclaw table muttered.

Jenny pouted. "Come and eat with us," she ordered, squirming out of his arms and dragging him over to her table.

"Careful, Ginny," Blaise said from the Slytherin table, "You're going to lose him."

Ginny laughed. "I think I'm safe for a few years yet," she replied cheerfully.

Harry sat down. "How are you enjoying Hogwarts?"

"It's pretty amazing," Mary said quietly. "I didn't expect it to be quite so wonderful, despite what Dean told us."

"I know," Harry agreed. "I still feel awed every time I step into these hallowed halls."

"The food's been excellent," Graeme added. "In fact, it's probably been the best holiday we've had."

"That's an idea," Harry said, "we should see about inviting some of the Muggle-born students' families to come and stay over the summer, to put their minds at rest about what their children are getting into."

"We would have appreciated it," Mary said. "We're not going to want to go home."

"Well, you do have a while – there's going to be a big Quidditch match on Saturday that you'll want to see."

"I can't wait," Graeme said happily. "It's going to be worth missing the Hammers playing Chelsea."

"Jenny," Harry said, as he noticed the girl had finished her dinner. "See the huge man at the professors' table?"

She nodded warily.

"That's Mr Hagrid. He runs Hogwarts' farm. He has loads of animals you've never seen before, if you go and ask him nicely, he might take you out and show you some of them."

"Really?" she asked.

He nodded and leaned in. "There are unicorns in the forest."

Jenny's eyes went incredibly wide, and then she turned and scampered off toward Hagrid.

"Was that wise?" Susan asked softly.

Harry looked at her. "Hagrid would die before letting any harm come to anyone, especially a child."

Susan smiled and nodded. "I didn't ask for me."

"Oh, sorry," Harry apologised to Dean's parents. "I didn't think about that."

"It's all right, we trust you."

"Yeah," Dean teased. "You're a *better* wizard than I am."

"Different, not better!"

"Okay, you don't like the word better. Would you accept more powerful?"

"I guess."

"More skilful?"

"Well..."

"More dedicated, harder working, more resourceful?"

“But...”

Dean smirked at him. “So, if that’s not better, what is?”

Harry glared at him and pouted.

“Accept it, Harry,” Mary told him firmly. “It doesn’t make us love Dean any less. There are always talented people around, and what makes them special is when they marry that talent with desire.”

“I give up,” Harry groaned. “Now, if you’ll excuse for me a few seconds, I’m going to devour this meal. I’ve not eaten enough today.” He concentrated on his meal, hardly noticing as Hagrid invited the rest of the family out to see his animals.

When he had finished, and he felt like he could happily get on with his work, he looked up thoughtfully.

“Brace yourselves,” Padma said loudly. “He’s got that look on his face that means someone’s not going to get much sleep tonight.”

“Well volunteered,” Harry responded. He ignored her groan. “In fact, your entire little group has just volunteered.” Padma ducked a hail of bread rolls from around the hall. “I want you with Molly Weasley and Fred and George. Charlie, you’re with me tonight. Fleur, can you arrange an appointment with Madame Maxime for sometime soon? I’ll have to ask you to act as translator for us.” He looked around the Great Hall again thoughtfully. “Charlie, I’ll meet you in the library in half an hour. I’ve got an errand to run first.”

Harry appeared in the outer office of Gringotts.

Five heavily armed guards charged into the room, weapons ready. “Oh, it’s you.”

“Sorry,” Harry apologised cheerfully. “I need a chat with Mackrack, and I don’t want to be seen.”

“This way, Harry,” Mackrack called from his office. He looked at the other goblins. “Good response time,” he praised.

The goblins all bowed and retreated.

“So, what can I do for you?” Mackrack asked.

“You can be upset with me,” Harry requested.

“Oh?”

“I had Voldemort informed earlier that you’re staying neutral in this conflict. Normally, he’d try and recruit you, but he hasn’t got the time.”

“Because you’ve cut off his money?”

“Something like that,” Harry agreed. “Now, I want every goblin warrior you have next week.”

Mackrack’s eyebrows seemed to shoot through the ceiling. “You want what?”

“I’ll pay, don’t worry,” Harry said, brushing aside the concern of payment.

“Why do you want them, Harry?”

“Because it’s no longer enough to win,” Harry replied in a low voice. “I want to send a message that will last for eons so that anyone who thinks about picking up the mantle of a Dark Lord will hear its echo and maybe choose not to.”

“Can I ask what your plans are?”

“You can ask, but don’t expect an answer. I’m the only person who knows, and at the moment, it is staying that way. I’ve got a lot of things coming together, more through luck than judgement, and I’m barely keeping on top of things as it is. If things go well, I’ll be able to go back to being a teenager by the end of next week. If things don’t, then I’ll be dead.”

“It’s going to happen that soon?”

Harry nodded. “Please, don’t tell anyone that – although obviously, you’ll want to have the fighters I hire practicing.”

“Harry,” Mackrack said thoughtfully as he leant back in his chair and looked at the ceiling. “What do you think the Ministry and the general population will think if we let you hire our support?”

“They’d probably be grateful?” Harry said, a little doubtfully. “I wouldn’t worry about the Ministry, that’s being taken care of soon.”

“The people will think that nothing has changed, and that if Voldemort had offered us enough money, we would have worked for him, and things would continue. I can’t have that, Harry, so I’m afraid I’m going to have to state that the goblin nation is fully behind you, and our army will be under your command when you need it. For free,” he finished, looking like his teeth hurt.

Harry gaped at him.

“The time has come, Harry, for us to earn our own place in society. By helping you fight Voldemort, the people will start to see us differently. It will take time, since you can’t change centuries of prejudice overnight, but it will be worthwhile.”

“If I lose, though, Voldemort will be against you.”

“Do you honestly believe that even if we supported him, he wouldn’t turn on us?”

“No,” Harry admitted.

Mackrack bared his teeth. “We trust you, Harry, to lead us into the future we want.”

“I won’t let you down.”

“I know. Now, while you’re here, let’s discuss Butterbeer.”

From: Wonder Researcher

To: Strangely Researching

Subject: Research

Exactly why are you pretending to read a book on Charms when you’re really reading a book on how to be an Animagus?

Hermione

From: The girl who needs to do real research

To: The girl researching for my boyfriend

Subject: Re: Research

I have to, Hermione.

Everyone else here is working away, doing what is needed for the Wizarding World and helping to defeat Voldemort.

I’ve got something more important to do. Everyone’s noticed that Harry’s been different recently. He’s spent more time as a wolf, and it’s changed his personality slightly, and I need to understand that, and I need to be able to match it.

Harry’s already shown me that I can be his mate in more ways than one, and I’ve got to understand what I’m doing so I can be with him when he runs with the werewolves at night, or just lounges around as a wolf.

Everyone else can look after the rest of the world; I’m looking out for Harry!

Ginny

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Audaces fortuna juvat

From: The girl who has been told

To: The girl who told

Subject: Well, that told me

That makes a lot of sense. I’ll wander by in a few minutes and pass you a better book.

Hermione

Ginny looked around the library and smiled softly. Her entire family was sitting around, engaged in low level discussions, the likes of which had probably never been seen at Hogwarts before. The twins were at the head of a large circular table, directing the discussion, as three generations of people shared ideas.

Abe sat next to her mother, Sirius next to her father, Remus next to Bill. Blaise was next to Percy, Padma next to Fleur and George, and so on. The only person missing was Charlie, who was with Harry, practising Occlumency and Legilimency.

“Okay,” Fred said, “We’ve had some good ideas so far from this discussion.”

“Do we actually know what we’re facing?” Graeme asked apologetically, as he slid into his seat. “And sorry I’m late.”

“Not exact numbers, no,” George replied. “What we do know is that they’ve going to have some giants, other assorted creatures, and a large number of Death Eaters.”

“We’re going to have us, and the allies that Harry is arranging,” Ginny added. “I don’t know who or what, but I do know that we won’t be standing alone.”

“So,” Graeme continued, “We’re here to protect the castle, and do what damage we can?”

“Pretty much,” Fred agreed.

“Well, I’ll make my contribution and go back to playing with my kids. Caltrops.”

“Bless you,” Blaise murmured.

“Can I borrow someone to show what I mean?”

“Come with me,” Ginny said, getting to her feet and leading him toward a corner.

“Okay, can you create two pieces of metal that we can bend?”

Ginny nodded and took a deep breath. She held out her hand and concentrated, drawing on the memories of what the elder Dursleys had done to Harry. With a growl, she forced her magic to do what she wanted.

“You didn’t use your wand?”

“Harry’s asked me to try to stop using it. I’ve done some things in the past when I’ve been really mad, and as children, nearly all of us do accidental magic. We then come to school, and everything is done with a wand. It becomes a habit because it’s a lot easier.”

Graeme nodded. “All of this is incredibly fascinating to me.” He picked up the two pieces of metal and twisted them together. “Can you join them in the middle?”

Ginny nodded and did so.

“Well done,” Graeme said. “The thing about this is that no matter how you throw them, one point always points up. You scatter a whole bunch of them. When people attack, they will step on these, and it will hurt.”

“Perfect,” Ginny whispered. “These are brilliant!”

“I wish I could claim I invented them,” he admitted. “But I remember being taught about them at school. I’m going to go and see my family, so I’ll see you later.”

“Thanks, Mr Thomas.”

Graeme nodded and walked out of the library. Ginny took the caltrop and threw it into the air into the middle of the desk. “That is a caltrop,” she announced as she took her seat. “And if you note, no matter how you throw it, a point is always pointing up. We make lots of them and put them where people will step on them.” She paused. “And if we use enough poison on them, we should decimate our attackers.”

“Ginny!” Molly scolded.

“She’s right, Mum,” Percy said. “According to Ministry figures, Death Eaters have destroyed over a hundred families. That includes over thirty children under school age. Just think about Jenny - she’s bright, funny, obviously planning on stealing Harry from Ginny, and now has Hagrid wrapped around her little finger. If Harry hadn’t planned ahead, she’d just be another Ministry statistic, another small coffin buried in an unmarked plot.”

There was silence around the table.

“You know, death is almost too good for these animals. They fight people weaker than themselves and call it heroic. They are not. They are barbarians, they are torturers, and they are murderers. And if a bit of poison on a spike ensures that one more family sleeps soundly at night, or that when I have children I don’t have to worry about them being killed, then I’ll be the first in line.”

Penny walked around and kissed him, hard, while the others started to cheer.

Molly smiled and waited until the noise had died down. “You’re right,” she admitted. “I’m sorry, Ginny.”

Ginny smiled at her mother.

“And don’t think that I didn’t notice the wandless magic,” Harry said from a seat that had previously been empty. Charlie was next to him, an amused look on his face.

“How the hell do you do that?” Sirius demanded as he jumped in surprise.

Harry waved his fingers. “Magic.”

Ginny?" Hermione asked.

"Tell me something, Hermione," Ginny said, as Harry walked behind her, lifted her up, and sat down with her in his lap, "Did you do accidental magic as a child?"

Hermione nodded.

"Did you use your wand when you did that?"

"I didn't *have* a wand at that point."

"Then how did you do magic?"

Hermione opened her mouth and then shut it again. "The magical power was just forming, and I didn't know how to control it yet."

"Did I ever tell you what happened when Hagrid met the Dursleys?" Harry asked.

Everyone shook their heads. "Well, after tracking us down to a cabin where Vernon was hiding me, he shouted at them for a while, and then he gave Dudley a pig's tail."

"And?" Blaise asked.

Harry smiled. "Hagrid hasn't had a wand for years. He used an umbrella. Are you really telling me that you all have to use your wands, when a low-powered half-giant can cast a spell with an umbrella?" He looked around. "You can probably all still do accidental magic, and wandless magic is the same thing, only with a bit of control."

Hermione stared at Harry intently, before she sighed. "You're a git, Harry," she stated. "But I can't find a flaw in your logic."

"Agreed," Harry smirked at her.

"It's worse when you're right."

"I'll try not to do it again."

Hermione looked at her wand and sighed. She threw it at Harry, who reached out and caught it. "Skip classes tomorrow morning, and I'll help you with the basics," he offered, as he chuckled it back. "But keep your wand for now. This isn't really the time to start from scratch."

"Okay," Hermione nodded.

"My heart," Ron gasped, clutching his chest.

"I'll help," Hermione said sweetly and pounded his back.

"Ouch!"

"You're going to be there as well."

"Why?" Ron asked.

"If Ginny can do wandless magic, so can we, and so can everybody at this table," Hermione stated firmly.

"Almost everyone," Ginny said apologetically.

"Sadly, my dear sister is correct," Percy said with a sigh. "Those of us who aren't that powerful can't." He paused and his eyes went distant. "Feel free to correct me if I get this wrong," he said to Penelope. "Wandless magic used to be quite common. Wands themselves were invented as far back as our history goes. They were used to make magic easier, but more powerful wizards and witches didn't use them – they considered them to be limiting. And they are.

"They excel at making spells easier, but they also act as a crutch and a limitation. It's far easier to keep using memorised incantations and wand motions than to figure out how to do something original.

"Over the last thousand years, the idea of not using wands has become anathema to a society that is far too insular and conservative to make any real advances. Wands should be used to start with, but then abandoned and people should be using magic directly."

"So why weren't we ever told?" Fred demanded.

"Because the Ministry can monitor wands," Percy admitted. "They, and by 'they' I mean the pure-bloods who try to run everything, think that they can keep the population down by making people reliant on their wands – that they have, on behalf of the Ministry. Can you imagine their fear if a non-pure-blood mastered magic they couldn't control?"

"They are the ones who are responsible, over the past thousand years, for ensuring that wands are used everywhere."

"Percy, why didn't you tell us?" Charlie asked.

Well, some of this I've only learnt recently. I'm going for a Mastery, and this is an area I've studied. Part of it, I'm ashamed to say, was envy that I couldn't do it, and finally, well, why didn't any of you look it up yourselves?"

No one answered for a few seconds.

"Because we're trained not to," Hermione said candidly. "And it took someone who doesn't really care for any restrictions to point it out to us."

"Just to make this clear," Harry said, "this isn't a priority at the moment. I'd like all of you who are interested to come along tomorrow morning, but we'll not do much with it until this is all over. Speaking of which," he closed his eyes and took hold of the table. "Everyone grab hold."

Rather than grabbing the table, Ginny took a firmer hold of Harry. The Portkey activated, and they all appeared downstairs in the meeting room behind Dumbledore's office. The members of the Order of the Phoenix were already waiting for them. Harry touched the table and it vanished back up to the library.

"Hmm," he said. "A table isn't going to work." He waved his hands, and row after row of comfortable looking armchairs appeared. "Everyone take a seat," he ordered as he moved to the front and created a lectern to stand behind. Without preamble, he looked around. "The game is afoot, and we can't let it slip. So, I want every single one of you to raise your wand." He raised his. "And swear that you will never divulge what you are about to hear to anyone not in this room, or without direct permission from me."

"And if we don't?" Dung Fletcher demanded.

"Your services will no longer be required," Harry said icily. "Your memories will be altered and you will be sent home."

"Harry," Albus said, "I am assured of their loyalty."

"I will not jeopardise the lives of all the people involved for the sake of a simple magically binding promise," Harry replied.

Minerva stood. "I swear that I will never divulge the contents of what I am about to hear to anyone else."

"Thanks," Harry smiled at her. As one group, everyone who had been in the Library said the same thing. From there, everyone else did the same, even Dung, ending with Albus Dumbledore.

Harry smiled softly and started to talk. He talked for close to an hour, as he laid out his plans, what he had accomplished, and what he still planned to do.

"And that," he finished softly, "is my plan."

There was a profound silence as everyone stared at him.

"Any questions?" Harry finished.

No one seemed to know what to say.

"Not really," Blaise eventually said into the silence, "but thanks for inviting us tonight."

Harry smiled at her. "Just as Albus has people he knows and trusts implicitly, I have the same, Blaise, even if you *are* a Slytherin," he finished with a teasing grin.

"I love you, too."

"If there are no more questions, we'll meet again on Monday for a final round-up. Remus and Sirius, could you go to the werewolves and get them started? I'll be along later. The Weasley boys, I believe you have Quidditch to practice. Everyone else, I'll see you on Monday."

Harry walked quickly through the maze of armchairs, grabbed Ginny and Apparated them both away. He groaned in relief as he appeared in his new bedroom and collapsed onto the bed.

Ginny looked at him for a long moment before she climbed onto the bed and straddled him, sitting comfortably over his hips.

"Did I do okay?" he asked.

"You were wonderful," Ginny told him firmly. "Brilliant, but where's all this planning skill coming from?"

"Planning?" Harry asked. "What planning? I've been contradicting myself every thirty minutes, flying by the seat of my trousers the rest of the time, and relying on my instincts. And I keep forgetting to do things – like talk to Sev about a charm that could have caught Wormtail earlier."

"Oh," Ginny asked as she leaned over him, shaking her head a little so that her hair fell down around them. "Were those the same instincts that made you choose me as your mate?"

"Yes," he whispered.

She smiled at him, "They're good instincts. You didn't mention Narcissa or Bellatrix."

"I didn't mention a few things," he admitted. "I didn't want to deal with their negativity."

Oh?" she asked.

Harry's left hand reached up and cupped her cheek, and she almost missed the words he whispered next. She blinked at him, and then gave into the urge to kiss him. One kiss led to another, and thoughts of planning and the future were lost as she let her future husband kiss away her fears and doubts over what he had told her.

From: Ginny

To: Blaise

Subject: Tonight

Hey, Blaise, Harry's running with the wolves tonight, and I'm a little lonely, do you mind coming over?

Gin

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

From: The girl who runs Slytherin House

To: The girl who runs Hogwarts

Subject: Re: Tonight

Sure, I'll be there in a few ticks of Sirius' tail. I want to run something by you anyway.

B

From: Hermione

To: Boyfriend

Subject: If you've finished your homework...

... I know a free place tonight we could... discuss today's events...

Hermione

From: The boy just given motivation to finish

To: The girl who likes ellipses

Subject: Re: Tonight

Fifteen minutes. And it will get me a category four reward.

Ron

From: Punctuation girl

To: Clever boy

Subject: The room we found Fluffy in

Category four, a proper O?

I'll look forward to seeing that you've earned it...

H

From: Checkpoint Charlie

To: Bill

Subject: Occlumency and that girl of yours

Hey, Bill, you might want to come and spend some time learning this stuff – makes you immune to that charm.

C

--
Draconis dominium

From: The Senior Sibling

To: Chuckles

Subject: Re: Occlumency and that girl of yours

Fleur and I will be over in a tick to test it out.

B.

Harry finished his breakfast, kissed Ginny, smirked at Ron and Hermione – whose current odour told him clearly that they'd had an extremely vigorous night, despite the fact they had showered – and Apparated away to Little Whinging.

The house he had lived in for the first eleven years of his life was pristine. The Ministry officials in charge of handling the aftermath of a Death Eater attack had left things as they were before.

The wards that had protected him were gone, overpowered by the Death Eaters' concentrated attack.

He walked inside, a simple wandless charm unlocking the door, and made sure that he picked up everything that had once belonged to him, from the small blue blanket that had been his only possession for so many years, to the first piece of homework he had brought home. It had also been his last, as the response from the Dursleys to him achieving an A at school had been frightening. He'd managed to fish it out of the rubbish the next morning.

He opened Dudley's door, and blinked in surprise. Most of the toys had gone, and there was a new bookcase along one side of the wall, filled with second-hand books – proof that Dudley had purchased them himself, as the Dursleys would never have allowed their precious Duddikins to get second hand books.

As an idea hit him, he waved his wand, and a whirling cyclone appeared in the middle of the room. It bounced around the room, sucking everything off the walls and shelves and into itself, before it collapsed into a small box, which he picked up and put in his pocket.

With a shrug he Apparated back to Hogwarts, and appeared outside the small set of rooms that the Dursleys were staying in.

Without knocking, he opened the door and strode in. Vernon appeared to have been waiting for someone, as he swung what looked like a table leg toward Harry's head.

Acting on the instincts that his hard training had provided, Harry stepped into the swing, catching the arm against his side. His right hand shot out, catching Vernon perfectly on the chin.

The fat Muggle collapsed to the floor, while Petunia screamed.

Harry's hand shot out, a silencing charm ensuring that the screaming stopped. The words that he had planned vanished from his mind, as he grabbed Petunia's arm and knelt to touch Vernon.

Apparating Muggles was harder than he had expected, especially Vernon, who seemed to weigh a ton. They arrived in the living room of Number Four, Privet Drive.

Harry cancelled the spell on Petunia and turned, ready to Apparate away.

"Wait!" Petunia called.

Harry turned back to her.

"Are we still protected here?"

"You know," Harry said slowly, "I really don't care." He Disapparated, knowing he would never see them again, and perfectly content with that idea. They were not worth wasting any more of his time or effort on. They had lost their son, and all they had left was each other.

Back at Hogwarts, he made his way out to the Great Lake, where the Thomases and Dudley were enjoying the last of the autumn sun.

"Harry!" Jenny called as she bounced over to him.

"Hey, short stuff," Harry greeted her, picking her up and swinging her onto his shoulders. "How's things?"

“Brilliant! We saw a tentacle of a huge monster!”

“You’ve met Iris then?”

“Iris?”

“All monsters have names. Iris is the Giant Squid who helps keep the lake safe for us.”

“Cool!”

Harry sat down next to the others. “I’ve just sent your parents home,” Harry said to Dudley.

Dudley sighed under his breath. “So it’s time for me to leave as well?”

“That’s one of your options,” Harry agreed as he absently lifted Jenny onto his lap. “The other is for me to trust you and put you up in your own apartment.”

Dudley blinked at him. “Excuse me?”

“I wouldn’t punish anyone I liked by sending them to live with Vernon and Petunia. They are the worst examples of humanity and I’m fully aware that if the Death Eaters had a Muggle Auxilliary, Vernon would join them in a second. I don’t really see any other option.”

“He could stay with us,” Mary suggested.

“It would be a tight squeeze,” Graeme said, nodding his head in agreement. “But I think we could do it. He can have Dean’s old room, they can share over the summer, and Sheryl can move back in with Jenny.”

“Really?” Dudley asked in surprise.

“Regardless of your relationship with Sheryl, we couldn’t let anyone live with those people.”

“Okay, Graeme, why don’t you come with me, and we’ll go and have a look at your house. Jenny, are you going to come with us or stay here?” Harry asked.

“With you,” Jenny replied instantly, in a tone of voice that suggested that he was insane to think that she would have chosen otherwise.

Harry laughed under his breath. “We’ll see you later,” he said to the others and stood. “Take my hand,” he told Graeme, as he picked Jenny up. He Apparated them both back to their house, and like the Dursley’s, it was pristine.

“What did you want to talk to me about?” Graeme asked.

Harry looked at the standard three bedroom house before him. It was a typical semi-detached house, with a garage attached to the side. “How about if I pay for a building conversion above the garage for Dudley to live in?” he asked.

Graeme looked at him in surprise. “Can you afford it?”

Harry smiled faintly. “I could probably buy Little Whinging with spare change and not notice it,” he admitted. “I’ll also have some friends place a few wards here, just in case. So, what do you think?”

“I think that would be the best solution,” Graeme admitted.

“Good, I hoped you were going to be reasonable,” Harry grinned. “Are we going to argue about me paying for Dudley’s rent?”

Graeme seemed to be having a battle with himself.

“I know you’re not doing it for money. If you were, I’d do the bare minimum, but you offered to take Dudley in because it was the right thing to do. That sort of thing means a lot to me, and Dudley is the last piece of family I have left. I don’t want to spoil him or anything, but I also don’t want you, or your family, to suffer when it won’t make much of a difference for me. If you’re unhappy about accepting cash, I can always pay off your mortgage and get you a new car or two. Actually, Dudley’s going to need one, so I’ll be getting one for him. You can tell your friends that you won a bit on the lottery, so they won’t be concerned about the sudden influx of cash.”

“You do seem to have thought this through,” Graeme admitted.

Harry felt it was prudent not to admit that he was making it up as he went along.

“Can we get a pink one?” Jenny asked. “I like pink cars.”

“Okay, Harry,” Graeme said. “Do what you want.”

“Then let’s get moving,” Harry said cheerfully. “We’ll drop in and see my bankers first.”

To: Harry

Cc: Ginny

Subject: This evening

Harry, could you (and Gin) pop to the Room of Requirement this evening at five? I've got something I need to talk to you about.

B.

From: Harry

To: Blaise and Gin

Subject: Re: This evening

Sure, I should be finished by then.

Harry.

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

From: Ginny

To: Blaise

Subject: Do you need anything?

Do you need me to do anything?

Ginny

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

From: Nervous girl

To: Encouragement Girl

Subject: Re: Do you need anything?

I think I'm ready, Ginny. Wish me luck?

B.

From: The Future Mrs Potter

To: The current Miss Zabini

Subject: Re[2]: Do you need anything?

You don't need it, Blaise, but I'll wish it all the same.

Ginny

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

“Dad,” Dean said that evening, as he sat next to them at the Hufflepuff table, “you’ve got the sort of expression that tells us that you’ve had a run-in with Hurricane Harry.”

Graeme nodded. “There’ll be a few changes by the time you get home.”

“Like what?” Susan asked, as she sat down and hugged Jenny.

We're going to be taking Dudley in," Graeme explained. "And as he's the last relative Harry claims, he decided to make sure that we could handle it. He managed to get an architect to draw up some plans for an extension above the garage, and then he walked into the local council and convinced the planners to give us permission on the spot, before he arranged for a team of builders to start."

"That's brilliant!" Dean said happily. "We've needed that for years."

"And then," Graeme continued, "he took me to a dealership and got me a new car for work, to make sure that I can afford to feed Dudley."

"Hey!" Dudley protested in a good-natured way. "I don't eat that much!"

"Right," Sheryl teased, "which is why you're just now finishing your second helping?"

"I'm a growing lad, all this exercise is hungry work."

"So what did you get?" Dean asked. "The new Ford Mondeo or the Vauxhall Vectra?"

Graeme sighed. "Harry didn't like the shapes and Jenny didn't like the colours."

"You let *Jenny* choose a car?" Mary asked.

Graeme shook his head. "She just gave her opinion. I tried to point out that either the Ford or the Vauxhall were fine, but Harry decided that Jenny knew more about cars than I do."

"I do," Jenny protested. "Daddy wanted to get ugly cars."

"So what did you get?"

"A new Mercedes E-class."

Dean's jaw dropped. "We've got a new Merc?" He was very close to squealing.

Graeme nodded. "It will be delivered next week. Harry can be extremely persuasive."

"I liked it," Jenny said as she started to eat. "It was pretty. They didn't do pink, but shiny black was good."

"When I told the firm that I'd got a new car, they passed me over to a new company, and when we finish our holiday, I've got a new job waiting for me, as an executive chauffeur."

"All right!" Dean shouted and did a little dance in his chair.

Mary had a small frown on her face.

"We didn't take advantage of Harry," Graeme told his wife softly. "He just wanted to make sure that we wouldn't suffer because we took Dudley in."

"But..."

"But he knows that we didn't do it for money, he just wanted to make sure that we'd all be comfortable." He paused. "Harry kinda paid off our mortgage as well."

Mary blinked. "Why?"

"So we'd be able to afford to send Jenny to school here," he mumbled.

Mary sighed. "That boy," she grumbled under her breath.

"Has very little concept of what is possible and what isn't," Susan interrupted. "Dudley is his family, and there's very little he won't do for the people he cares about. And don't worry about it hurting him. Judging by the noise the twins were making yesterday, he could have paid for it with what he's earned this week."

Mary smiled at her. "You're a very loyal friend."

"Only as loyal as Harry is to me," she replied firmly. "So, no words about what happened, please. We all like Harry the way he is."

Dean's mother held up her hands. "It's just unusual to find someone doing something for no reason."

"It's not no reason, Mum," Sheryl pointed out. "It's because you were nice enough to take in my boyfriend. Sometimes good things do get rewarded."

"About that," Graeme said, looking at Dudley and Sheryl. "We're going to have to have a very long conversation about rights and responsibilities of you two being in the same house!" He enjoyed immensely the look of chagrin and worry that flashed over their faces.

Harry knocked on the door to the Room of Requirement.

Harry," Blaise greeted him happily. She was wearing a smart black skirt, black heels, and a white blouse.

He looked at her and raised an eyebrow.

"Ginny's already here," she said, offering no explanation for her outfit, as she led him in. "Can I get you a drink?"

"No, thanks," Harry replied as he sat down on the chair next to Ginny.

"Okay," Blaise said, as she walked in front of them. She had her wand in her right hand, and she waved it at a screen behind her. An image of a dodgy looking building appeared.

"Thank you for coming, Harry," she said, her demeanour changing slightly. "I asked you come here because I have a proposition for you. After your successful partnership with the Twins, and your investment with Lavender and Parvati, I started to think about what I want to do after I leave Hogwarts, and I came to the conclusion that, with your help, I could do what I've always wanted to do."

Harry nodded and sat a little straighter.

"This," she said, pointing to the current image behind her, "is the Ingredient Shack. It is the biggest supplier of potions in the country. And as you can see, it's an absolute dump." She waved her wand, and a graph appeared behind her. "This graph shows the amount of money spent on the store – the figures are publicly available, as the business is public.

"As you can see, over the past ten years, the sales have been flat. The reasons for this are many, not least the fact that Professor Snape has put a lot of people off Potions in the past, and the fact that people think that potions tend to be evil – unless, of course, they are using medically.

"The fact that this shop looks so bad, and is in Knockturn Alley, doesn't help. They do have that small place in Diagon Alley for the students, but that is only open for a few weeks before term starts. The rest of the year it's a newspaper stand." She waved her wand, and a new image appeared. "Now, what I would like is to open a new shop, the Potent Potions Apothecary." The shop behind her was bright and clean, with a friendly look to it.

"There are two main parts to the store. The first is the pre-made potions section, where people can order their potions to be made for them. This would be everything from a sleeping potion up to Wolfsbane. The second part is the ingredients and the equipment necessary for brewing their own potions.

"I've talked to Percy at the Ministry, and I've got all the paperwork I need, and I've got a list of all the forbidden potions, the key ingredients for which we will only sell to licensed potions masters. There are only four in the country at the moment. I've talked to Severus about the Hogwarts account, and if I can find the products needed, at the right price, he's happy to use a more reputable source.

"I've also had a tentative talk with Neville, and he's interested in working for me as my main gardener. I've also made tentative inquiries to most of the world's wholesale ingredients suppliers, and put together a price list for supply of what I need." She waved her wand and another slide appeared, showing a breakdown of costs and projected sales.

"What I need, though, is money to do this. And unlike the others, I can't just create the raw materials that I need to be able to do a proper job. Potions ingredients can't be conjured or transfigured, and I need to be able to open with a full stock list if I'm going to be successful." She took a deep breath. "I need six thousand galleons to start, and I am aware that is an absolute fortune, but it's the only way I can take this seriously.

"What I'm offering in return is a straight partnership. Fifty-fifty. I have the contacts needed; I've got a location scouted out, and contacts made. All I need once I finish is the money to do it, and the advice from the goblins that you can provide." She seemed to run out of steam as she sat there.

"Can I have a look at your figures again?" Harry asked, keeping his voice level. Blaise nodded and waved her wand four times. He looked at the figures for some time, making some mental calculations.

He could feel that Ginny really wanted this, and there was no chance he was going to say no, but he felt like Blaise deserved a serious response. She had obviously put a lot of effort into this, and he didn't want to cheapen that. From what he could tell, the figures were good, and reasonable. The growth was steady, and the idea of pre-made potions was a good one.

"Have you considered talking to Fred and George, and seeing if you can get them to outsource their own potion requirements? Some of the things that they need are very time consuming, and they can better spend their time doing the things that only they can do rather than brewing routine potions. You'll also need to contact St Mungo's and speak to Poppy here, to see if you can become their supplier."

Blaise blinked and then smiled at him. "Good ideas," she nodded. She wrote them down.

"How are you going to deal with demand if you do become popular?"

"I've talked to a lot of Slytherins, and found out from Professor Snape who his best ex-students are. There are quite a few who would be willing to leave their current jobs and work making potions."

"Then," Harry said slowly, "I think you have a new partner."

Blaise dropped to her knees in relief, while Ginny jumped onto Harry and hugged him, before diving off and hugging Blaise.

"This is the most impressive proposal I've seen," he continued, neatly ignoring the fact that it was the only proposal he'd received. "I think that I'll expect something of this quality in the future. The Twins are family, so they have different rules. Lavender and Parvati I approached, so again, different rules. This is the sort of professionalism and forethought that I am going to expect."

"Thank you," Blaise said, as she got to her feet and put Ginny down. Ginny pushed her forward, and she hugged Harry. "You have no idea what this means to me," she whispered.

"I think I do," he replied, hugging her back. "You put the effort in, you found out the facts, and it is that effort, more than anything else, that persuaded me."

"I've been planning this since I was twelve. I had talked to a few people about investment – the goblins wouldn't because of my age – and it was looking very difficult," Blaise said, before she moved and hugged Ginny, before she thanked them both once more, and walked out almost floating on air.

"You didn't seem surprised," Harry said, as he pulled Ginny close.

"She ran it by me last night," Ginny admitted. "I thought it was a great idea."

Harry leaned in and kissed her. "I guess we need to go and get some food," he sighed against her, as his stomach rumbled.

"Did you have lunch?"

"I had some Muggle garbage that Jenny wanted to eat, but it wasn't very nice. Why don't we go to my room, and I'll cook us up something?"

"Can you cook?"

"If I follow a recipe or two, then yes," he said. "I'm going to see the Twins and Abe this evening. They've been working with your mother, and I need to know what is going on. Want to come?"

"Of course," she replied as she wrapped his arm around her. "I need to spend more time with you to make sure you don't run off with Jenny."

"It's at least six months before you have to worry about that," Harry teased. "Well, more like eleven years, and by that time, she'll be much more interested in boys her own age."

The day before the big Quidditch match started early enough to irritate Harry. The previous evening had turned into a lot of fun, as they had shot ideas at Fred and George while drinking Butterbeer and Firewhiskey, and the more that Fred, George, and Abe and Molly drank, the wilder the ideas became.

Harry had been careful to write them down, even if some of them did make him shudder in his boots. Molly turned out to have the most Machiavellian mind he'd even been close to, and with a few drinks inside her, she could really let it flow.

They'd ended up crashed on a couch, all of them too tired to bother Apparating home.

"Ginny," Harry said.

"G'way," Ginny mumbled, her face buried against his bare shoulder. "'leepin'."

"We need to get back to Hogwarts for breakfast."

Ginny looked up at him. "Apparate us," she mumbled. "Later."

"It is later," Harry tried again. "You said that twenty minutes ago."

"Hate you," Ginny grumbled. "Warm, comfy, with boyfriend."

"And you're not hungry?"

Ginny poked him in the chest – firmly.

"Not a morning person, are you?"

"And you are?" Ginny asked with a sigh as she reluctantly sat up.

"Not really, but I've not got anything major planned for today. We're helping Hermione and the others start with Wandless magic first, and then we can do a bit of Quidditch practising with Severus, Remus and Sirius."

Ginny nodded and stretched. She looked down at him. "My t-shirt smells of alcohol," she complained, and faster than he could think, she whipped it off and threw it in a corner. Or at least, Harry presumed it went to a corner, because he couldn't take his eyes off the green bra that Ginny was wearing, nor the items encompassed by said bra.

Ginny seemed to find the need to make deep breathing a national hobby, and stretching an Olympic sport, as she settled down firmly across his lap.

Thoughts of school and breakfast vanished from his mind as he stared up at her, his eyes flicking from the amused look on her face, to her chest.

Ginny slowly reached around her back, with both hands.

Harry couldn't help holding his breath as he stared at her.

"I love you," Ginny whispered as she undid her bra with an audible rustling of clothing.

"Ginny, Harry, you two need to get back to school," Molly's voice called through the doorway.

Harry released his breath in an explosive swearword.

"Damn it, Mother, I'm trying to seduce my future husband!" Ginny shouted.

"And I've ruined the mood, right?" Molly asked.

"Yes!"

"Good, that's what mothers do. Now get to breakfast. Or do I need to come in there?"

Ginny grumbled under her breath as she did her bra back up again. "Fine," she continued. "We'll do exactly what she said. Harry, Apparate us to the Great Hall for breakfast."

"But..."

"No buts," she said. "Dad and my brothers will be there, and they'll tell her that we followed her words exactly."

"But..." Harry tried again.

"We're decent," Ginny said, "my underwear covers more than a bikini and you're wearing jeans. Do it."

Harry shook his head and Apparated them both, as they were, to the Great Hall.

The sound of nearly a thousand heads turning at once, followed by the same number of jaws dropping was an unusual one.

"G-G-Ginny," Ron stuttered. "You're naked."

"Naked?" Ginny asked as she climbed off Harry and stood with her hands on her hips, "Not at all. If my bloody mother hadn't interrupted I probably would have been, and would have been having a lot more fun than eating breakfast, but *noooooooo*, she had to order us to come for breakfast, and I am *ever* the dutiful daughter."

Harry looked around at the other Weasleys, who appeared to be fighting a battle between amusement and shock. Fleur was grinning proudly at Ginny. Harry sighed and sat down.

"You two are going to have to put some clothes on," Hermione said firmly. "The sight of that many tongues out is slightly off-putting, the drool is becoming an issue, and everyone's food is getting cold."

Ginny pouted. "But I look good like this."

"What ever happened to my shy little sister?" Ron asked the ceiling.

"She grew B-cup boobs and got herself the best boyfriend in the world," Ginny replied cheerfully. "And she spent some of her boyfriend's money on some fantastic new under garments," she added as an aside. "Fetch me an outfit, honey?"

Harry snapped his fingers, and passed her a t-shirt and a very short skirt.

She grinned at him. "You're *such* a leg-man," she teased him, as she dressed quickly. "Better?" she asked Hermione, well aware that her bra was visible through the thin white material of her t-shirt, and that the skirt was a little too short.

"No," Hermione said, her lips quivering as she suppressed a smile. "And that's only forty-six percent of the tongues in. Harry needs to put a top on as well."

"If you insist," he replied as he pulled on a black t-shirt. "Can we eat now?"

"Of course," Hermione replied. "Ginny's family seem suitably shocked."

"Excellent!"

From: HJP

To: The Future Miss Black

Subject: Today

Narcissa,

I'll be sending you a Mmail shortly cancelling today. If you're in, and Lucius is out, I'll pop by Malfoy Manor later for a dance lesson, but you'll need to

send the Mmail on to Tom.

Harry.

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

From: Harry
To: My Darling Narcissa
Subject: Today

Dearest Narcissa,

My heart is filled with despair that I will not be able to see you today, but alas, I have to prepare for Tom's invasion tomorrow. We must be ready for him, and with everyone at the match, we should be.

I'll miss you, every second of every day that keeps us apart.

Harry

p.s. I've discovered a potion that will help eliminate the little problem we had last time (and I'm still sorry about that).

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

From: Regaining her maiden name
To: The Boy Who Writes Bad Love Letters
Subject: Re: Today

That was truly awful, Harry. I'm sure Voldemort will lick it up with a spoon.

Lucius is rarely around during the day, so stop round at three.

You'll be pleased to know that Voldemort almost killed him after that crap he made me wear.

N.

--
More than just an anything

From: The Competent Malfoy
To: Lord Voldemort
Cc: My Darling Husband
Attachment: mml.mml
Subject: Dance Lessons

My Lord, Potter has cancelled today's lesson as he is preparing for your "attack" tomorrow. As you can see, he is infatuated with me. I have arranged to meet him again on Monday, when I'll "console" him.

Narcissa.

From: The Dark Lord
To: The Competent Malfoy
Cc: The Incompetent Malfoy
Subject: Re: Dance Lessons

Narcissa, tell Potter that I'm planning a big attack on Halloween. That is the traditional time for me to attack, and attacking early will leave him

unprepared.

Lucius, contact the banshees today and gain their assistance for Thursday.

L.V.

--
Victory or Death

From: The Boy With Your Future in his Hands

To: The Poisonous One

Subject: Spying

Bellatrix, I need numbers from you.

The more accurate you are, the more lenient I'll be.

H.

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

From: The Deceitful One

To: The Adult One

Subject: Re: Spying

Carrot and stick, Potter? You'll go far.

I'll get you the exact numbers by Tuesday.

Bella.

From: Harry

To: Quidditch Team

Subject: Quidditch tomorrow

Good practice last night, guys. You other two, we'll see you tomorrow – you don't have to worry, everyone is playing well.

H

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

From: Ingredient

To: Master

Subject: Harry

Sev, are you sure that boy is running things? Because he seems to be getting pretty damn ruthless in his dealings with me.

Bella

From: Used to handling dangerous materials

To: Dangerous

Subject: Re: Harry

You do know that he's a wolf?

He appears to have taken to it like a duck to water. And yes, he has been a little more ruthless. And not just to you.

It certainly makes things more interesting. And really, it makes me even more optimistic. I completely believe now that he'll put the Dark Lord down.

Permanently.

S.

--

Working for the downfall of the Dark Tosser for fifteen years

From: Quidditch Master

To: Beating Colleague

Subject: I can't wait

Man, the years seemed to drop off yesterday. Hogwarts, playing with you and a James look-a-like, even Snape flying around was good.

We're going to win tomorrow – we have to!

Sirius.

From: Beater Boy

To: Other Beater

Subject: Re: I can't wait.

The sad thing is that it's immoral for us to bet on ourselves.

Remus.

From: Harry

To: Amelia, Tonks 'n' Kingsley

Subject: The match

Can you make sure that there is a heavy Auror presence at the match on Saturday, please?

Get a few desk jockeys into Auror cloaks so that the numbers look good.

They won't be used, but appearance is everything.

Oh, and Amelia, you'll need to tell me off for wasting Auror time at the end.

Harry

--

Audaces fortuna juvat

From: The Head of Magical Law Enforcement

To: The Boy who sends cryptic emails before pulling off coups.

Cc: Kingsley and Tonks

Subject: Re: The Match

With that many people expected to show up, Harry, there is no doubt at all that we will have a large presence there anyway.

I will, indeed, tell you off afterward – I will, however, demand an explanation as to why!

Amelia

From: Kingsley

To: Tonks and the boss

Subject: Re: Re: The Match

How much do I have to bribe you to tell me what he says?

K

--

Aurors do it right, first time and every time

From: Tonks

To: The Boss and the King

Subject: Bribery

I'm in; I'll take half the cost.

NT

From: The Boss

To: Aurors who work for me

Subject: Re: Bribery

Just remember that I know how much you two get paid.

1) You can't afford me.

2) If you can, you need a pay cut

Any more offers?

A

From: Kingsley and Tonks

To: Dragon lady

Subject: Re: Re: Bribery

No, Ma'am.

K&T

--

Aurors do it right, first time and every time

"Ready?" Harry asked Charlie as he stepped into the library.

"What for?" Charlie asked.

"Sabotage for tomorrow's match," Harry smirked.

"Oh, sure, in that case I'm ready."

Harry reached over and grabbed Charlie's shoulder and Apparated them both to Romania.

"Damn," Charlie whistled. "That is the way to travel internationally. You should run a taxi service."

Harry elbowed him in the stomach. "It's test time." He looked up as Crenth flew other toward them. "Hey," he greeted the large dragon, and roughly rubbed his hand against the top of the dragon's head. "How's Midram?"

Crenth reared back proudly.

Congratulations.”

Crenth smirked and looked at Charlie.

“I’ve been teaching him,” Harry explained. “Want to give him a shot?”

The dragon looked at Charlie thoughtfully, before he nodded.

“You know what to do,” Harry said to the Weasley.

“Legilimens!” Charlie said, as he concentrated hard, his wand in his pocket. “I’m doing it,” he whispered. “I can talk to him!”

“I’ll leave you two to have a chat.”

Harry wandered deep into the dragon reserve, stopping before a humongous blue dragon with light purple ringlets over its scales. He bowed deeply to the dragon.

‘*Speak, young one,*’ the dragon ordered. The mental voice’s clarity was like a diamond drill bit compared to Crenth’s coppery voice. It was also distinctly female.

‘I’ve come to beg a favour. I’ve arranged for a Dark Lord to attack my school, and I would like some help defeating him.’

‘*A Dark Lord?*’ the dragon asked. ‘*Open your mind, youngling, and let me see.*’

Harry did as he was told, lowering his Occlumency barriers. As if before his own eyes, he relived some of his past involvements with Voldemort, but the memories didn’t stop there. The dragon seemed to delve deep into his soul, examining and judging his every action. He struggled, trying to eject her from his mind, but the dragon refused to let go.

It took everything he had not to drop to his knees when the dragon finally left his mind. He took a deep breath, and then stood up straight, staring the dragon in her purple eyes.

‘*You are a brave one, youngling. I judge you worthy of our assistance.*’ She reared back and blew a plume of fire high in to the air. ‘*The old days return – the riders are back!*’ she cried, before looking at Harry.

Harry smiled and ran toward her, placing a foot on her left leg and hopping into place. ‘*You shall see, youngling, what it is like to ride a full dragon, and you shall experience the joy that is a flight of dragons.*’ She flapped her wings once, twice, before launching herself in to the sky. Every other dragon joined her, as they burst through the wards and headed east.

Harry looked to the side, to see Charlie flying on the back of Crenth. He had one fist clenched above his head as he yelled his pleasure. Crenth roared back to him. Harry had never seen Charlie so happy.

‘*I’ve not stretched my wings in many millennia,*’ the dragon whispered. ‘*The time has come again for me to fly*”

‘*What’s your name?*’ Harry threw the thought, shouting it at the same time.

‘*I am Gwyneth.*’

‘*Then, Gwyneth, let’s show these other dragons the meaning of flight!*’

Gwyneth turned her head to look at Harry, and then gave him the draconic equivalent of a grin. ‘*Yes. These young ones have almost forgotten!*’

The dragon lowered her head, and Harry settled down firmly, whispering a charm to keep him stationary. With a powerful roar, the dragon leapt ahead of the others, and kept accelerating.

Crenth tried to keep up, but he was soon lost in the distance as they flew. It was faster than Harry had ever been, and he couldn’t deny the yell deep inside him. This was the single most exhilarating thing he had ever experienced. The wind buffeted him as the dragon flew through the clouds, the ride becoming progressively bumpier, before it suddenly seemed to smooth. He looked back and saw a ring of vapour behind them. He laughed, the sound almost ripped from his throat before he could release it.

‘*Up!*’ Harry yelled. ‘*Higher! Faster!*’

Gwyneth roared her agreement and flew higher, until Harry had to cast a charm to allow himself to breathe. Gwyneth roared again and a faint purple bubble surrounded them. The endless movement of her wings pushed them ever faster. There was a feeling of deep heat as the bubble flared, before it ended and everything went deadily silent.

It was cold, incredibly cold, so Harry cast a charm to warm them both up, pouring more magic into it than he had ever needed before.

With a lazy movement of her left wing, Gwyneth turned around and before them was the earth.

Harry stared down at the small blue planet, unable to think of a single word to say.

‘*This is what you are fighting for,*’ Gwyneth whispered in his mind. ‘*If Voldemort wins, the blue will turn red and then black and we will leave and cross the great void. I have seen people like Voldemort throughout history, people who can only destroy, and it is our duty to help, it is*

everyone's duty to stop him. *We shall be there, youngling, and we will remind the world that everyone lives here together, and for one species to consider dominion over another intelligent species is abhorrent. This is our home, and has been for longer than your race has existed, and we hope it will continue to be so for as long as the planet exists.*'

Harry nodded, unable to tear his eyes from the tranquil scene in front of him. *'Brace yourself, youngling, re-entering the atmosphere is always a little rough.'* He re-cast his charm and leaned forward so that he was hugging the dragon.

It only seemed to take a few flexes of the dragon's wings before the purple bubble lit up again. The re-entry was much easier than Harry expected, less bumpy than a Gringotts dungeon ride. Gwyneth slowed them down to a gentle glide, as she aimed toward the other dragons.

The rest of the flight was made in silence, until the dragons touched back down.

Harry jumped off and stood before Gwyneth. He bowed deeply to her.

'It was a pleasure, youngling. I shall eat and then sleep. We will be ready.'

'I'll send Charlie as soon as we're ready,' he promised.

'Crenth will be waiting,' Gwyneth replied. *'Could you ask the servants to produce a cow for me?'*

Harry smiled. *'I will. Thank you.'*

'Thank you, youngling.'

Harry walked over to the Dragon Keepers. "They'd like cow for dinner."

"Aye," one of them said. "Do you think they'd let us ride?"

"By the time I've finished with Charlie, he'll be able to teach anyone. If you ask nicely, who knows?"

"The blue dragon," the man Harry remembered as Charlie's boss – Morgo Flashchime - started.

"Gwyneth," Harry interrupted.

"She's the boss?"

"Yes," Charlie said as he joined them, the grin appeared surgically attached to his face. "Crenth told me that she is the oldest dragon on the planet."

"Right," Morgo muttered. "I've never seen her fly before."

"She had no reason to," Harry explained. "We had a nice chat, and she was nice enough to take me for a flight."

"Right," Morgo muttered again.

Harry laughed. "Don't forget her cow!" He grabbed Charlie's shoulder and Apparated them back to Hogwarts.

As was becoming usual, the library was full of Harry's closest friends and family, as well as most of the professors. They were researching and discussing plans in low voices.

"We have new allies!" Charlie yelled, doing a little twirl on the spot.

"Oh?" Albus asked.

"So much for surprise," Harry muttered dryly.

Charlie blushed a rather fetching shade of Weasley red.

"Don't worry about it." Harry looked at the other in the room and smiled. He couldn't help it.

"What happened?"

Charlie looked at Harry, who nodded. "Well," the dragon handler began, "I was able to talk to Crenth, and he allowed me the honour of flying with him. I was on his back when Harry approached their queen. They talked for a while before Harry jumped on her back and every single dragon took off. We were flying in formation. Crenth was telling me how lucky we were to be flying next to the queen. It was brilliant, unbelievable, and makes flying a broom seem pedestrian. But then Harry and the queen looked at each other, and the queen took off. We must have been doing around two hundred miles an hour. We tried to keep up, but when we reached double that speed, we couldn't keep going. They didn't stop, they blasted through the sound barrier, leaving an incredibly cool looking ring behind them, and then they headed up."

"And out of the atmosphere," Harry finished softly.

There was an absolute silence from the library.

"You did what?" Padma asked quietly.

"We turned, and I could see the earth," he continued. "And Gwyneth told me that she would help me defeat Voldemort, and to change the world. She told me that one species subjugating another sentient species is wrong."

He looked up. "Every time I look around, I find allies that we have overlooked in the past. I find magnificence and glory that we, as humans, have tried to ignore and bury. I find goblins, I find dragons, I find werewolves, and I've not even started to look. How much have we missed out on, how much have we lost through our arrogance? How long will it take us to reclaim what we once had? How many of our children must grow up, being taught these lies, having our supposed seniority treated as fact?"

"The dragons don't need us, and if they didn't love this planet, they'd leave and cross the vast expanses of space and find another home.

"The goblins don't need us. If they desired, they could close their doors and dig deeper, never to be seen again, completely at ease.

"The house-elves do so much for us, and yet we treat them so abysmally, and it's only through a special elf that I've discovered just how remarkable they are.

"The centaurs and merfolk don't need us. The centaurs barely tolerate us, and the merfolk have their own world beneath the waves.

"How many other species are there, ones that we consider extinct, but who have just hidden themselves from us?"

"It is a crime. It is a crime that we must pay the price for, but no more. When Voldemort is dead, that is when the battle truly starts, because I can't sit by and watch everything we secretly want vanish."

"And you won't fight alone," Charlie promised fervently. "Can you imagine having dragon flying lessons at Hogwarts, forestry lessons from a centaur? Can you think of how much we could learn from a goblin?"

"And we will follow you," Ginny said simply. "Wherever you lead, we will be there, supporting you."

Harry smiled at her softly and opened his arms. She walked into them, hugging him tightly. He looked up, and whispered, "Legilimens."

With a burst of effort, he pushed the memory of watching the earth on the back of a dragon to all of them. He could see tears form in a lot of eyes, could feel Ginny crying against him.

"That is our goal, now," he whispered. "Voldemort stands in our way, and we will defeat him."

Blaise reached up and brushed a tear away from her cheek. She walked forward and knelt on one knee before Harry. He looked at her in surprise, and then around the room as every other wizard and witch knelt as well.

"I pledge myself to the future you see," Blaise said quietly, preparing herself internally for the next part of the pledge. "My wand, my magic, and my life are yours."

The words echoed around the room. First by Ron and Hermione, then by Luna, Padma, Parvati, Susan, and Lavender. Then by the members of the D.A., then the professors, and finally, to Harry's complete shock, Professor Dumbledore himself.

Ginny moved out of his arms and knelt before him. "I have already pledged myself to you, but I do so again, willingly and freely. It is your dream, my love, which inspires us. We will follow you to the end of our days, because you have the power to dream and the courage to fight for that dream. We want that future. I want that future. I want our children to grow in the world you see as possible."

Harry took a deep breath. "I swear that, until my dying breath, I will fight for what is right, for those who can not fight for themselves, and I will do everything in my power to start us on the road to regaining the mysteries that we have lost."

Slowly, Blaise rose, so that she was looking directly at him, as did everyone else. She smiled softly at him.

"Wow, that was heavy," Fred remarked casually. "Didn't we swear once that we'd never be followers?"

"Yeah," George agreed. "Of course, that was before we met Harrikins and he made us realise that there is more to life than pranking and having a good time."

"That there is," Fred agreed. "I want to see the earth from space."

"And with that," Molly interrupted, "Harry has pulled off the biggest miracle."

The laughter that swept the room was almost cathartic. Harry hugged Ginny again. "I'm really tired," he admitted. "The warming spell was really difficult in space. I'll see you all tomorrow for the Quidditch match."

"Come on," Ginny said, taking his hand. "I'll put you to bed." They walked out of the room in silence, and headed toward their quarters.

"What was that all about?" Harry asked, as he collapsed onto the bed.

Ginny moved to his feet and undid his trainers. "We felt your awe, Harry," she whispered as she pulled the off his feet, and removed his socks. "We felt your determination, and I think that for the first time, we all felt your destiny."

"To kill Voldemort?"

“No,” she replied as she undid his belt. “Not any more. You said it yourself - Voldemort is only a minor inconvenience. One the Wizarding World should have dealt with decades ago. In that room were some of the most important people in the country. A generation of the best students Hogwarts has seen in eons. One of the few pure-blood families that fights for the light, their partners, representing other species, as did some of the professors. And you talked to all of us, my love, you told us that it wasn’t enough for us to continue as we had in the past, you told us that we have to fight against the dying of the light, and that you would be there, in the middle of the fight, doing what you had to, not for a reward or for glory, but simply because it was the right thing to do.”

She moved and settled down over him, her hair draping down. “And you humbled us. You gave us a glimpse of heaven. You gave us the choice. And everyone there felt the same thing. We felt your belief, and we all decided that we needed to help, that we had to help, that our honour would demand nothing else for us.

“For so long we have been under the yoke of one Dark Lord after another, of one incompetent Minister being elected after another incompetent Minister retired rich. We hid from the Muggles and settled for our one village in Scotland, a few streets in London and the rest of our population dispersed. We forgot what we had once been. And you reminded us, you gave us just that little sliver that awakened something we didn’t even know existed. And we won’t be able to forget it again, and we don’t want to.

“Without trying to, without meaning to, you demanded that we judge ourselves as wizards, and you told us that if we wanted to look in a mirror again, we’d follow you.”

“But...”

Ginny smiled softly and gently kissed him, just laying her lips on his. “But if you had insisted, we would have refused. If you had begged, we might have considered. But you did neither, and we had to react.” She moved so that she was resting on his side. “Sleep, now, my love.”

“Stay?”

“For eternity, Harry, for eternity.”

This Means War

10c - Werewolves, Goblins and Dragons, Oh My! (Part 3 of 3)

From: Minerva

To: Albus

Cc: Severus, Pomona, Filius

Subject: What did we just do?

Did we do the right thing? Or were we just caught up for a moment in a single vision?

Min

From: Gnomebody

To: Senior Faculty

Subject: Re: What did we just do?

I think that we just signed up for possibly the most important thing since Godric, Rowena, Helga and Salazar got together one morning and said, “Hey, here’s an idea, let’s open a school.”

I don’t know where it’s going, and I don’t know where it’s going to end, but I can recognise when someone has had an epiphany.

And the very fact that said epiphany was a lesson taught by an animal we consider to be, well, dumb, drags home his point.

Filius

From: Sev

To: Other members of Team Hogwarts

Subject: Re[2]: What did we just do?

Fil is right. When we had the dragons here for the First Task, I didn’t think of using Legilimency on them, even though I tend to use it all the time. Why? Because they are mindless beasts, right?

And how prevalent is my attitude? Pretty much global.

I’ve often wondered if one of the reasons I was open to joining the Dark Tosser was because of a subconscious desire for change to occur.

Well, this time I’ve hitched my wagon to another charismatic leader, but this time there is no mark that says I am his, no dark magic; instead it is something far more insidious. I willingly offered him my very soul.

Sev – who is going to bugger off to bed, as he has a Quidditch match tomorrow – so hurry with your opinions, Albus, Pommie.

--

Working for the downfall of the Dark Tosser for fifteen years

From: Pomona

To: Sleepy Sev + others

Subject: My opinion

There was magic in that room, deep, personal magic, the sort of magic that is only barely mentioned in fairy tales.

I want part of it, I want more than that; I want in on it, and I want to experience it.

It’s that simple, really.

P – over to you, Albus

From: Hogwarts Headmaster

To: Fellow followers

Subject: This evening

For a very long time, I have been the most powerful magic user in the world. I'm not boasting; it's a simple fact.

But then Voldemort returned, and I was then one of two. And then Harry grew up, and I am now one of three.

And I look back at my many years, at the way I have used my power, and I am ashamed. I grew up in the same world as the rest of you, and I never questioned what is normal, I never really looked behind the surface. I defeated a Dark Lord, and was somewhat responsible for the emergence of the next, due to my inactions.

I have nightmares about the experiences Harry had with the Dursleys, turning him dark.

But tonight -- tonight, Harry offered me redemption. He offered a vision so wide and so pure that it left me breathless. He showed me a way I can make a lasting difference, not just by defeating Voldemort, but by making sure that there can never be another single human who tries to take control at the expense of everyone else.

He offered me immortality.

And I believe that everyone in the room looked upon their lives and their achievements, and felt the same sense of lacking that I did.

But we didn't join him, as much as we joined his idea, and the power of an idea is greater than all the magic in the world.

Albus

--

Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot and Chairman of the International Confederation of Wizards

From: Severus

To: Albus

Cc: Minerva, Pomona, Filius

Subject: Re: This Evening

Never forget, Albus, that although you might have made mistakes, on the eternal scales of justice, your actions put you heavily on the correct side.

Severus

--

Working for the downfall of the Dark Tosser for fifteen years

From: Charlie

To: Bill (and Fleur)

Cc: Tonks

Subject: Our apology to Harry

Guys,

Gonna need your help to do this, but Bill, I've got it. I had a chat with Crenth, and he told me that he'd get us some fresh Dragon Scale -- not the molted stuff, but top of the line, still fresh Scale!

We can make him an absolute kick-ass outfit out of them, which will help him against Voldemort!

C.

--

Draconis dominium

From: Bill

To: Affianced, Charlie and Tonks

Subject: Over! use! of! exclamation! marks!

Sounds like a good idea. Fleur and I have some charms that'll help with the magical protection.

We'll need to work fast though, as he'll need them soon.

Now get to sleep!

We have a Quidditch Match to win tomorrow!

B – who can use 'em as well.

The day of the Quidditch match was another glorious day in the long Indian summer Hogwarts had been enjoying.

There was not a cloud in the sky, and a gentle breeze kept the temperature down.

Outside, people had already started to gather for the amateur Quidditch match. Ministry Officials and minor celebrities jostled for space near the reporters, as Filius, Minerva, Pomona and Albus worked to reinforce the stands.

Harry watched them with a slight smile from his balcony.

"It seems so long ago," Ginny said, "that all this started."

"It was a different life, Gin. One I'm happy is behind me. And I'll be so much happier when all of this is over, and I can be a teenager for a little longer."

Ginny laughed softly. "Me, too. Perhaps then you'll stop falling asleep on me," she teased.

"And who was it that fell asleep on me the other night?" Harry demanded.

Ginny waved her hand airily. "We're talking about your faults, not mine."

"Ohhhhh," Harry replied. "In that case, fair maiden, I do beg of thee, forgive my incomprehensible inattention."

"That's more like it," Ginny replied, before giggling. "Ready for the match?"

"Absolutely! I can't wait to play again. It's been forever since my last match."

"Are you going to let me know the team yet?" Ginny asked.

"I didn't realise I hadn't. It's..."

There was a knock on the door, which opened, and their friends trooped in.

"Your timing is almost as bad as my mother's," Ginny grouched.

"Sorry," Blaise said perkily and completely insincerely, "but when you didn't come down for breakfast, we figured you'd be here and decided to join you. Dobby will be bringing food in a few minutes."

"Take a seat," Harry said, "and watch the fun. It's basically just journalists and people who want their views known at the moment."

"Harry, Aunt Amelia said that she'd be here an hour before the match starts, and that she's coming mob-handed."

"Excellent. I just hope that Voldemort doesn't decide to attack, anyway. I've got a few too many eggs in the non-attacking basket for me to be truly comfortable."

"Do you think he might?"

"Only if he's an absolute idiot or if he doesn't trust the information I've placed."

"Are you going to tell us how you've placed it?" Blaise asked.

"In time."

Blaise pouted. "That's a bloody Slytherin response, Potter."

"I know," Harry grinned. He paused as Dobby arrived, bearing steaming plates of food; he put the largest plate in front of Harry.

"Harry Potter needs to be keeping his energy up," Dobby said. "Some elves were being listening to Harry Potter sir last night, and theys is starting to think that maybe Dobby is being right."

"Good," Harry said, surprised.

"Dobby always says that Harry Potter sir is a great and powerful wizard," Dobby said before popping out.

"You're going to have to help me with the Snorkacks," Luna said as she started to eat. "If anyone can find them, it will be you."

"Do you think so?" Harry asked.

Luna nodded eagerly. "They like males with dark hair and green eyes."

"So do I," Ginny murmured.

"You know, that could make a fun holiday," Harry said. "We all get a couple of those Wizarding tents and have a holiday traipsing around Europe looking for them."

"That sounds fun," Padma agreed.

"Yeah," Parvati added. "It's hardly roughing it with the right tent."

"So, a way to spend the summer?" Lavender asked.

"If Voldemort is dead, none of our parents will mind," Blaise predicted.

"Then it's agreed. I'll tell Ron and Hermione later." Ginny smiled at Luna. "Happy?"

Luna nodded hard, causing her wand to fall from its perch on her ear. "Extremely."

"Welcome, ladies and gentlemen, to this special match at Hogwarts. I'm Lee Jordan, your host for this afternoon's entertainment. Next to me, as always, is the lovely Professor McGonagall, and for once, she won't be shouting at me for biased commenting against the Slytherins, as they're not playing.

"They are, of course, represented in the person of Professor Severus Snape. Professor Snape was a Chaser back in his day, and helped Slytherin house to several noticeable victories against the other teams, including the Gryffindor team that two of his cohorts in today's match played on. As Beaters, we have Remus Lupin, the best Defence professor we've ever had, and Sirius Black, who has recovered from his long incarceration at Azkaban. As for the other names, we know that Harry Potter and Ginny Weasley are playing, but not who the other Chaser or Keeper are.

"Switching to the other team, we have, Weasley, Weasley, Weasley, Weasley, Weasley, and Weasley!"

"Lee!"

"Sorry, Professor," Lee replied, "but I just couldn't resist. Seriously, we have the six Weasley boys, and the beautiful Alicia Spinnet. I'll go through their positions later, but I think it is time for a bit of background.

"For those that aren't aware, Ginny Weasley and Harry Potter started dating, and a cuter couple you're unlikely to find this side of the Atlantic.

"The Weasley boys, ignoring the fact that Harry Potter is, to quote a few female friends of mine, 'hot, loaded, with a body to die for, and honourable to boot,' decided that they didn't approve of anyone dating their little sister. They also managed to ignore the fact that their 'little' sister is big enough and powerful enough to look after herself.

"So, to put Harry off, they played a prank on him. Sadly, the only effect *that* prank had was to raise the oestrogen levels in the Great Hall, and, coincidentally, irritate Harry.

"Now, when Harry gets irritated, things start to happen. He freed his godfather, the infamous Sirius Black, and rescued Severus Snape from the clutches of the Dark Tosser himself.

"It was only then did he turn his attention back to the Weasleys. One prank later, which, by the way, was filmed from start to finish – prints are available from the Hogwarts Press Office and all proceeds go to St Mungo's – he managed to get them into a display of an old Muggle disco classic. He followed this up by presenting this match as a way to end the pranking.

"The end of the pranking is something that we're all grateful for. Hogwarts has suffered under the yoke of some great pranksters and, as I can testify from personal experience, not being able to eat breakfast for fear of turning into some form of animal is not always fun.

"I did a straw poll of Hogwarts students, and they are all backing Harry against the Weasleys, who, luckily, have now grown up and the sting has been taken out of this match. So, what does that leave us with?

"Well, Team Weasley, along with Alicia, is a very skilled unit. Often called the first family of Quidditch, they have an extremely distinguished school career before them, with both Bill and Charlie being offered professional contracts – although candour does force me to admit that Bill's offer was for a reserve position. Sadly for the sport in general, their love of Egypt, in Bill's case, and dragons, in Charlie's, meant that they turned them down.

"Percy, the next in age, is the self-admitted weakest link, but in a family this talented, it really means that he is above-average, so you should look for some skill even from him.

"Next we have the best Gryffindor beaters since Remus and Sirius, the proprietors of the wildly successful Honest Abe's Original Butterbeer, Fred and George Weasley!" Lee paused for a cheer to ring around the stadium. "Finally, we have Gryffindor's current Keeper, Ron Weasley. He holds the record for the least goals conceded in a match in the last ten years.

Finishing off the team is their friend and former Gryffindor teammate, Alicia Spinnet, who, while making public her dislike of the original purpose of this game, is now enjoying what should be a very special occasion.

"And here comes the Weasley team, dressed in Gryffindor colours. As Chasers, Bill, Percy, and Alicia. As Beaters, Fred and George, as Keeper, Ron, and as Seeker, the famous Charlie!" Seven red and gold streaks shot out of the starting gate, circling around the pitch to enthusiastic cheering.

Lee paused and looked down. "And I've just received an Mmail, hopefully containing the Potter team." He opened the Mmail and smirked. "Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to state that, while gambling may be irresponsible, any of you who have placed bets on the Potter team should really enjoy this match. I know I will be happily spending my winnings tonight.

"As Chasers, Severus Snape, Ginny Weasley, and..." he paused to watch the faces of the Weasleys who were lined up in front of him. "Harry James Potter," he finished, to gasps of surprise. "As Beaters, we have Remus Lupin and Sirius Black. As Keeper we have, from Puddlemere United, a close friend of Harry Potter and former team captain of Gryffindor, Oliver Wood!" There were screams of delight from the crowd, and nervous looks from the Weasleys. "And to finish off the team, another close friend of Harry's, on loan from the Vrastra Vultures, the World Cup Seeker, Viktor Krum!"

There was another roar from the crowd as the seven players flew out, wearing light grey uniforms, with a band of colour for each of Hogwarts houses on the side. Lavender and Parvati spent many an hour coming up with this natty looking outfit to help distinguish them from the Gryffindor Weasleys, and to show some school unity – a popular theme of Harry's. Viktor and Oliver had huge smiles on their faces as they waved back to the crowd. Ginny and Harry flew up to the Weasleys.

"Afternoon," Harry said pleasantly.

"Damn it, Harry," Ron sighed. "Wood *and* Krum? No wonder Hermione's been smirking at me all day."

"I don't like losing," Harry replied.

"But I only agreed to play to get a shot at you," Charlie complained.

Harry winked at him. "Sorry, Charlie, but you're the wrong Weasley."

Charlie shot him a foul look.

"Captains," Madame Hooch shouted.

Bill flew down, as did Ginny.

"Not Harry?" he asked.

She shook her head. "Not this time. He said I'd be better."

"You do know that the outcome doesn't matter anymore?"

"Of course. Well, apart from bragging rights."

Bill laughed. "Right, Munchkin. We're not going to go down without a fight."

"I wouldn't expect anything else," Ginny replied, as the Snitch was released.

"And the match begins," Lee's amplified voice rose over the noise of the crowd. "Let's hope for a prime example of good Quidditch play."

Remus spun his broom around, cushioning the Bludger that was flying toward him, gently pushing it toward Sirius, who smacked it merrily straight at Percy.

Percy evaded quickly, but lost sight of the Quaffle as it was thrown at him. Ginny flew past and grabbed it, chucking it toward Harry, who caught it and passed it to Snape, who executed a cork-screw roll before firing it at Ron. The Quaffle evaded his outstretched fingers, and it was ten points to Harry's team.

The three Chasers slapped hands as they retreated back to their positions. Above them, Charlie and Viktor were engaged in a thrilling duel, as Viktor tried to plough Charlie into the ground. The dragon-riding Weasley managed to pull up, and nudged Viktor so that he had to take evasive action to avoid Oliver. In the confusion, Bill passed to Alicia, who evened the score.

"Man," Sirius shouted, as he intercepted a Bludger aimed at Oliver, "this is fun!" He hovered around Oliver, in case it was fired back.

"You're damn right," Oliver agreed, as he blocked another attack and threw the Quaffle to Harry. "Potter's almost as good a Chaser as he is Seeker, and this is being played at around 90% professional speed, so it's a lot of fun to play in without having to push ourselves to the limit."

"And the result doesn't matter," Remus added as he teamed up with Sirius for a Dopplebeater Defence that flew straight toward the Weasley twins, causing them both to dodge out of the way.

Sirius darted to the left and smacked the other Bludger back at Percy.

For old guys, you two was a pretty good,” Oliver rumbled. “Potter, fake to the left!”

Harry did exactly that, although there was no way he could have heard Oliver across the pitch, and scored another ten points. He grinned at the crowd and blew a kiss to Ginny.

Ginny smiled, and then dived quickly as Charlie and Viktor started another wild chase, both barely hanging on to their brooms as they used the players as obstacles in their chase and swerved around them.

Harry shook his head enviously, before retreating to try to stop Percy. He managed it, but Percy managed to offload to Bill, who faked and then scored.

The roar of the crowd was a constant reminder that people were here to have fun. Throughout the crowds, students were doing a roaring trade selling Butterbeer for Fred and George. The children were on a generous commission, and sold as much as they could.

The girlfriends of the Weasley boys, as well as Juanita, were sitting together, cheering the match. Their cheering was pretty bilateral, as loyalty to their partners predisposed them to cheer for the Weasleys, while loyalty to Harry and Ginny made them cheer for the other team too.

Tonks was on duty, along with a large contingent of office workers, who were wondering just why they were being paid to watch Quidditch and wear Auror cloaks. The fact that the Auror cloaks had heating and cooling charms meant that no one really complained. The effect was the impression that the Aurors were there in force.

Lucius Malfoy sat near Cornelius Fudge, a sneer on his face. Next to him, Narcissa spent her time trying to find Draco in the crowd.

The students – those not employed by Fred and George, anyway – were sitting together, house rivalries completely forgotten as they cheered for Harry and Ginny – not so much because they disliked the Weasleys, but because a lot of them had been the victim of Fred and George in the past, and were quite willing to see a little revenge paid out.

Viktor flew away from Charlie and signalled to Ginny. Ginny called for a timeout, and all the players dropped to the ground.

“Harry,” Viktor said, “Charlie is a good flyer. If I am to beat him, I must play like a pro, but I have a match on Tuesday. We should swap.”

“You don’t mind playing Chaser for a bit?”

“I am a good Chaser,” Viktor replied. “Good Quidditch player, I like to beat Charlie, but I promised boss I would not go all out.”

“I appreciate this, Viktor.”

Krum waved the compliment aside. “Dis is best fun I’ve had in ages. Now, go catch the Snitch, let me fly with the pretty Chaser,” he finished with a wink.

“Viktor,” Snape smirked, “I never knew you cared!”

Viktor looked at him and then laughed. “I valked inter dat,” he admitted. “Now, let us beat the meddlink boys.”

The teams took to the skies again.

“It looks like there has been a change,” Lee’s voice rang out, “with Viktor changing to Chaser and Harry turning to Seeker.”

“Viktor thought you were too good,” Harry said, as he flew around above the match with Charlie. “He said he’d have to go all out, and as he’s doing this for free, he didn’t want to break his promise to his coach to be available for his next match.”

“That’s a hell of a compliment,” Charlie replied, “I was barely hanging on half the time. How did you get him to play?”

“I asked nicely. Now, are you ready to show me why I’m always being compared to you?”

“Catch me if you can,” Charlie retorted and flew straight down. Harry kicked his broom into top speed and followed him down, spiralling as he did. He smiled; flying like this seemed much easier than in the past. His avian form could fly even faster, and flying Gwyneth was so much faster it was unreal.

He overtook Charlie and casually pulled up at the last second, his feet brushing the turf, before he shot straight back up and rocketed into the sky. He leaned forward, into a parabolic arc that gave him a feeling of complete weightlessness, before he dived back down, as fast as before, and did an inverse swoop, so that his head brushed the grass, before he rotated and shot back up, coming to a lazy stop.

He looked around, to see everyone staring at him. “What?” he shouted.

“Shoot,” Oliver yelled, “We can marvel at the boy wonder’s flying later.”

Snape shook himself and did exactly that.

“Charlie?” Harry asked as the other man flew up to him.

“Where did you learn to do that?” Charlie demanded.

“Do what?”

“Pull off those moves! You were flying at your broom’s top speed and everyone thought you were going to kill yourself! An inverse swoop at top speed!? How did you not fall off?”

Harry shrugged. “It wasn’t that fast. I’ve flown much faster.”

“It was bloody fast, Harry. If you ever decide to go pro, you’re going to redefine the Seeker’s role! I don’t know how you hung on upside down, the gravity must have been immense! I’m going to have to fly with Crenth a lot so I can get used to that sort of speed before I try it.”

“Gwyneth was much faster,” Harry said, as he relaxed a little. “When you’ve flown at the speed of sound, these brooms seem pedestrian.”

“A Firebolt, pedestrian,” Charlie muttered. “Well, as much as I’d like to sit and chat, I have a Snitch to catch.” He turned his broom and raced off, heading toward the other posts.

Harry swore and took off after him at full speed; he slowly started to catch up as Charlie weaved through the players and under the stands, following the darting Snitch. Harry followed him without an ounce of fear, as they swerved up and down between wooden beams, before they both exploded out into the open again.

Charlie urged his broom forward, his eyes fixed on the Snitch. He flinched as Ginny flew in front of him, and then dodged to the right to avoid a pair of Bludgers that flew straight at him. That was the only chance Harry needed. He darted in and caught the Snitch inches before Charlie’s despairing grab.

Harry raised his hand in triumph, before pushing his broom down abruptly to avoid the hoops. He landed and was immediately embraced by an ecstatic Ginny. He hugged her back and carried her over to the others. “Great game, guys,” he yelled happily. “Without Ginny and those Bludgers, Charlie should have caught the Snitch!”

Remus and Sirius grinned at each other. “There’s a lesson for you, there, Harry,” Snape said. “You surround yourself with good players, and play for them, and they’ll return the favour and help you look good as well.”

“Severus,” Sirius said, “your Chasing skills are better than I remembered them.”

“Minerva gave me some help,” he admitted.

“Minerva?” Harry asked. “Hey, I just had an idea to spice up next year.”

“Oh?”

“Staff Quidditch team.”

Snape grinned. “I like that idea.”

“Oliver,” Harry said, as he hugged the Keeper, “damn good to play with you again.”

“You too, Harry,” Oliver replied, “and it was great to be on the same side as Viktor Krum!”

“Krum is worried,” Viktor sighed. “If you decide to play pro ... pfft!” he said with a dismissive hand gesture. “I can not fly like dat!”

Harry thumped Viktor on the back. “I’ll tell you what,” he said, “as soon as this mess with the Dark Tosser is over, I’ll show you how I did it.”

Krum’s face lit up. “Danke, Harry,” he replied happily.

“Come on, guys,” Ginny said, “let’s go over to my family.”

What followed was more hugging and laughter, as they discussed the match.

Harry looked around and spotted Lucius Malfoy heading toward them. He turned and walked over to Amelia.

She looked at him, and then over his shoulder, glancing past Malfoy to survey the markedly Death Eater-free Quidditch Pitch. “And where, exactly, is the Dark Lord, Mr Potter?” she demanded.

Harry looked down and shuffled his feet. “I knew he was going to attack,” he protested. “I can’t understand why he didn’t!”

“A feeling?” she asked icily. “While I’m sure that my Aurors have enjoyed a day off, I’m sure that the victims of crime today will not be. My Aurors are not your play toy.”

“Halloween,” Harry blurted. “He always attacks on Halloween.”

Amelia snorted. “We’ll talk about this tomorrow, young man,” she promised ominously, before pausing. “He’s gone,” she said quietly.

Harry grinned. “Was he listening?”

“Yes. Your messages will be back with Voldemort before you can blink.”

Did you enjoy the match?"

"Not as much as Kingsley did," she admitted. "He had some very good odds on you winning, and that was some nice flying."

"Thanks. Hopefully you'll see why we did this when Voldemort attacks on Thursday," he said, after putting up a silencing charm around them.

"Thursday?"

"He's going to attack with all his forces, here, probably in the morning. I should know his full forces by Wednesday at the latest, and I've got plans to deal with them."

"The Aurors will be ready," she promised.

Harry looked at her. "Would many of them have any objections to using the Unforgivables, if I get the Wizengamot to allow it?"

"The ones who would won't be there."

Harry smiled. "I'll need your help on Monday. You're going to help Percy get rid of Fudge."

"Because of what happened at Azkaban?"

"Among other things."

"Who are you getting to replace him, Umbridge?"

Harry snorted. "Let's talk about that," he said, wrapping an arm around her.

From: Lucius

To: My Lord

Subject: Plan

My Lord,

After today's match, I successfully eavesdropped on Potter and Bones. Bones was extremely angry with Potter for wasting her time and resources. Potter told her that you would attack at Halloween, and she did not believe him.

Your servant,

Lucius

From: The Dark Lord

To: Lucius

Subject: Re: Plan

Excellent news, Lucius.

The werewolves joined us yesterday.

This time next week, Potter and Dumbledore will be dead, and I will rule supreme.

L.V.

From: Roland Randolson

To: Harry Potter

Subject: Quidditch

Mr Potter,

I am the scout for the Chudley Cannons, and we'd like to offer you a contract when you leave school.

Your ability as a Seeker is amazing, and the fact that you can pinch-hit as Chaser as well makes you even more valuable.

Sincerely,

From: Joyce Jackson

To: Harry Potter

Subject: Falmouth Falcons

Mr Potter,

Having watched your impressive display today, I would like to offer you a position with the Falcons. Your ability with a broom is unsurpassed.

Please reply at your convenience, and we shall discuss the matter further.

Joyce

Ginny smiled happily as she looked around the Great Hall. The match had turned into a huge party afterward, and she adored these moments with her family.

Charlie and Harry were huddled in a corner with Viktor, talking about Seeking. Bill, Ron and Oliver were sitting together as well. Snape, Sirius, Remus, Fred and George were in another group, while Percy had bowed out early to spend an evening with Penelope. Her mother and father were with the professors, talking cheerfully.

She drifted from group to group, just enjoying the last quiet evening they were going to have, before Thursday and everything that was going to happen. Harry had plans in place for the rest of the week, and she wasn't looking forward to it. He was going to push them, hard, but only because he wanted them to be alive at the end of the day.

"Hey," she said as she sat down with Dean and his family.

"Quidditch is amazing," Dudley stated. "Basketball on brooms, and I honestly thought that Harry was going to kill himself."

"I think we all did," Ginny replied. "That sort of thing isn't normal."

"We kinda figured that," Graeme said, "seeing as you all stopped to watch."

Ginny laughed, "Not exactly professional behaviour, I'll grant you, but you don't normally see that sort of thing pulled off that easily."

"It was surprising to see Harry enjoying himself like that."

"He always feels free when he's flying," Dean said. "We've always seen it. Up there, he's got no pressure to keep all of us alive; he's just a kid having fun."

"And hopefully," Ginny added softly, "he can have a bit more of that when all of this is over and done with."

"You were pretty damn good as well," Dudley added. "The way you crossed in front of your brother was brilliant."

Ginny blushed. "It was luck actually," she confessed, "I just happened to see the Snitch and where they were going."

"Teamwork is like that," Graeme agreed.

Harry groaned and cracked open an eyelid. "Blaise," he asked. "Why are you sitting on the ceiling?"

"Talking hurts," Blaise muttered, barely audible.

Harry felt that groaning was an appropriate response, so he did so again. He reached down, to find that down was up, and that Ginny was attached firmly to his chest.

She looked up, or down, at him. "Hey," she rasped. "What happened?"

Harry surveyed the scene in front of him. There were various girls strewn around the room, with Ron and Hermione cuddled in a corner. "I think we celebrated," Harry muttered.

"Oh, yeah," Ginny agreed. "We got a bottle or two of Firewhisky, didn't we?"

"Will you two please SHUT UP!" Blaise demanded.

"*Accio* hangover cure," Harry mumbled, before collapsing back down as the magic left him exhausted.

A minute later, a bottle flew in through the window. He opened it and looked at it with a sigh.

Everyone,” he called.

“Potter, will you please shut up!” Susan demanded.

“I have a bottle of hangover cure.”

“I love you.” Susan’s tone changed completely.

Harry waved his hand, and the sound of running water emanated from the bathroom. “This stuff has a hell of a kick,” he pointed out. “Take a large gulp, and you’ll know what to do from there.” He passed it to Ginny, who did as she was told, before she started to turn green, and flew toward the bathroom.

He took his own drink and passed it to Susan. A second later, the steam came out of his ears, and he dived toward the bathroom, and jumped straight into the large bath. He sighed in relief, and then shifted as first Blaise, then Padma, Lavender, Parvati, and Luna joined them.

“H-h-harry,” Ginny whispered, her teeth chattering. “Heat the water.”

Harry did so, and exhaled in relief as the cold left his body. “Next time,” he said softly, “we plan ahead.”

“Next time?” Susan asked. “You’d want to do this again?”

“Didn’t you know?” Harry asked. “Gryffindors are fiendishly brave. And we did have a good party, didn’t we?”

“From what I can remember,” Lavender said, “It was brilliant. We had no one to impress, just a bunch of friends having a laugh, a drink, and a good time.”

“No teachers, no curfew,” Parvati continued and sighed happily. “And any party that ends up with eight people in a hot tub, partially dressed, is a good one.”

Ginny laughed. “Which is probably why Harry’s not opened his eyes since he jumped in.”

Harry shook his head. “I think I drank slightly more than you guys,” he explained, “my eyesight is still a little sensitive. The light in here is a little too bright; otherwise I’d be leering to my heart’s content. As it is, you can rest assured that while I’m thinking about Ginny naked, most of you are in there somewhere, too.”

There was a second of silence, before Blaise started to laugh, a laugh that was quickly taken up by the others. “So, when are we going to awaken sleeping beauties, and what’s the plan for today, Harry?”

“I’m going to Beauxbatons with Fleur, and then I’m going to talk to the Professors. Today is the last day I need you guys to do research. Tomorrow, we’ll be putting the spells into practice.”

“So,” Blaise said cheerfully, “that just leaves one question. How do we all get out of here?”

Harry laughed. “I’ll go first and then you girls can take your time.”

“Ginny,” Susan said in a stage whisper, “we’re all going to watch your boyfriend.”

“As long as watching is all it is, I don’t mind,” Ginny whispered back, “I’ll be doing it as well.”

Harry grinned and made to splash the girls. They all flinched, and by the time they realised he wasn’t going to splash them, he was padding out the door in his wolf form.

“Damn you, Harry Potter,” Ginny yelled, semi-irately. “You’re no fun at all!”

From: Harry Potter

To: Andromeda Tonks

Subject: Narcissa

Mrs Tonks,

I got your Mmail address from Tonks, and wondered if you’d mind giving me some insight into your sister. I’ve spent some time with her recently, and, well, she’s not what I expected.

She has the pureblood arrogance and supercilious nature that I expect, but she also seems to be able to think for herself – at times – and seems very competitive.

But if that’s the case, why does she seem so supportive of a half-blood tosser like Voldemort?

Harry

From: Call me Andy

To: Harry

Subject: Re: Narcissa

Harry,

I expected your Mmail; Nymphadora mentioned that you'd be writing.

As you will have guessed, I am no longer in contact with Narcissa. I haven't been since I was disowned for marrying Ted. Before that, we were never that close.

Of the three of us, Bellatrix was the most radical and I was the least. Although, from their perspective, I would suppose that I was the radical. Bellatrix bought into the family doctrine, while Narcissa bought into the family.

Family is everything to Narcissa, or I should say, the Black family is everything. Yes, she is now a Malfoy, but I'll be she still thinks of herself as a 'Black-Malfoy'.

Narcissa was and is very much in love with Lucius, but was not completely on board with his anti-Muggle, anti-Mudblood behaviour. She thinks that she is better than them, but cannot see the point in expending so much energy against them.

Narcissa was always Father's favourite, and I think that was very important to her. From what I've heard from Nymphadora, rumour has it that Narcissa is no longer close to Lucius, as he has made it clear that Voldemort is more important than she is – and I mean that in an attention-giving way. If there is one thing that Narcissa will not stand for, it is being ignored. And if she feels slighted, she will pay that slight back on Lucius a thousand times over.

Narcissa and Bellatrix were very close growing up, and I am sure that there is genuine love between them as sisters, and I can guarantee that they will not betray each other. I could not give that guarantee about anyone else.

For the past fifteen years, Narcissa has worked tirelessly to ensure that the Black and Malfoy names are the most prominent in society, and I suspect that she only worked on the Black name as a precaution, just in case anything negative ever happened to the Malfoy name

Narcissa is a very proud woman, but don't underestimate her. If she felt that it would benefit the Black name, she would take lessons from the house-elves.

I'm sorry I can't be of any more help, but as I've not talked to her in many years, I only have my judgement and memories to go on.

Andy Tonks

From: Harry

To: Andy

Subject: Re[2]: Narcissa

Andy, thanks a lot – that does actually give me some clue to her motivation. There is an old saying: The enemy of my enemy is my friend.

Harry

“Ready?” Harry asked the elegant blonde witch next to him.

“I am,” Fleur replied.

Harry bowed and took her hand, “Then let us away!” He Apparated them both straight to the entrance to Beauxbatons, in the south of France.

The school before him was staggeringly beautiful, almost regal in its charm. While Hogwarts was awe-inspiring in size, and engaging in tone, this was the complete opposite, almost the definition of French sophistication.

The huge building had a large lake to the right, with a fountain streaming water high in to the air in the centre. The lake formed part of a moat that was bridged by a sweeping white staircase. Each corner had a large tower, with a circular turret at the top. The castle itself gleamed in the morning sun, the white walls reflecting the bright sunlight, while the slate grey roof added depth and gave a magical touch to the whole experience.

“Magnificent,” Harry whispered.

“It was built during the Renaissance,” Fleur said quietly, “we have a team of people dedicated to keeping it in top condition.”

“I think I'm in love,” Harry admitted.

“Beauxbatons has that effect on people. But Hogwarts is amazing as well.”

“Oh, I know,” Harry agreed. “I guess I just like the elegant simplicity. Hogwarts is, and always will be, my home.”

“Come on,” Fleur said, “Madame Maxime is waiting.”

Harry walked with Fleur into the school, looking around eagerly and committing everything to memory. “I wonder if I can talk Albus into a student exchange next year.”

“You’d have to learn French.”

“I’ve always wanted to do that anyway.” He paused, as he noticed students staring at him. “Am I so out of place?” he asked in a whisper.

Fleur laughed under her breath. “You *are* the great Harry Potter,” she reminded him gently. “You are as much a hero here as you are in England. Why, even our press covered yesterday’s Quidditch match. They had a full page spread dedicated to that little move you pulled off.”

Harry groaned.

Fleur laughed again and banged on the door.

“Come,” a deep voice ordered.

Fleur opened the door and ushered Harry in, shutting the door behind him.

The office had pale blue walls, and unlike Albus’ office, did not have portraits of previous Headmasters on them. Her desk was huge, but fitted the half-giantess perfectly.

“Madame Maxime,” he said with a bow. “You are looking as lovely as always.”

“Why thank you, Harry,” she said. “You’ve grown up as well.”

“I’ve been trying.”

“Take a seat.” Harry sat. “So, what can I do for you, Mr Potter?”

“Offer sanctuary,” Harry replied instantly.

“Oh?”

Harry looked at her for a long moment; he’d made the decision to trust her completely after talking to Albus. “Voldemort is going to be attacking Hogwarts on Thursday.”

Madam Maxime jerked forward. “It will be a tight squeeze,” she said, “but we’ll fit everyone in, and we’ll reinforce the wards.”

Harry smiled at her. “I thank you,” he said, “but it won’t be that many of us.”

“It won’t?”

“Most of the school is ready to fight him. Voldemort is walking into a trap. But there are students who are not ready to fight, or do not want to. It is for them that I ask sanctuary, Madame Maxime.”

“Please, call me Olympe,” she said absently. “You are luring the Dark Lord into a trap?”

Harry nodded. “As I believe Albus told you, I’m the only one that can kill him, and I intend on doing that sooner rather than later. I’ve got more important things to worry about than some pretentious tosspot with delusions of adequacy.”

Olympe threw her head back and roared with laughter. “My school is yours,” she promised. “Would you mind a bit of an exchange?”

“What do you mean?” he asked.

“Beauxbatons is not defenceless. We have many skilled witches and wizards here, some of whom have grudges against the Death Eaters that they would love to avenge. We have been touched by the Dark Lord’s…”

“Tosser,” Harry interrupted. “If you can’t call him Voldemort, call him the Dark Tosser.”

Olympe nodded. “Touched by the Dark Tosser’s evil as well,” she finished.

“If they can take orders,” Harry said slowly, “I’d welcome any help we can get. The more numbers we have, the better.”

“Albus has told me a lot,” she confessed, “and I am grateful that you honour me by asking me in person.”

“It is a large favour that I ask,” Harry replied. “If I fail, Beauxbatons becomes his next target.”

“If you fail, Harry,” Olympe said softly, “that will be the least of our worries.” She paused for a second. “Have you eaten?”

“Lunch? No.”

“Then you shall have dinner with us. I’m sure my children will love seeing a hero in person.”

Harry groaned.

Olympe got to her feet and laughed. “Don’t worry, they’ll be gentle.”

“The things I do,” Harry grumbled. He offered his arm to the Headmistress. “Shall we?”

“We shall,” Olympe said, as they walked through the school. “Do you like my school?”

“I think I’ve fallen in love,” Harry admitted. “Would you be open to a student exchange next year?”

“If it involved at least one assistant professor, I could be persuaded.”

Harry laughed. “It will. I can think of seven girls who would love to spend a term here.”

“And I can think of numerous children who would give their eye teeth to look into Hogwarts library.”

They entered through a side door, unseen from the other students. Harry looked around and smiled as he spotted a familiar face. “Is that Gabrielle Delacour?” he asked.

Olympe smiled and nodded. “Yes, she started this year.”

“I thought she was younger than that,” he admitted. “How’s she settling in?”

“It has been a little difficult for her. Her Veela powers are difficult for her to control at times. The girls do not like her, and the boys are too busy making idiots of themselves.”

“Do you mind if I...?” he trailed off, not sure what he was asking.

“Go ahead, she speaks excellent English.”

Harry walked into the Hall, ignoring the gasps as he headed toward the small blonde girl. She was reading a book; silver glasses perched on the end of her nose.

“Hey, remember me?” he asked.

Gabrielle looked up and did a classic double-take. “Harry,” she screamed as she jumped up, her glasses vanishing from her face, and she hugged him tightly.

Harry smiled and hugged her back. “You do, then.”

Gabrielle pulled back and shot a huge smile at him. “I will remember you forever,” she said fervently. “You saved me.”

“I’m here for lunch,” Harry said, avoiding the compliment. “Are you going to keep me company?”

“Of course,” she replied happily.

“What are you reading?” he asked as he sat next to her.

She held up the book so he could see the title. *Histoire de la folie à l’âge classique - Folie et déraison*. “*Madness and Civilization: A History of Madness in the Age of Reason*,” Gabrielle translated for him. She winked her nose cutely, “I’m trying to understand why I am who I am, and why people are affected as they are. I’m not getting very far with it,” she confessed. “But I’ll get it!”

Harry whistled under his breath. “I’m impressed,” he admitted. “It’s not what I expected.”

“I’m rarely what people expect,” Gabrielle replied without rancour.

“Touché,” Harry smirked. “A feeling I know well. I’ve just never had the idea to study why people react to me the way they do.”

“Oh, that’s simple. Individually, your features are not classically handsome, however you have a purity about you that is intoxicating, a power that is immeasurable, and an aura of goodness that shouts that you will do what you believe is right, regardless of the cost to yourself.”

Harry blinked at her.

She laughed happily. “The fact that you are modest as well helps.”

“How are you enjoying school?” he asked, in an effort to change the subject.

“The lessons are fun, the people...” she trailed off and gave him a sad look.

“The people don’t choose to look beneath the surface, and anyone who does not fit in is to be pushed aside, correct?”

She nodded.

“They are only children,” Harry explained, “like you. You, however, are different, through no fault of your own, and that is all the matters to them.” He reached out and raised her chin as she looked down. “Some people will accept you for who you are, Gabrielle Delacour, and some people won’t. The ones that will are the ones that will be your friends for eternity. But you, you have to do the hardest thing.”

“What’s that?” she asked, as she looked into his eyes.

“Be yourself and don’t compromise. One of my best friends is a werewolf. He went to school with my father and my godfather. He is the bravest man I have ever met. He has stood up to injustice, to prejudice and persecution. And he is still the most honourable man I know. He is the sort of person that I aim to become.

“But I am determined, Gabrielle, that I’ll do what ever I can to stop it. I’ll stop the prejudice and persecution that comes from being different. It sickens me deep inside, that wonderful people are outcasts through no fault of their own. People smirking and looking down on others because of blood, because of race, because of species, is bigotry, pure and simple. All intelligent species are equal, and I won’t rest until that notion is enshrined in the core of human belief.”

Gabrielle took a deep breath. “I promise,” she said clearly.

Harry grinned at her and let her face go. “Sorry,” he apologised. “I get on my high-horse a bit.”

“No, Harry, I needed to hear that more than you can ever know. The loneliness of being unique leads to self-doubt. I know you understand what it’s like, and now I know that I’m not alone, that there are others like me.”

Harry smiled and summoned a book from Hogwarts library. He gave it to her.

“*Occlumency and Legilimency - The Art of Mind Control*,” she read.

“Read it, and then Mmail me. Don’t try it out on your own, though.”

“I won’t,” she promised, and wrote down his Mmail address as he whispered it to her.

“What do you do for fun around here?” he asked.

“Fly,” she replied happily. “Veela *are* birds, after all.”

Harry grinned at her. “Then we’ll fly together.”

“Really?” she gasped. “Can you show me how to fly like you did yesterday?”

“Of course. Now where’s the food? I’m hungry enough to hunt down a horse.”

From: Fleur

To: Ginny

Subject: Harry

I believe that your boyfriend has just made my sister’s life. She was experiencing the same things that I did at school, only I did not have a big brother like Harry come from Hogwarts and make it all better.

Olympe cast a charm so that the whole school could hear Harry as he promised to Gabrielle that he would end the prejudice that she has suffered as a Veela. He shamed many people, and then he took her flying for the afternoon. I’ve not seen Gabrielle this happy for years. She has adopted him as her brother and I think he has adopted her as well.

When he talks, he talks with such passion and belief that it is hypnotic to watch.

Love him, Ginny, because every man needs one person he can rely on above all else.

Fleur

From: Ginny

To: Fleur

Subject: I do

With everything that I am for the rest of our lives. This I swear, Fleur.

Ginny

--

From: Severus

To: Harry

Subject: Potions

Damn it, Harry, if you're going to steal some anti-hangover potions, can you NOT destroy half my room in the process?

S.

--

Working for the downfall of the Dark Tosser for fifteen years

From: Harry

To: Sev

Subject: Whoops

Sev, I'm sorry about that. I'll drop by this evening and fix things.

H.

--

Audaces fortuna juvat

It was raining on Monday morning, when Harry woke. It was going to be a miserable day, but it didn't change Harry's good mood. He wasn't going to let a bit of rain have that effect on him.

He felt like he was going to explode as he walked down to breakfast.

"Harry?" Hermione asked, "you're putting out a load of power. What's going on?"

"Percy is going to deal with Fudge today," he explained with a small smile. "I'm looking forward to it."

"Why?"

Harry grinned at her and touched the side of his nose. "You'll see."

"You're incorrigible," she sighed as she shook her head. "Is this part of your master plan?"

He nodded, and didn't mention that his master plan was only a vague outline that he was fleshing out as he went.

Ginny wandered into the school and sleepily sat beside him.

"You're really not a morning person, are you?"

"No," she mumbled and rested against his arm.

"What are you doing today, Harry?" Ron asked.

"Potions first thing, and then Transfiguration."

"And this afternoon?"

"That depends on what happens this morning."

"But..."

"Give it up, Hermione," Ginny said with a large yawn. "I'm too tired to referee the pair of you."

Hermione pouted. "But it's fun!"

From: Harry

To: Narcissa

Subject: Send the next Mmail to Voldemomkey: EOM

From: Harry

To: The lovely Narcissa

Subject: Spies and counter moves

My beautiful Narcissa, it's been too long since I've seen you properly. It was horrible seeing you attached to that git at the match. I could tell how unhappy you were.

I think we have another spy at Hogwarts. I was so sure that Voldemort would attack on Saturday and now Amelia doesn't trust me. Luckily Albus is planning on getting rid of Fudge today. He only mentioned it this morning, but it cheered me right up.

I can't wait to see you this afternoon for our 'lesson'.

Harry

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

From: The lady who infiltrated Hogwarts

To: Lord Voldemort

Attachment: mml.mml

Subject: The naive brat's latest missive

My Lord, I believe this is important.

Narcissa

From: The Eternal Dark Lord

To: Lucius

Subject: Wizengamot

That meddling old fool is going to interfere with the Wizengamot today. Talk to Parkinson; tell him to make sure that the people who support us ensure that Fudge's toad takes control. She is easy to manipulate, and beyond suspicion as she is not an actual supporter of mine.

We will corrupt her as soon as she has power.

L.V.

--
Victory or Death

From: Lord Voldemort

To: Narcissa

Subject: Your 'dance' lesson

Tell Potter that I do have another spy at Hogwarts, that one of the students is helping me. It will sow some uncertainty in the boy.

L.V.

--
Victory or Death

"I do wish Harry would tell me who I'll be working for," Percy grumbled.

"Trust him," Kingsley Shacklebolt advised.

Percy snorted elegantly. "For all I know, he's planning on resurrecting Merlin!"

“Now there’s an idea,” Amelia mumbled.

“Give up, Percy,” Tonks told him. “You’re not going to get it out of us early.”

“I know, I know. Is everyone ready?”

“We are,” Kingsley said.

“Indeed,” Amelia agreed with a small, slightly evil, smile. “I’m going to enjoy this on far too many levels.”

Kingsley sniggered.

“Just remember,” Amelia said to Percy. “Be as arrogant as you can and shout down anyone who tries to quiet you. Remember that the Aurors have your back, and if anything goes wrong, Harry is only an Mmail away.”

There was a noise from the hallway, and as Percy looked up, he saw the Animagus form of Sirius Black bounding up.

“What are you doing here?”

Sirius transformed. “I heard you were getting rid of Fudge,” he explained. “There was no way on earth that I could miss this – so I begged Harry nicely, and he said I could watch.”

“And?” Percy asked suspiciously.

Sirius sighed. “If I was Kingsley’s guard dog,” he muttered.

Kingsley smirked as Sirius pulled a lead and a bag out of his pocket and handed it to the Auror.

“What’s this?” Kingsley asked.

Sirius blushed. “Dog biscuits.”

Percy shook his head in disbelief but said nothing. After Kingsley had Sirius on his lead, he looked at the doors to the Wizengamot, before nodding to the two ceremonial Aurors each side.

They smirked at him, before throwing the doors open. Percy marched in, his best sneer in place.

“What is the meaning of this!?” Dolores Umbridge shouted. “The Wizengamot is in session.”

“Quiet,” Percy ordered as he walked into the middle of the circular room. As was usual, the Wizengamot was three-quarters empty, as most people had better things to do than listen to Fudge and his crony..

“Cornelius Oswald Fudge, you are hereby charged with aiding and abetting a known fugitive, and for accepting money in direct contravention of the Wizengamot rules.”

“What are you talking about?” Fudge blustered. “You can’t arrest me - I’m the Minister for Magic. Guards, remove this man. I’m innocent.”

The guards moved forward toward Percy. Amelia stepped next to him and glared at the guards. The guards quickly resumed their position.

“Would you care to explain just why you received a large donation to your personal bank account on the same day that Sirius Black was freed?” Percy asked, placing a piece of paper on the display table. The wall behind the table lit up with Fudge’s bank details.

“One of my investments paid out,” Fudge said.

“Tell me, what happened to Peter Pettigrew?” Percy asked.

“He was Kissed, as was ordered by the court.”

Percy nodded to Kingsley. “*Accio* Pettigrew,” Kingsley said, causing the rat-like man to fly in and crash against a wall. Peter screamed in agony, and then started to swear vociferously at Kingsley. Kingsley sighed and stunned him, and he slumped to the floor, unconscious.

“Kissed?” Percy asked. “Why, the Dementors seem to have lost their touch. Amelia, would you be as kind as to invite our next guest in?”

Amelia nodded and barked out an order. A few seconds later, the form of Claudia Striven was pulled into the room, in chains.

“I think,” Percy said slowly, “that we will now take a fifteen minute recess so that the full Wizengamot can be summoned. The Weasley-Shacklebolt report has been finalised, and I’m sure you’re going to find everything very, very interesting.”

“Not you, Fudge,” Amelia barked as Fudge and his toad tried to leave. “You stay exactly where you are.”

Percy stood in the front of the chamber, in his best robes. His hands were behind his back as he stared up at the lawmakers as they assembled, the very picture of a calm and collected career politician.

"Silence," Percy ordered when he was bored of waiting. The last wizard to arrive was Albus Dumbledore.

"As you have seen or heard, this special meeting of the Wizengamot is to deal with the current Minister for Magic, and the fact that he has been working for Voldemort for the past decade."

There were scattered screams of terror from the Wizengamot at the mention of the Dark Lord's pseudonym.

"Such courage from our leaders is truly inspiring," Percy sneered. "I was at Hogwarts last night and some of the eleven-year-olds there show more courage when faced with the fact of a stupid, made-up name like 'Voldemort'."

"Stop saying that!" an elderly member shouted.

"No, I will not! Voldemort is a ridiculous name of a terrorist who we should be dealing with, not cowering from. However, I invite anyone who doesn't like the name Voldemort to leave now."

"Of course," Amelia added, "doing so during an extra-ordinary meeting of the Wizengamot will relieve you of your obligations to serve. Permanently."

"So, is anyone going to leave because I keep saying 'Voldemort'?" Percy asked hopefully.

There was a lot of protest, but no one actually left.

"How wonderful," Percy mumbled sarcastically. "To get back to the point – because I have better things to do than spend all day in front of a bunch of cowards who are scared of a name."

"The Shacklebolt-Weasley report will be made available to all members when I finish, but first, we need to deal with our Minister."

"I must protest," Fudge said, his bowler hat in his hands.

"Will you be quiet, you disgusting traitor!" Percy demanded. "Thanks to some excellent intelligence, we were able to obtain Cornelius Fudge's bank report. It is displayed to your left. As you can see by the way I've nicely highlighted it for you, there was a large deposit made on the same day that Sirius Black was freed. On the same day, Peter Pettigrew was ordered to be Kissed. And as you can also see, Pettigrew is alive, well, and still working for the Dark Tosser."

"I must insist that you stop this immediately," an elderly member shouted.

"Why?" Percy asked. "Speak your objection and get it out of the way, so that I can get on with the business of imprisoning the traitor clutching his bowler hat like a child with his security blanket."

"Do you have no regard for our safety?"

"Yes," Percy snarled. "More than you do, apparently. I'm doing something about it. Any organisation that relies on a minor to solve its problems has lost all moral rights to safety. Sit down, shut up, and do what you are told." He paused for a second. "Amelia, I'm going to want every single member of the Wizengamot scanned for the Dark Mark before we continue."

"You can't do this!" More of the members shouted this time.

"I control the Aurors," Percy stated. "And more, I work directly for Harry Potter. I can do exactly as I please, because I have real power backing me up. We'll start with Professor Dumbledore."

Dumbledore beamed happily and bounced down to Amelia and Tonks. He held out his arm eagerly.

"Thank you, Chief Warlock," Percy said respectfully. "And as the Chief Warlock has been validated, I'm sure none of you lesser gentlemen have any objections, do you?"

It was patently obvious, though, that most of them did have some very strong objections.

"I might add," Percy continued idly, "that these entire proceedings are being recorded for broadcast later. So, Trevor Parkinson, I believe you're next?"

"But..." the father of Pansy Parkinson started.

"Nymphadora," Percy said, taking his life into his own hands. "You will Stun the next person who refuses to move."

"Okay, Percy," Tonks said, an eagerness in her voice matching the bright smile on her face.

Parkinson didn't move, until Sirius padded forward and growled threateningly. "Easy boy," Kingsley said, "You only get to eat him if he runs."

Sirius turned and whined, before he gave an expressive woof. He turned, and lunged at the stationary Parkinson.

"Bad doggy," Kingsley yelled, yanking on the chain.

Sirius barked in response.

Kingsley reached into his pocket and looked at the label. "I've got Scooby Snacks!"

Sirius froze. He turned and looked at Kingsley hopefully. Kingsley threw a few in to the air – Sirius caught them before they hit the ground.

"I suggest you start moving before he finishes," Kingsley advised. "He can finish a sandwich the size of your head in seconds!"

With a gulp of fear, Parkinson held out his hand. There was a flash of light, and before Parkinson could react, Kingsley had moved, grabbed his arm, and thrown him to the ground with a thump. Sirius immediately pounced on him as Kingsley had dropped his lead, and now sat down firmly on the Death Eater, jaws parted with a fierce-looking smile as he looked down at the fear-paralyzed man.

"Trevor Parkinson, you are hereby under arrest for wilfully aiding and abetting a known terrorist, and for membership of an illegal organization. You will be tried, under Veritaserum, and you will be punished for your crimes."

"Veritaserum?" another member, Richard Parakletos, gasped.

"Indeed," Percy sneered. "Why, the Minister for Magic signed the bill authorising it just last week."

"No, I didn't," Fudge protested, an outraged look on his face.

Percy smirked. "I tacked an addendum to the House Elf Subjugation Rules. Surely you read it before you signed it?"

Fudge's face slowly turned red.

"You didn't?" Percy asked with a fake sound of shock in his voice. "Why, that was *quite* careless of you. And as I'm sure you are all aware, there are anti-Portkey, anti-Mmail and anti-Apparition wards in place around this room. No one is getting out of here before we've finished."

Percy stood by and watched as all the hundred and eleven members who had answered the summons were tested. Thirty-five were immediately escorted out of the room and placed in holding cells.

"Now that the unwelcome element has been removed for our midst," he said, getting back to business, "it's time to examine the facts. For my first witness, I call Claudia Striven, the erstwhile head of the Azkaban penal colony."

With great reluctance, she walked up to the witness block.

"I'm not going to bother swearing you in," Percy told her. "You've already proven that your word is worth exactly two hundred and fifty galleons a shot. The Veritaserum, if you please, Amelia."

Amelia walked over and locked the prisoner in a full body bind, before administering three drops of the truth serum.

"It's been a hard day for you, hasn't it, Claudia?" she asked, as she removed the bind.

She nodded sleepily. "Very long," she agreed.

"So, how long have you been working for Voldemort?"

"Oh, I don't work for him," Claudia said quietly. "I work for Cornelius Fudge. He pays me two hundred and fifty galleons for every prisoner that I help escape the Kiss."

"That's a lot of money."

"It is," she agreed. "Much more than the Ministry pays me for my services. Of course, it was only Death Eaters that were ever freed. No one else."

"And you kept the records perfect so that no one would ever look, right?"

"Oh yes," she agreed, her face still strangely blank. "I followed all the ridiculous rules and no one suspected a thing, until your last inspection. I would have gotten away with it too, if it hadn't been for you pesky kids."

Sirius made a bark that sounded suspiciously like a laugh as Kingsley absently fed him another Scooby snack.

"I think we've heard enough, unless there's anything else you want to tell us?"

"Fudge owns a mansion in the Lake District that no one knows about," she said. "I was planning on blackmailing him if he ever tried to stop paying me."

"Thank you," Percy said. "I believe that you've been more than helpful."

Claudia started to sway, then she shook herself hard and stared at Percy. "I hate you," she whispered.

"Just remember that when you are executed by firing squad," Percy told her, a hard look in his eyes.

Claudia went completely white.

"Get her out of here." He paused while the terrified witch was bundled out of the meeting hall. He hid a nervous sigh to himself. He was breaking practically every rule and several laws with his cavalier treatment of the prisoners, but he was having an incredible amount of fun doing so.

“So, from the pony’s mouth, we have a direct implication of Fudge buying freedom for Death Eaters, and at the same time we have corresponding donations into Fudge’s bank account. I think it’s time for another witness. Put Pettigrew on the stand.”

Kingsley kicked the prisoner until he moved into position. The small rat-like man cowered as he stared out at the Wizengamot.

“Peter Pettigrew, you have already been sentenced to death by a fully accredited court of the Ministry of Magic, operating under the original charter as set by our founding members, back in 406. If I detect any falsehood from you, or if you refuse to answer any of the questions, the sentence will be carried out immediately, where you stand.”

Kingsley moved directly in front of Pettigrew and pointed his wand at the shaking man.

“If you answer every question truthfully and to the utmost degree of your knowledge, I will allow you to live until you die a natural death, in protective custody.” Percy didn’t mention that the protective custody would be the deepest, dankest prison cell they could find. “Why don’t you state, for the Wizengamot, exactly what happened on the day of your capture?”

Pettigrew looked down and didn’t say anything.

Sirius bounded forward and placed his front paws on the balustrade in front of Pettigrew and snarled.

Pettigrew went completely white. “Keep him away from me! I’ll tell you everything, I promise!”

“Kingsley,” Percy said.

“Here, boy,” Kingsley called.

Sirius dropped down and padded over to Kingsley, sitting next to him obediently. Kingsley scratched him on the head and handed him another Scooby snack.

“W-w-well,” Peter stuttered. “I received an email from Lord Voldemort,” – there was less of a fuss this time – “from Harry Potter. I believed that Potter was going to join, what I didn’t know was that the attachment was a Portkey that took me straight to court. After I was tried and sentenced to the Kiss, I wasn’t worried. I knew my Lord would protect me, and he would send Lucius Malfoy to pay off Fudge, as he has done every time we needed an important Death Eater in the past. It would have been a lot worse for me if I had just been sentenced to jail, as it takes a lot of time to release a prisoner. Someone who is going to get Kissed can be released instantly.

“I spent around fifteen minutes in Claudia’s office, before I was Portkeyed away, and a Muggle was used to take my place in the Kissing ceremony.”

Percy felt his insides freeze. “You had a Muggle Kissed?”

Wormtail nodded so fast it looked like his head might topple off. “Fudge’s plan – the only problem is, unlike a wizard, a Muggle can’t survive the Kiss, so the body has to be removed instantly. As far as the guards are concerned, another prisoner has had their soul sucked.”

Percy looked up at the Minister. “I believe that makes you a murderer, as well as a traitor,” he hissed.

“Objection,” Dolores shouted.

“Don’t be an idiot,” Percy hissed. “There is no one to object to. With Fudge being accused of practically every crime known to man, the only person you could object to is the Chief Warlock.”

“Don’t look at me,” Albus said. “I’m finding myself thoroughly disgusted in Cornelius, and quite convinced so far.”

Percy turned to Pettigrew again. “Exactly what did you do after you were freed?”

“Lord Voldemort ordered me to keep it a secret that I was alive, and that I was able to infiltrate Hogwarts and spy on Harry Potter’s plans. It was going well, until you found out and told Harry.”

“Indeed,” Percy said quietly. “For the second time, Mr Potter has fixed the mistakes made by the Ministry and captured someone we had believed dead without checking. This is something we are going to have to deal with in the future. For far too long, we have taken a hands-off approach to running this country.

“That has led us to be in the state we are in today. We have an illegal terrorist organisation camped on our desktop, and traitors and murderers among our legislative body.” He paused and looked at Cornelius. “So, do you have anything to say for yourself?”

“You can’t do this to me – I’m the Minister for Magic!”

Albus stood, his power radiating enough to attract the attention of everyone in the room. “That, Cornelius, is something we shall rectify immediately. I hereby place the motion to the floor that the current Minister for Magic be removed from office, effective immediately.”

“Seconded,” Amelia said instantly.

“You will now vote, Gentlemen,” Percy said formally, happier to be back on a somewhat less dubious legal footing. “As always, you will place your wands on the mark in front of you. A ‘Yes’ signifies that you agree, a ‘No’ signifies that you disagree. Please vote now.”

It didn’t take long for an overwhelming ‘Yes’ vote to be recorded.

“Kingsley, please take Mr Pettigrew into protective custody. Nymphadora, please escort the former Minister into the dock.”

Tonks scowled as she ordered Fudge into place at wand point. Dolores was now studiously edging away from Fudge.

“Amelia,” Percy said, “the Veritaserum, please.”

“No!” Fudge protested, but it was a futile protest, and three drops of the potion were promptly administered.

“Tell me, Cornelius, how long have you worked for Voldemort?”

“Since the beginning,” Cornelius responded with a dull expression in his eyes. “Lucius Malfoy helped me to become the Minister, and he made it clear that the Dark Lord was not dead and that he would be returning, and that if I wanted to have a position of power once the Dark Lord took power, I should help out.”

“And what did you do?”

“I didn’t have to do much, at all. I tried to alienate as many of the Ministry’s allies as I could, and arrange for the Death Eater prisoners to find a way out of Azkaban. I even ordered the escape of Lucius Malfoy last year.”

“And?”

“The Wizengamot supports the Dark Lord and his policies, so life was easy.”

The members of the Wizengamot responded with shock, horror and denials, but it was obvious that his charge was true. Whether they had realised it or not, the Wizengamot had, indeed, supported the Dark Lord.

Kingsley was struggling to hold back an incensed Sirius.

“Until Harry Potter came along.”

“Blasted child was intent on ruining everything, but I managed to get the press to discredit him. Without that, the Dark Lord might have never returned.”

There was a horrified gasp from the Wizengamot.

“Cornelius Oswald Fudge,” Percy said formally. “You will be tried, officially, next Monday, for crimes too numerous to mention here. You are remanded into custody until that time. Do you understand?”

“I deserve it,” Fudge replied, before he started to shake.

“Kingsley, escort the previous Minister to his new abode.”

“No!” Cornelius wailed, only to be hit by a silencing charm from Tonks.

“This has been a fun day,” Percy said.

“Indeed,” Dolores Umbridge said. “As acting Minister...”

Percy looked up and laughed at her. “Acting Minister?”

“As the Minister’s Undersecretary,” she started.

“Tonks, put the bitch in the dock,” Percy snapped.

“*Finally* , he gets my name right,” Tonks muttered as she approached Umbridge.

Umbridge pulled out her wand and pointed it at her. Tonks morphed into Umbridge’s form, and used her momentary confusion at seeing *herself* to disarm the Undersecretary.

“Dolores Jane Umbridge,” Percy said formally. “You are hereby charged with the Attempted Murder of Harry James Potter. How do you plead?”

“This isn’t an official court,” Dolores blustered.

“Amelia, would you be so kind as to take your seat?”

Amelia took Fudge’s vacated seat. She placed an old grey wig on her head. “As head of Magical Law Enforcement, I hereby declare this court to be in session. Albus Dumbledore,” Amelia said. “Would you please act as counsel to the defendant?”

Albus nodded and took his stand. “May I request a ten-minute recess to discuss the charges with Undersecretary Umbridge?”

“Of course,” Amelia said, and banged her gavel.

Albus and Dolores went into a corner, and Albus erected a silencing charm around them.

Percy turned to the Wizengamot. "As I'm sure that you all know, the Wizengamot is capable of becoming a full court, and has been empowered to do so since 1342. The trial of former Minister Fudge is slightly different, as the people of this country deserve to see that corruption at the highest level is dealt with in a swift, but just matter. This is a minor matter that we will deal with as quickly as is possible so that you may continue your normal routine."

He stood very still at the front and waited for the remaining seven minutes to pass by.

As soon as Umbridge retook the stand, she said, "I would like to plead guilty as charged."

Percy blinked at her.

"My counsel has pointed out that you are using Veritaserum," she explained bitterly, "and as I can't fight it, I don't have any real choice."

"The court accepts your plea," Amelia said. "The evidence will be made available to the members of the Wizengamot. In sentencing you, I have taken into account your plea, and place you in the same protective custody as Peter Pettigrew."

"Thank you," Dolores said with a surprised look on her face.

Amelia nodded to Kingsley, who escorted the last prisoner of the day out.

"And with that, I've taken enough of your time today," Percy said.

"I'm afraid there is one more thing," Albus interrupted.

Percy looked at him.

"We need to appoint an interim Minister for Magic," Dumbledore reminded him.

With that, the Hogwarts Headmaster walked into the middle of the floor and looked at the assembled Wizengamot.

"We are now very aware that we have failed," he said solemnly. "We have failed in our solemn duty to protect the people, and we have pinned our hopes on a sixteen year old boy. We have been fortunate in the fact that he is more than capable, but we must, as honour dictates, stop standing in his way and start to help him.

"Because of this, I would like to place a nomination for Interim Minister. The candidate is from a well-known Pureblood family, and has fought for the Light for many, many years. He has proven himself trustworthy not only to me, but to Harry himself. He has been instrumental in ferreting out Ministerial corruption, and his swift action has saved the lives of many who would have otherwise perished as a result of Voldemort's actions."

Percy frowned, trying to work out who Albus was talking about, before he suddenly realised that the only person who fit the bill was his father, Arthur.

"And so, with complete confidence, I hereby place the name of Percy Ignatius Weasley into consideration for the Interim Position of Minister for Magic."

Percy blinked, and then absently placed his finger in the ear, to remove the blockage that must surely be there, as it sounded like Dumbledore had said the wrong name.

"Seconded," Amelia agreed from behind him. "It is, perhaps, time to let a younger man take this temporary position while we defeat Voldemort, and then have normal elections as soon as we can thereafter."

Percy fought to stop his jaw from hanging open, but as he looked around, he could see many people nodding, and suspected that the idea that it was only temporary was going to work in his favour.

Amelia ordered the vote, and he turned, hardly believing it as he was voted into the highest position in the land.

"Percy, if you'll take your place," Amelia said, strong amusement in her voice.

In a daze, Percy walked up the prime place and looked out at the sea of faces. From this level, he was almost looking down on them. "Thank you for your trust," he said solemnly. He paused, trying to decide what to do first. "My Lords and Ladies, ladies and gentlemen," he began.

"I hereby order two working parties to be formed. The first will examine all laws that have been issued in the last thirty years, and will bring to our attention any that unfairly legislate against any group, race, or species.

"The second will be constructed of an equal number of Aurors, Barristers, and members of the Wizengamot. Their brief will be to examine our current procedural laws, and bring the laws of our great nation up to date, so that the sort of ad-hoc justice demonstrated today can not be done again in the future. We must have a justice system that relies on law and justice. Although we have used the system for good today, there is nothing to stop it being used for evil in the future. We must protect ourselves, and protect our people, and ensure that justice be done, regardless of prejudice, incompetence, position or species."

From: The Minister for Magic

To: The Git

Subject: New Job

I don't know whether to hug you or kill you, Harry. Damn you!

Percy.

--
Percy I. Weasley

Acting Minister for Magic

Harry looked at the Mmail and did a little dance of delight in the middle of the Great Hall.

"Harry?" Minerva asked.

"It worked," he shouted.

"What worked?"

Harry looked to the left, and saw all the Weasleys' and associate Weasleys' Mmail notifiers go off. Ginny's lit up at the same moment. "I'll let him tell you."

From: The Minister for Magic

To: My extended family

Subject: That damn boy

No, you're not misreading. Bloody Potter has somehow got me elected as the Minister for Magic.

I'm still not quite sure how he's done it, but for now, and until we can arrange a full election, I have the power to make some real changes.

I'm well aware of where I have come from, and this is not the start of Git!Percy returning. I will work for the ideals that Harry has clarified in all of us, and I am now in a position to make sure that Harry gets the backing he deserves.

I don't know how he did it, but it is done. I, Percy of 'Cauldron Bottom' fame, have been placed in the highest position I barely dreamed about, because Harry trusts me. I will live up to that trust!

I know that I never say this, but I love you all. You accepted me back in to the family despite my attitude, and it is with my family that I have the strength and the courage to accept this position.

Love,

Percy

--
Percy I. Weasley

Acting Minister for Magic

From: Lucius Malfoy

To: Lord Voldemort

Subject: Parkinson

My Lord,

It saddens me to report that Parkinson has failed. He is currently under arrest.

The Wizengamot arrested every one of our followers, and then elected the Blood Traitor Percy Weasley as Interim Minister.

Your humble servant,

Lucius

From: L.V.

To: Lucius

Subject: Re: Parkinson

Have Parkinson killed for his failure.

This may look like bad news, but the Blood Traitor will not have time to prepare anything before we attack on Thursday.

When we have killed Potter, we will punish their incompetence.

L.V.

--
Victory or Death

There was a moment of silence as the Weasleys looked at each other, before they started to celebrate. People grabbed each other, hugging tightly, as they talked incoherently.

“Damn it, Harry,” Blaise shouted above the noise of a gaggle of Weasleys celebrating. “What happened?”

“Fudge is in prison,” Harry said with a small smile. “And Percy Weasley is the new Minister for Magic.”

“How the bloody hell did you do that?!” Blaise demanded, a look of incredulity on her face.

Harry just grinned and waited. Ginny was the first to break away, as she sprinted over to him and jumped, wrapping herself around him. “Thank you, thank you, thank you,” she chanted as she kissed him.

“I didn’t do anything,” he replied.

Ginny rolled her eyes and gave him a sizzling kiss full of promise and desire. “And I’ll not do anything the second I get you alone,” she whispered huskily.

Harry smiled and pushed her toward her mother, who was hugging people at random. He stood back, and the smile slowly fell from his face. He wanted to let them enjoy the moment, before he had to bring reality back into the mix. This was his last throw of the dice, and while it had come up sixes, it signified the beginning of the end.

Through a mixture of luck, snap decisions, and a modicum of planning, he’d forced Voldemort into a corner. He’d cut off the Dark Tosser’s money, his intelligence, his public support – through the new Butterbeer – and now the Ministry he’d enjoyed was gone as well.

Voldemort was going to *have* to attack on Thursday, and it was now Harry’s job to make sure that everyone was going to live through that fight. It was still a gamble, but it was one he felt was worth taking.

He watched as Albus entered and took his seat at the head of the Professors’ table. The great man’s eyes were twinkling as he scanned the hall. Harry met his eyes for an endless moment.

He took a deep breath. This was it, this is what he had subconsciously been aiming for, this was the moment when he could no longer play at being in control, using his friends and family as support; this was the moment when he had to take the lead officially.

He walked in front of the huge doors and turned, so that he could see everyone. Slowly, the noise level died down as everyone turned to look at him.

“Until Halloween, I am taking charge of Hogwarts,” Harry said softly. “We have lived under the oppression of the Dark Tosser and his cohorts for too long. I am ending it, as soon as I can.

“I want everyone who is willing to fight with me, to the left, and those who do not feel they are able, to the right. There is no shame in knowing your limitations, nor dishonour in being afraid. You are children. You should not even be asked this question, so make your decision with a clear conscience, and do not let peer pressure influence you. I want you all to look deep in your hearts and ask yourself if you have the ability to fight and the will to survive. Even if you are with me, you do not have to fight – there are many ways to help, and only some of them are with the actual fighting.”

Ginny was the first person to move, from the Gryffindor table to the Slytherin. Ron and Hermione were only a second behind her, as were the other Weasleys. That started a mass migration as the children chose the sides they felt most comfortable with.

As a block, the entire Hufflepuff house stood and moved over, stubborn looks on their faces. The Gryffindors were soon with them, proud looks on their faces. Most of the Ravenclaws followed suit, with some deciding that, logically, they couldn’t help, and would be better off with the others to the right. A number of Slytherin House also crossed to the right, conflicted expressions on their faces, leaving Harry to think that they didn’t want to fight their own parents.

Dean hugged his parents, slapped Dudley on the back, as he moved to the left, leaving his family on the right.

“Professors,” Harry said respectfully, “could you choose your sides as well?”

The senior staff moved to the left without hesitation, as did Hagrid and Poppy.

The Defence professor – and Harry still couldn't remember his name – moved to the right, as did Sinistra and Vector and the rest of the professors.

Harry looked to the left and blinked in surprise. "Draco?"

Draco sighed and nodded at Terry. "He's not fighting alone," he said simply.

Harry nodded. "Parkinson, and anyone else who believes that the Dark Tosser is the way forward, you can leave the school. But know that if you do, you will not be coming back, and if I meet you on the field of battle at Halloween, you will be treated as any other Death Muncher."

"The spell," Pansy muttered as she scowled at him.

Harry smirked at them. "It never existed. You fell for my friends' story hook, line, and stinker."

Pansy looked outraged.

"Go," Harry said, opening the door behind her.

"Well, come on then," Pansy snapped to some of the Slytherins.

"You're on your own, you crazy bitch," Theodore Nott stated calmly from his place on the right. "I've got no love for Muggles, the Muggleborn, or anyone else, but if you think I'm going to stand nose to nose against Potter, you are not only ugly, but *stupid* as well."

"Cowards," Pansy spat, and stormed out. "You'll get yours," she snarled at Harry as she left.

He just smiled at her angelically.

"Professor Sinistra, you are now in charge of the children. Please arrange for as many lessons as you can, and report to Albus if there are any problems." He turned to face the group to the right. "The house elves are currently moving your belongings, so that you can all be together in the Slytherin dungeon. It is the safest place for all of you. I'm afraid that you are no longer allowed on the second floor or higher. As security is an issue, the boundaries will be warded, and you don't want to see what happens if you try and break them. We'll see you after Halloween." They started to file out the door, accompanied by their Professors.

"Everyone else, follow me." Harry turned and walked out of the Great Hall. He walked up several flights of steps, to the Room of Requirement. Inside, the room was a bigger replication of the Great Hall. He moved to the front of the room and waited for everyone to enter. The entire Defence Association filled in the front rows.

"Everyone who hasn't already sworn to keep what I am about to say a secret, please take your wand and cast an oath now. Please don't try and fake it, we will know."

In a wave of magic, the promise was given, which allowed Harry to relax. He smiled slightly and hopped up onto the table, dangling his legs. He waved his hand and the door slammed shut.

"Some of you are probably wondering just why I let Parkinson go. Here's the deal. Over the past week, Voldemort and I have been playing a game. Sadly for him, I've been cheating. Voldemort thinks that he has a spy at Hogwarts. He doesn't. The spy works for me, and I've been feeding Voldemort false information, while getting accurate information about him and his forces back.

"Voldemort told the spy to tell me that he'll be attacking during the Halloween ball. This is false, as he will actually be attacking on Thursday."

There was a gasp from the students and a few of the professors. Harry held up his hand and they went silent. "I know this, because I've arranged for him to attack then. For the past few days, I've had some of the most Machiavellian minds in Britain researching spells and booby traps, and I've been gathering our allies. Voldemort will march toward Hogwarts, convinced he is springing a surprise attack."

"When in fact," Draco Malfoy whispered, barely loudly enough to be heard, "he's marching straight into a trap, where you know everything about him, and he knows nothing about you."

Harry nodded.

"Damn," Draco said admiringly. "And Pansy wondered why I gave up trying to fight you!"

There was some laughter from around the room. "The plan," Harry said, "is for us to work together on our fighting skills. Please notice that I did not say duelling. There is going to be no formality out there. This is going to be a fight, and it's what we've been training you for all this year. You know how to work together, you know how to block the Cruciatus curse, and believe me, Death Munchers will freeze when they cast their favourite toy at you and it has about as much affect as a tickling curse against a dragon.

"Over the next few days, you're going to be pushed like never before - you're going to learn new things and new techniques that are going to save your life." Harry looked at Professor Dumbledore. "*Avada Kedavra* !" he suddenly shouted.

A blast of green light flew out of his hand, aimed at the headmaster. Albus merely smiled faintly and raised his wand. A stone wall appeared in front of him. It disintegrated as the curse hit it, and then he lowered his wand.

Harry looked back at the students and teachers before him. "You all know that the Imperius can be fought. I've shown you how to block the

Cruciatus, and Professor Dumbledore has just proven that even the Killing Curse can be blocked. By Thursday, we'll all know our roles, we'll all know each others' strengths and weaknesses, and when we stand together, we will once again prove that Hogwarts is the best, and we will show the Dark Tosser what happens to people who stand against us!"

"Yeah!" Ron cheered, and it was a noise that the others soon took up, as they screamed and cheered and clapped.

Harry smiled at them. "Now, until this is over, there are no professors, and no students. We are in this together, and we will learn from each other. We have Minerva, Filius, Albus, Severus, Pomona, Poppy, Molly, Bill, Fleur, Charlie, Penelope, Alicia, Katie, Angelina, and we will be joined by a few others. Remus, Sirius, Arthur, Fred, George and Aberforth will be joining as soon as they can. There are others who will be here for the battle, too, but they've all got tasks making sure that the Dark Tosser doesn't attack early.

"For the next four days, we're going to eat, sleep, and act like the team we are." Harry exhaled and smiled as his first army looked at each other and shared nervous grins. "Hermione?"

Hermione moved next to him, and pulled out a stack of parchment. "Well, let's get started," she said cheerfully. "I've got everyone's first assignment marked out."

From: Molly and the trappers

To: Harry

Cc: Hermione

Subject: Daily report

Harry,

It was a good idea giving me the young ones. They're determined to help you, but they are still a little scared. This way they know they're making a difference.

We've made a game out of the traps, and they're coming along fine. I've been making notes of some of the things they've been saying, as the twins would love these ideas.

We'll be finished by Wednesday lunchtime. After that, we're going to report to Poppy as we'll be helping her with the casualties.

Love,

Molly

From: Albus and the defenders

To: General Potter

Cc: Quartermaster Granger

Subject: Daily Report

This is the most fun I've had in a very long time. I've been wanting to get closer to the students, and this is a wonderful way of doing so.

I must say that I admire your command structure. Your closest friends seem to be everywhere, making sure that everything is going smoothly. When this is over, I shall ensure that Susan, Luna, Blaise, Padma, Parvati, Lavender, Ron, Hermione and Ginny are given special awards for service to the school. The energy, effort, and good humour they are showing makes me feel incredibly hopeful for the future.

Of course, even they can't keep up with you. So far I've seen you take two hours' sleep, and that was as a wolf. Harry, you do need to relax a little. I know that you feel the weight of the world is on your shoulders, but you will be no good to us if you are dead on your feet.

Now, our progress is startling. The children are working hard, and have already mastered the basic creation of a wall. We are now working on endurance, speed, and observation.

Albus

--

Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot and Chairman of the International Confederation of Wizards

From: Minerva and the Transformers

To: The Boy Who Took Charge

Cc: His administrative assistant

Subject: Daily Report

Harry, some of these Transfiguration spells are nasty! Turning grass to glass makes me wince, even though I understand the necessity. However, we are making steady progress, and I promise you that we will be ready.

I have found myself forming closer relationships with my team, and while I was doubtful at first, I now appreciate the comradeship you have inspired in us.

Minerva

From: Snape and the Brewers

To: Taskmaster

Cc: Task giver-outer

Subject: Daily Report

Today's progress:

100 healing potions

50 post-Cruciatius potions

10 hallucinogenic potions

8 other assorted potions that I wouldn't ever want used on me.

I had a chance to chat with Blaise, and I'm very pleased that you are backing her. She even offered me a job! Cheeky brat. If she can top my current retirement benefits, I just might take it.

Sev

--
Working for the downfall of the Dark Tosser for fifteen years

From: Poppy and the Nurses

To: Surgeon-General

Cc: Chief Administrator

Subject: Daily Report

First, Mr Potter, as your physician, if you don't start taking more rest, I shall declare you unfit to lead, shove a potion down your throat and get your girlfriend to sit on you until you pass out.

Second, I am very pleased with the people I have. We ran some training drills today, and the bravery that some of the 'Puffs have shown as stretcher bearers is astonishing.

The auxiliary nurses have mastered the basic healing spells, and a couple show a real talent.

Poppy

From: Pomona and the Sprouts

To: Gardener

Cc: Administrator

Subject: Daily Report

Things are progressing nicely here. We have some wonderful plants being cultivated. Neville is proving invaluable; that boy has the greenest fingers I've ever seen.

We also have a crop of Mandrakes ready, and they should help if we have to fight any banshees.

Pomona

From: Filius and the fighters

To: Duel Master

Cc: Referee

Subject: Daily Report

Harry, you do seem to have inspired these children. They're working harder than you can imagine, and they seem to carry a most implacable grudge against the Death Munchers.

Having seen some of them duel, I wouldn't bet against our students versus Voldemort's inner circle if they remember the lessons on teamwork we have taught them.

Filius

From: Hagrid

To: Harry

Cc: Hermione

Subject: Daily Report

Always said you were going to be a great wizard, Harry, and your parents would be proud of you.

I've done what you asked, and they're willing to help.

Hagrid.

From: Superior Spy

To: The Boy Wonder

Subject: Details

Attachment: details.pmt

As requested, a detailed list of the Dark Lord's forces.

Bella – congrats on getting Weasley elected. Voldemort was NOT a happy bunny.

From: The Minister for Magic (Who hasn't yet got tired of writing that)

To: The Power Behind the Throne

Subject: Aurors

Harry,

As a result of a secret vote last night, the Aurors have now been given the permission to use the Unforgivable curses – which makes them pretty forgivable, actually.

The Aurors have been sent on a two-day training course, today and tomorrow. No one will realise that the second day will be defending Hogwarts. Kingsley has been in contact with Hermione and knows what to do.

I'll see you tomorrow, Harry – because if you think that I'm going to miss this, you're wrong.

Percy

--
Percy I. Weasley

Acting Minister for Magic

From: Harry

To: The General

Attachment: Voldemort's_forces.pmt

Attachment: Extra.pmt

Subject: Something for your plans

Ron,

The first is from my spy, and should be pretty damn accurate. The second is from me, and is very accurate.

Bung 'em into the mix and see what you come up with.

I want you to keep in close contact with Amelia and Kingsley, so they know what is going on.

Harry

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

From: Ron

To: The Boss

Subject: Re: Something for your plans

These are real?

Blimey!

Ron

From: HJP

To: RBW

Subject: Re: Blimey

Yeah, I've been a bit busy.

And do you know any other swearwords apart from "Blimey" and "Crikey"?

H

From: RW – note the missing B

To: HJP

Subject: Re[2]: Blimey

Of course I do.

But if I use them, Hermione cuts me off.

R.

From: The boy about to bleach his mind

To: The boy who couldn't keep his quill to himself

Subject: Re[3]: Blimey

TM!! TM!! TM!!

HJP

--

From: The one who was asked

To: The boy who asked

Subject: Re[4]: Blimey

You asked, mate. And you're the one dating my sister.

Moving back onto topic for a second. I've looked through the enemies and allies, and I can't help but come to a conclusion.

You're making a statement, aren't you?

"Potential Dark Lords, beware, because if you irritate Harry, you will be squished like a bug."

Ron.

From: Fuse-lighter

To: Contemplator

Subject: Re[5]: Blimey

Keep our extras under your hat for now. I want people thinking and practising as if they aren't there – there's no place for complacency.

Oh, and who, me?

Harry

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

Harry looked around the room and smiled softly to himself. Everyone had worked so incredibly hard, he could hardly believe it. Everyone was sitting together in the groups that Hermione had placed them, students and professors talking as old friends. They were eating the last meal of the day, and talking about the battle that was going to happen tomorrow.

As the students finished the meal, Harry stood. "I think," he said clearly, "that I need to say how proud of you I am, how proud of the work that you have put in over the last few days. To you," he said, and raised his glass, before taking a large drink.

His action was emulated by everyone in the room, and as they sat down, most of the students started to fall asleep. Harry moved his hands slowly, and one by one, the students floated toward the sleeping areas.

"Harry?" Hermione asked.

"They need to sleep properly tonight, so I got Sev to get me some sleeping potions," Harry explained. "Too many of them would have spent the night worrying about things they can't change. And before you ask, after we've had a final meeting, we're all going to be taking one as well. We need to be rested for tomorrow."

"That's actually a good idea," Hermione said.

"It's just what I'm feeling," Harry agreed. "Okay, gather around everyone."

From the different tables, his friends and family gathered around him, most of them creating nice seats to sit in. Ginny moved to sit next to him and took his hand in hers.

"Are we ready?" Harry asked. "Sev?"

"Yes. Enough potions to heal practically anything, and quite a few offensive ones as well. I've got enough people trained on how to use them. As far as I can see, we're ready."

"Molly?"

"Traps are in place. They're keyed to you giving the word. Morag, who's a scarily smart girl, came up with a way of using the Dark Mark research she did with you so that the traps will only affect Death Munchers."

Harry smiled. "That's brilliant news," he said softly. "The problem with traps generally is that they're pretty indiscriminate. Fred, George, Abe?"

"We're ready," Abe said. "We've got some of the most fun things I've ever seen ready, we're going to confuse and befuddle where we can. These

spells are a lot lighter than you might expect, but are harder to defend against.”

“Bill, Fleur, how are the wards?”

“They’re some of our best work,” Bill said proudly. “Practically undetectable to start with, and as soon as we set them up, they will reinforce Hogwarts’ own wards, and make sure that no one can leave the dance early.”

“Arthur, how are the caltrops coming on?”

Arthur smiled happily. “Well, I thought that if we had a Muggle weapon, I’d use a Muggle device to spread it. With plenty of help, I’ve built a trebuchet. We’ve tested it, and it should spread them high and wide. And if they happen to land on anyone, even better. Severus has supplied us with the potions, and we’ll apply them tomorrow.”

“Blaise, Lavender, Parvati, how’s Hogwarts coming along?”

Blaise smirked. “We’ve reinforced the entrance wards, and used the Marauders Map to ensure that every other entrance to Hogwarts is hidden. We borrowed Padfoot and Moony, and they borrowed the twins’ Portkey Paste. Anyone who tries and enters through one of the other entrances will be Portkeyed to the area we think will be the main battle area.”

“Luna, Padma, Susan, what’s the general morale at the moment?”

“They’re generally positive. People trust you, Harry, and they trust what you’ve been doing. They’re nervous about the fight, but really, it’s a bit of a game to them at the moment. The reality was going to hit tonight, but you’ve made that a non-issue. Tomorrow, they won’t have time to worry.”

Harry smiled and relaxed back against his chair, he stretched. “Okay, is there anything else that I need to know?”

Bill and Charlie looked at each other. “As you know,” Bill said, “We owe you an apology. And being Weasleys, we like to do things in style.”

Charlie reached under the table and pulled out a box. “Of course, we had to hire your partners to help us out.” Harry shot a curious look at Fred and George. “Not them,” Charlie continued, “your good-looking partners; Lavender and Parvati.” He opened the box. “Crenth supplied some scales for us, and we’ve enchanted them with every protection spell we know, and a few we researched.” He held up a pair of black trousers that gleamed in the candlelight, and added a jacket of matching colour. He passed them both to Harry.

“You didn’t have to do this,” Harry whispered, awed by the gift in front of him.

“We know,” Bill said, “but we’re Weasleys. We do things properly.”

“I’ll wear them tomorrow. Thank you, guys. And you were forgiven a very long time ago.”

“We know.”

“Ron, anything to add before we all hit the sack?” Harry asked.

“I’ve looked into the forces Voldemort is bringing tomorrow, and once the werewolves join us, we should have the advantage – and that’s ignoring the traps we’ve placed, and the charms we’ve produced. When we add in the Aurors, we should have superior numbers.”

“So, as we are, we’re in good stead?” Harry asked, to clarify.

Ron nodded.

Harry smiled. “Percy has given the Aurors *carte blanche* to use what ever curses they want. And any Death Eater captured will be tried before the Wizengamot, force-fed Veritaserum, and executed if they are found guilty. There will be no escapes and bribery this time – mainly because most of the money is gone.

“I told you all the other day that Voldemort is standing in the way of the future. We’ll send a message that will reverberate into that future that we will not tolerate any group trying to subjugate others, and that if you poke us, we’ll poke back.”

“But I like poking,” Sirius complained.

“So Juanita tells me,” Severus muttered.

Harry laughed as Sirius threw an apple at the Potions Master.

“I’ve got one more thing,” Hermione said. “What about you?”

“Me?” Harry asked. “What about me?”

“You’ve had five hours of sleep since Monday. You’ve spent two of those hours as a wolf, and one as a hawk. You’ve also spent time with every single group, helped Ron and me out, and kept an overview on everything, and managed to fit in practising your duelling against all five professors at once.”

Harry shrugged. “I find my other forms relaxing, and I’ll sleep when this is over. No matter what happens to the Death Eaters tomorrow, no matter what happens to Voldemort’s allies, I will have to fight Voldemort, and I will be ready for that.”

"And killing him?" Albus asked quietly.

"He's no longer human, and I've killed a couple of Death Eaters already. I've heard that it gets easier, I guess I'm going to find out if that's true."

"You sound cold, Harry," Minerva said softly, in a sad voice.

"My emotions are still here, Min, they're just locked up. I'm wondering if my desire for a normal life has made me push Voldemort too hard, push us too hard. I picked an arbitrary date – should I have picked a later one?"

"Harry, second guessing yourself isn't going to help," Remus said firmly.

"I know, but that is just the start of my doubts." He smiled faintly, "I think I just want this whole thing over with." He stood and walked around the table, pouring out a new glass of the potion-enriched juice for everyone. "Tonight," he said firmly, "everyone sleeps."

He saluted them, and downed his drink. He took Ginny's hand, and walked with her to the cot they had been sleeping on, while the others made their way to their own sleeping quarters.

Harry closed his eyes and listened to the sound of his girlfriend sleeping. He waited five minutes before standing. He walked around the hall and checked that everyone was asleep before he smiled sadly at them. It hadn't been hard to neutralise the potion in his own drink – a small amount of wandless magic and it was plain orange juice. He didn't want to sleep, not the night before his life either changed or ended.

He hadn't lied to the others; he did feel more rested after sleeping as an animal, especially the wolf. He was calling on reserves he didn't know he had, but felt extremely comfortable with, nonetheless. He changed into his hawk form and flew out the window, changing into his wolf as he landed. He'd get some sleep later, and be fine.

He padded into the Forbidden Forest and sniffed around, until he caught the scent he wanted. It didn't take him long to find the large huts that were the permanent home of the centaur clan that inhabited the Forbidden Forest.

A centaur moved in front of him and pointed a spear at him. "Halt."

Harry growled warningly. He was here to talk, and he wasn't going to be stopped by a guard.

The centaur looked nervously around, before slowly backing away as Harry moved forward purposefully. The centaur raised a horn to his lips and blew it, hesitantly at first, then with more confidence, to summon the others.

Harry nodded and proceeded into the centre of the village, before he changed into his human form and sat down, ignoring the guard who was following him. One by one, roused by the guard's horn, the centaurs emerged from their huts and approached the lone human.

"Human," a centaur hissed. "You have trespassed. You will be executed for this."

Harry looked at him and smiled, recognising him. "Bane," he said softly, "the next time you open your mouth, if the usual mindless vitriol and racism spills out, I will end your miserable life."

Bane sneered at him and opened his mouth.

Harry started to move, calling his sword to him, as he forced himself to move as he had done so many times. It wasn't quite as fast as he wanted – he'd spent too much time concentrating on his Animagus forms and not enough time practising it – nor was it as easy to do, now that he knew he shouldn't be doing it. But it was effective enough. He paused with his sword against Bane's neck. "Finish the sentence."

Bane glared at him, but didn't say anything.

Harry turned his back on the centaur and re-took his seat, his sword by his side.

"Harry," Firenze said as he moved to the front.

"Voldemort is attacking tomorrow. Where do you stand?"

"Why should we help you, human?" Bane spat.

"*Silencio*," Harry said, pointing at Bane. "You can speak again when your betters have finished." He turned back to Firenze.

Firenze looked amused. "I think, Harry, that I'm the wrong person to be speaking to. This is Magorian, clan leader."

Harry stood and inclined his head slightly to the larger centaur, as one pack-leader to another.

Magorian studied him for a few seconds, before nodding back. "You've not made a good impression with Bane."

"If you are all like him, then I'll probably be forced to evict you from the Forest. I won't have a bunch of selfish, racist, ignorant idiots in my range."

"Do you think you can do that, *human*?"

"Easily, *centaur*," Harry replied.

Magorian nodded firmly, and Harry sensed an attack from behind him. He rolled to the left, stood, batted a spear aside with his sword and then

reversed the sweep of the blade, intending to decapitate the centaur.

"Stop!" Magorian roared.

Harry paused his swing, stopping the blade against the neck of the terrified centaur. "Why?"

"He was only acting on orders."

"I know," Harry replied, "which is why you will be next."

Magorian snorted in amusement, before he went down on one knee. "I apologise, pack-leader, for insulting you in such a manner."

Harry stared at him for a long moment, his wolfish instincts battling against his human ones. The human ones won, just. "Don't do it again," he whispered, as he vanished his sword and sat back down.

Magorian returned to standing on all four legs. "What do you want from us, Harry?"

"Well, Magorian." Harry used the centaur's name deliberately, as the centaur had used his without invitation. "I'd quite like you to keep the forest free from Death Eaters, and if a few of your people would like to stand on the edge and fire a few arrows toward the Death Eaters, that would be appreciated as well."

Magorian nodded. "And in return?"

"Freedom from oppression and being treated like a third-class species."

"That is a large promise."

"I'm not doing it for you. You'll just benefit from it. Firenze apart, you're all too arrogant for my liking." He stood. "You treat all humans based on the actions of the few. If I was to do the same, I'd probably think that Bane's attitude was the most prevalent, and I'd treat you all as he deserves." He walked to the edge of the clearing, then paused and turned, his eyes meeting Bane's. "Do not have any accidents tomorrow, because I will hold you personally responsible."

He took a last look around before Apparating away to Mackrack's outer office. The alarms didn't go off this time.

"Come in, Harry," Mackrack called. "We fixed the wards so that you don't set them off anymore."

"Aww," Harry pouted as he walked in and dropped into a seat. "That takes the fun out of it."

"Good evening?"

"Just so-so, actually. I just had a meeting with the centaurs. Bane's an arrogant git, and Magorian attacked me while I was under his protection. He seems to have forgotten how to conduct himself with a pack leader."

"I doubt he's actually met a pack leader for a long time, Harry," Mackrack pointed out. "What did you do?"

"I came very close to killing him. You know, I wouldn't even have noticed the insult a few weeks ago, but the more time I spend as a wolf, the more stuff I find myself knowing instinctively. I find the idea of breaking my word, or breaking the ancient compacts so morally abhorrent that I'd rather die first."

Mackrack bared his teeth. "Humans have forgotten the compacts. As they became 'civilised,' they abandoned the rules about dealing with other leaders."

"It's not as if they're difficult," Harry complained. "Treat another leader as your equal while he is in your camp, regardless of real strength. Respect the leader, and place him under your personal protection. If you are going to fight, do so on the field of battle not like a coward."

"It's the first one, Harry, which causes the problems. Would you mind me saying that you are no longer really human?"

Harry shrugged. "I don't know what I am."

"A part-human, part-wolf, part-hawk, part-snake, and the first dragon rider in over a millennium."

Harry laughed. "Well, yeah, I guess. When this is all over, I'm planning on spending a lot more time as a hawk. I've not really used the form enough yet."

Mackrack nodded and changed the subject abruptly. "Are you ready for tomorrow?"

Harry nodded. "The important question is, are you?"

"Two hundred of our finest goblins are ready," he paused. "Which, sadly, is the total size of our army. It's all we were allowed after the last rebellion, but rest assured, they are extremely powerful warriors." He paused. "Well, two hundred and ten, actually."

"Ten?"

"My father," he sighed. "Elder Blutwood. He wanted to meet this human I spoke so highly of. You impressed him. He spent Monday evening

polishing his axe, before he called a few of his old friends up. They all decided that this was a perfectly good way to spend a Thursday. He's arranged for his wife to manage the Butterbeer distribution in his absence."

"Are they capable?"

Mackrack cackled. "Most of father's friends have fought in a war or two," he admitted with a wide grin that showed a lot of teeth. "What they lack in speed they make up for in skill."

"Then I'll be delighted to have them."

"I thought you would," Mackrack grunted. "My father seems to view retirement with a general contempt. He didn't even want to get paid!"

"Well, technically, he is being paid," Harry pointed out. "He works for one of my companies."

Mackrack scowled. "He said the same thing." The goblin threw his hands up in the air. "I give up. Let the old man have his last battle."

Harry smiled and pulled a piece of string out of his pocket. He cast an enlargement charm on it, and then turned it into a Portkey. "Activation word is 'Hogwarts'. I'll Mmail you as soon as I know what time the Dark Tosser is going to turn up."

"What are your plans now?" Mackrack asked.

Harry smiled faintly. "I'm going to have one last check around the battlefield, and look at the charms we have in place, and then I'm going to find a nice spot where I can curl up and sleep until the sun wakes me. I'll then slip into bed with my mate and pretend that I was there all night."

"Sneaky," the Goblin approved. "Oh, I've heard about your latest venture into commerce. A new potions shop?"

Harry nodded.

"Do you think she'd be interested in brewing some goblin potions as well?"

"If everything goes well tomorrow, I'll bring her by and you can ask her yourself. But I suspect the answer will be positive."

"You wouldn't be backing her otherwise."

Harry nodded in agreement, and said his goodbyes. He Apparated back to Hogwarts and performed a slow and thorough check, and tried to make sure that he had covered all the angles for tomorrow.

He sighed softly as he realised he had overlooked something. The dragons were in Romania, and he was going to need them at short notice. Gwyneth was probably the only dragon capable of getting there on time. He Apparated to Romania, appearing high above the earth, and as he started to fall, he turned into his hawk form and spent a few minutes playing in the air currents around the mountain range.

It was a lot more fun than he expected, as he swooped and dived, before lazily floating up in the updrafts.

'It's a good thing I'm not the jealous type.'

Harry almost missed a beat of his wings in surprise. He turned, to find the humongous form of Gwyneth lazily hovering behind him.

'Why?' Harry asked.

'I'm a dragon, you're a dragon rider, and flying on your own might be seen as a little cheeky.'

Harry squawked in amusement. *'I love to fly, on a broom, in this form, or on your back.'* He paused for a second, *'But to be honest, nothing matches the sheer thrill of riding you.'*

Gwyneth grinned at him. *'Well, as we are flying, you may as well learn how to do it properly. Follow me.'*

Harry did as he was told, grateful that the dragon kept the speed to something he could handle. He learnt more about what it was like to fly in the next hour than he would have in a lifetime on his own. Over and above the knowledge his own instincts had given him, he learnt how to read the air currents, how to use them to increase his speed, almost like surfing on an ocean, and how to hover effortlessly. He made a mental note to try and find a real wolf to learn from in the future.

Eventually, Gwyneth alighted on a large rock outcropping on the side of a mountain. Harry followed her down and landed next to her, before he transformed into his human form.

'You didn't come here for flying lessons.'

'I didn't,' Harry agreed. *'I've arranged for Voldemort to attack tomorrow. Come and have a look.'* He shuddered as the dragon moved straight into his mind, and took a look at his plans. *'I need you nearer to Hogwarts, but I don't want Voldemort to have any idea that something might be up.'*

'Impressive,' Gwyneth mused. *'A few thousand years or so ago, this would not have been a problem, all the old ones would have been able to fly as fast as I could, but they are all taking a nap – I agreed to stay awake to help the young ones. How are your illusions?'*

I can do them,' Harry answered.

'Then we shall mix human and dragon magic, and the results will work.'

'What illusion do you want?'

'I will tell the dragons to take off, they will be invisible before they do – a necessary survival skill – and you will create an illusion that they are still sleeping.'

Harry nodded.

'Follow me down, my rider.' Gwyneth seemed to fall forward, before she spread her wings and almost hugged the ground as she flew down the mountain.

He smiled and jumped after her, straining to catch up, as he experienced the exhilarating rush of a power dive less than thirty feet off the ground.

As Gwyneth landed, Harry spiralled high into the air, and prepared to cast the spell. Now that he knew that positive thinking was all that really mattered in a spell, he had no doubts about his ability to pull off the illusion.

His powerful eyesight allowed him to memorise the positions of all the dragons.

'Five seconds, Harry.'

Harry switched into his human form, and as he started to fall he counted down. On zero, he cast the spell and gasped as the magic rushed out of him. The dragons seemed to flicker.

'I can feel your tiredness, my rider,' Gwyneth's voice echoed inside his mind. *'Do not change back, you've had your fun, now, rider, it is time for you to be where you belong.'*

Harry laughed softly; the faint outline of Gwyneth joined him as he plummeted down, and he didn't have to do anything as she manoeuvred herself so that he landed gently on her back.

'Sleep.'

Harry was asleep before the command had completed.

When he awoke, he could see the start of the sun dawning over the horizon. He felt incredible, much better than he had ever felt before.

'That is how it is supposed to be,' Gwyneth said smugly. *'A dragon and her rider are a very special relationship. It allows us to work together, to share resources, just as you warmed me in the great void, I warmed you last night.'*

'Thank you.'

'We will hide until you need us,' Gwyneth said. *'It is time for you to go back. You will need to end your spell before the fight starts, as you do not want it draining your magic.'*

'I will. Thank you, for everything.'

Gwyneth turned her head and smiled. *'It is right, for I am a dragon and you are my rider.'*

Harry nodded and jumped off her back. As he fell, he Apparated back to Hogwarts, and silently slipped into bed with Ginny. Despite his nap, it wasn't long before he fell asleep.

"Harry," Ginny called, lightly pushing his shoulders.

Harry growled softly and tightened his arm around her.

"You know, that growling is really sexy."

"I thought you weren't a morning person," Harry said without opening his eyes.

"Blaise brought me a coffee earlier. Everyone is awake, refreshed, and contemplating how much of a Slytherin you are."

"Me?"

"Oh yes, they're very impressed that you made them sleep last night, even if it was downright sneaky."

Harry sighed and opened his eyes. He wasn't tired; he was just making sure that he didn't get caught in his slight deception of the night before.

He stood and stretched, before casting a cleaning charm on himself. He went to pull on a pair of jeans, when he stopped and realised he should wear the outfit Charlie and Bill had created for him.

He picked up the trousers and read the tag. “No underwear.”

Ginny showed no sign at all of looking away, so he shrugged and kicked off his boxers. Ginny’s face turned an interesting shade of red, although she didn’t once look away.

Harry pulled the tight trousers on and then inhaled to do them up. He shrugged the jacket on over his bare chest and drew the front closure together. It sealed itself up the front, and then the bottom of the jacket joined itself to the trousers. There would be no skin carelessly exposed to enemy spells. He added a pair of boots, and ran his fingers through his hair.

“How do I look?”

Ginny’s mouth opened and shut a few times as she looked at him, but she seemed incapable of speech. He took her hand and led her toward the food area.

Harry took a seat at the head of the main table, and looked around. Draco was looking at him in a way that made him shudder, before Terry nudged Draco, firmly. Draco blushed, and then leaned over to whisper something into Terry’s ear, probably an apology. Harry made a mental note to bleach his mind later. If he didn’t have Ginny, if by some quirk of nature, he didn’t like girls, if he lived in a world where water flowed uphill and he was actually gay, there was *still* no way at all that he could ever be anything other than polite to the ferret.

“So, is everyone ready?”

“After that enforced nap, I think we actually are,” Seamus said confidently. “I’ve had a good night of sleep, I can remember more charms than a cat at Christmas, I’m fighting with a guy who’s going to sit in the Pantheon next to Merlin, and I’m ready to kick some Death Eater arse!”

“Damn right,” Dean agreed. “Although I’ll bet Merlin never wore leather trousers to breakfast.”

“Dragon scale,” Harry corrected.

“Of course, how silly of me,” Dean muttered.

“Well, as we’ve all got this energy, and we’re waiting for Voldemort to wander into our trap, why don’t we play a game or two?”

“Before we do that, Harry,” Blaise said, “some of my friends brought something up this morning. What if Voldemort brings Dementors? We’ve got a plan to deal with everything else.”

“Dementors aren’t worth worrying about,” he said. “I’ve scared a few away with my Patronus in the past.”

“Define a few?”

“Several hundred,” Hermione interrupted. “He saved our lives.”

Blaise whistled. “Just one Patronus?”

Harry nodded. “Hands up everyone who can cast a corporeal one.”

Remus, Sirius, Albus, Bill, Charlie, Penelope, Minerva, Ron, and Hermione raised their hands. Ginny half raised hers.

“Ginny?” Harry asked in surprise.

“I’ve been trying,” she said, “but all I get is mist.”

“Try it now,” Harry told her.

“Expecto Patronum!” she called. From her wand a thick silver mist erupted, but it slowly vanished.

“You know that it is positive memories that count, right?”

She nodded.

He leaned over and kissed her hard, lifting her out of her chair and plastering her along his body. He lightly nibbled her lower lip, before whispering, “As soon as this thing with Voldemort is over, I’m going to expect your help to get out of these trousers, and you know what I’m wearing underneath.”

She gasped and her cheeks went pink. Harry released her.

“Now, cast the charm again!”

“EXPECTO PATRONUM!” Ginny shouted, her face still flushed, and a dreamy smile on her lips.

A huge silver wolf exploded out of her wand and bounded around the room, looking for enemies.

“I can’t decide if that’s sickeningly cute, sickeningly predictable, or just sickening,” Ron sighed.

Hermione elbowed him firmly.

“Do you think I could get the same help?” Susan asked, her eyes twinkling.

Ginny looked at her wolf, then at her boyfriend.

“No,” she replied.

Susan pouted playfully.

“Anyway, I think that’s Dementors taken care of,” Harry said. “Any other worries?”

“You know, I don’t think there is,” Ron said. “Now, about this game...?”

“Well, you’re all in groups, so dodgeball it is. Abe, can you referee again?” He waited a moment until everyone was distracted with the organisation of the game, then sought out one person who was standing on the sidelines. “Neville, can I have a word?”

They slipped out of the Room of Requirement. Harry guided Neville silently through Hogwarts to his rooms, and settled into his small study.

“What’s up, Harry?” Neville asked, a worried look on his face.

“Promise me this won’t go any further?”

Neville took out his wand and swore an oath.

Harry blinked, “I’d have accepted your word,” he pointed out.

“Oh, sorry.”

Harry sighed deeply. “You know I’ve got a spy in the Death Eaters?”

“It’s rumoured.”

“I’ve promised the spy some sort of limited freedom for the information.”

“Uh huh. That makes sense. What has this got to do with me?”

“It’s Bellatrix Lestrange.”

Neville gaped at him, before he turned white, and then red, and then white again.

“You can’t be serious,” he yelled.

“I am,” Harry said quietly.

“But she tortured my parents, and me!”

“I know.”

“I can’t believe you’d do this to me,” he shouted irately. “I’ve stood by you, been with you every step of the way, and then this – you let the person who ruined my life off, just like that?”

“For the information and help that she has provided, yes.”

“But she tortured my parents!”

“I know. But I needed her information and her assistance. None of this could have been arranged without her. I had to make a decision.”

“You made the wrong bloody one.” He stood and glared at Harry, before turning and storming out.

“Neville!” Harry’s voice cracked like a whip.

Neville paused in the doorway.

“If I have to choose between hurting your feelings and keeping you, and everyone else, alive, I’ll make a deal with the devil himself to keep you lot alive.”

Neville slammed the door shut behind him.

Harry sighed softly. As bad as he felt for Neville, he wasn’t going to apologise for it. He could understand where the boy was coming from, and wondered how he’d react if someone said that Voldemort was getting away with what he did to his parents because of some information.

He smiled faintly. In that hypothetical circumstance, he’d probably end up killing Voldemort anyway – and really, if Neville wanted to challenge Bellatrix later, he had no way, or desire, to stop him.

He hoped it didn't come to that, because as crazy as Bellatrix was, she was a skilled and powerful witch, and while Neville was skilled as well, he'd never be able to beat Bellatrix. Neville cared too much about living to truly be able to understand and beat the crazed witch.

From: Lord Voldemort

To: Bellatrix Lestrange

Subject: Attack

Bellatrix, you are to go to the werewolves and prepare them for battle at eleven am. You will Apparate to the gates of Hogwarts at five minutes to eleven, where you will join the main force.

L.V.

--

Victory or Death

From: Lord Voldemort

To: Lucius Malfoy

Subject: Attack

Lucius, it is time for us to reveal our secret. You will retrieve the Dementors from their hiding place. Take thirty Death Eaters with you.

I will expect you at the gates of Hogwarts at 10:55

L.V.

--

Victory or Death

From: Bellatrix

To: Harry

Subject: 11am EOM

From: Narcissa

To: Lord Voldemort

Subject: A request

My Lord,

May I be permitted to join you, so that I may fight with my husband for your cause, and see the boy's face when he finds out who the spy really is?

Narcissa

From: L.V.

To: Narcissa

Subject: Re: A request

You may.

And when we have won, I will Mark you as mine, and you will join the Death Eaters as a favoured member.

Be at Hogwarts at 10:55

L.V.

--

Victory or Death

From: Harry

To: Werewolves (all)

Attachment: Portkey.pmt

Subject: The fight

When Voldemort tells you to attack, use these.

HJP

--

Audaces fortuna juvat

From: Harry

To: Kingsley, Tonks, and Percy

Subject: The fight

Guys,

Be at Hogwarts at 10:30 to get ready.

HJP

--

Audaces fortuna juvat

From: Harry

To: The future sisters Black

Attachment: Portkey.pmt

Subject: Changing sides

Use these when I mention that you work for me.

Harry

--

Audaces fortuna juvat

Harry walked downstairs and into Snape’s dungeon classroom. He smirked as he saw the friendlier decor that the other Professors had given it.

“Sorry to interrupt,” he said as he leaned against the door. “But I’m here to evacuate you all.”

“Why?” Sinistra demanded.

“Because Voldemort will be launching a surprise attack in the next forty minutes, and I want you all safely out the way.”

“How can it be a surprise if you know about it?” Vector asked.

Harry merely tapped his nose and smirked. He pulled a piece of string out of his pocket and enlarged it. “Everyone take hold – and don’t try and stay behind. If you do, I’ll have to presume that you’re working for Voldemort.”

“Harry, look after yourself,” Dudley said as he took a hold of the rope.

“That’s what I’ve got the others for,” Harry quipped as he gave Jenny a quick hug.

The students and professors all took hold of the rope, and they vanished, to re-appear in the Beauxbatons dining area.

Madame Maxime was waiting for him there with approximately fifty students gathered around her. Behind her, looking curious, were the rest of the students.

“Welcome to Beauxbatons,” she greeted the newcomers with a smile. “You should have an enjoyable day, although I’m afraid that I’ve had to

disable the WizardNet system temporarily. It should be back in forty minutes.”

Harry walked over to her with the rope. “Are you coming?”

Olympe smiled massively. “But, of course,” she said. “I wouldn’t miss it for the world.”

“Take hold then.”

Olympe said something in French, and the other students took hold.

“Harry, wait,” Gabrielle shouted. She dashed across the room and hugged him tightly, before kissing his cheek. “Stay safe, mon frère,” she whispered intently.

Harry hugged her back and kissed her cheek. “I will,” he promised. “If everything goes well, I’ll return later to bring you to the party.”

She smiled brilliantly and returned back to the other students. Harry activated the Portkey, and they arrived in the Room of Requirement.

“Excellent,” Ron said. “Part one of the reinforcements.”

Harry smiled and pointed to the left. A few seconds later, two hundred and eleven Goblins appeared, all in full armour, carrying large axes.

“Mackrack?” Harry asked.

“There is much honour to be had here,” he said, “and if you think that I, as leader, will let others have it all, you’re quite wrong.”

Harry sniggered and indicated Ron. “Take your orders from him; he’s been doing the planning.”

Mackrack marched over and saluted him. “We are at your service, General Weasley.”

Ron flushed bright red, self-conscious at the address given him, but nodded and returned a passable salute in return before beginning to confer with the Goblin director.

“Harry,” Blaise called. “Are there any more surprises?”

Harry pointed to the final corner, and a hundred and fifty Aurors arrived, surprised looks on their faces. Percy was with them, and he moved over to his family.

“Sorry about the delay,” Kingsley said as he strode to the front. “We had a slight issue with a few Death Eater Aurors. They’re now contemplating their mistakes in the next life.”

“Does everyone know what they are doing?” Harry asked him.

Kingsley nodded. “Tonks and I have been drilling them; they know most of what you have planned, and how hard everyone has been working. They know their roles.”

“Good. Ron’s got the final updates. I want every team leader, Kingsley, Tonks, and Mackrack, going through the plan. Charlie, we’re going to get the final reinforcements.”

“All right!” Charlie exclaimed enthusiastically, doing a little dance. He dashed over to Tonks and gave her a quick kiss, before he arrived in front of Harry, and they Apparated to Romania.

“What are you doing here?” Morgo Flashchime asked in lieu of a greeting. “The dragons are sleeping today.”

“We’re going to borrow them for a bit,” Harry said.

“You have the paperwork?”

“Ahh,” Harry said slowly, “you appear to be under the impression that you are *in charge* of the dragons. As far as Gwyneth is concerned, you’re a servant, not an owner. Gwyneth has already agreed to help, and she will be. You really have very little say in the matter.”

Morgo blinked. “Oh,” he said slowly, and scratched his head. “Right.”

Charlie moved forward in front of Harry. “You’ll have to excuse Harry,” he said with a disarming smile. “He’s more interested in the large amount of Death Eaters who are about to attack Hogwarts than being diplomatic.”

Morgo sighed and looked at his watch. “You do what you want. I’m going to go and get a drink.” He paused. “Maybe several drinks.”

Harry jogged over to the illusion of Gwyneth. The dragon lifted her head, nodded, before she launched herself into the air and vanished.

“Where did they go?” Charlie asked in confusion.

“Dragons have been hiding from humans for years like this,” Harry explained. “We’re going to meet up with them a few miles up.”

“Right,” Charlie said softly, as Harry grabbed him, and they Apparated to the south coast of England, where Harry could feel Gwyneth.

“What’s going on, Potter? That is Portsmouth far below us. There is no way the dragons could fly this far, this fast.” Charlie casually ignored the fact that they were falling toward the ground.

Harry smiled at him. “I moved them last night,” he explained as he felt Gwyneth move under him.

“Whoa!” Charlie yelled, before he grabbed at the outline before him and moved himself into the proper position behind Crenth.

‘Crenth will learn,’ Gwyneth laughed. *‘He is still a baby.’*

‘Are you ready?’

“Harry,” Charlie yelled. “Just what were you doing when you were supposed to be sleeping last night!”

Harry turned. “Making sure that we win.”

Charlie opened his mouth, and then shut it again as Crenth turned his head to look at him.

‘Of course, I am ready; I have not had anything to interest me for many years. I am excited,’ Gwyneth said, *‘and Crenth is explaining things to his potential rider.’*

‘I’ll see you there, then, at eleven.’

‘At eleven. Stay safe, my rider.’

‘Stay safe, my dragon,’ Harry replied formally, before he Apparated back to Hogwarts.

“Is everyone ready?”

Nervous looks were exchanged, but everyone present nodded firmly.

“Then let’s take our positions.”

Most of the fighters walked out and down toward the Hogwarts entrance. Harry, Ginny, Ron, Hermione, Arthur, Molly and a lot of the younger children headed toward the roof.

Harry stood and looked out over the long driveway, toward the entrance where Voldemort and the Death Eaters were expected shortly. He hugged Ginny to him, before doing the same to Ron and Hermione. “Thanks,” he whispered, “for always being here.”

He got three radiant smiles in return. “Stay safe,” he ordered, before he hopped up onto the parapet.

He could sense the tension around, both from here and the others downstairs. He smiled slightly and cast a spell that allowed him to talk with the students waiting by the entrance.

“Albus,” he called, “you don’t happen to remember where that room with all the toilets is, do you? I think I could do with a bathroom break.”

There was some laughter from the kids around him as he winked, and the tension eased slightly.

“I’m afraid not,” Albus replied. “But you could ask the Weasley twins, I believe they’ve found the same room – although it was full of toilet seats for them.”

“Don’t look at us,” Fred’s voice rang out. “We’re innocent.”

“Right,” Molly’s voice entered the conversation. “And the day that’s true is the day that I become Queen of England.”

“A new ambition, Molly?” Harry asked. “I’ve already made Percy Minister, so if you’re really interested in the job, just say so…”

There was a silence, before Molly started to laugh. “I’m going to pretend that’s a joke,” she said. “I’ve got enough trouble looking after my family, without taking on the whole country.”

“Agreed,” Albus said. “That’s Harry’s job.”

Harry just groaned. “Stay safe, everyone. And look out for a few surprises.”

“Damn it, Harry,” Severus’ voice rang out. “More of them?”

“Harry just wants everyone to know that if they think of following Voldemort, they’ll be better off going somewhere quiet and turning the Killing Curse on themselves,” Ron’s voice echoed through the school, “because that way would be much quicker and neater and much less painful.”

There were a few more giggles.

Harry took a deep breath as he saw Voldemort’s forces start the march toward Hogwarts.

“Albus, did you invite a bunch of mask-wearing cowards to lunch?”

"I'm afraid not, Harry," Albus replied solemnly.

"Then I believe we have some trespassers. Would someone be as kind as to raise the first ward so that Tom and I can have a little chat?"

"Are you going to taunt him?" George asked.

"I am," Harry confirmed.

"Damn it, I'm on my way up, try and keep him talking for a second or two."

"Okay, everyone keep this channel clear for important messages now. I'll leave it open so you can hear what is going on."

Harry hopped up onto the parapet and cast a couple of spells. The first magnified the area that Tom was leading his troops into, the second allowed those downstairs and hidden to see what was happening.

"Tom, what a pleasant surprise," Harry called. He could see Voldemort stop, and then look up, before he cast a *Sonorus* spell.

"Harry, so sorry I'm early, but I do like to see old friends. Are you ready to die?"

"I'm afraid not. Why don't you run away like the coward you are, give up the Dark Tosser malarkey, and we can all get on with our lives?"

"Don't call me that," Voldemort roared. "This is the day that you die, just like your parents."

Harry looked down as an Mmail appeared from Fred. He read it quickly and shrugged. "Yeah?" he taunted, "Well, your mother was a hamster and your father smelt of elderberries! Now go away, or I shall taunt you a second time."

Voldemort looked both taken aback and quite puzzled at what Harry had shouted at him.

"Pull!" George shouted. Harry turned to see Arthur pull the lever releasing the arm of the trebuchet. An object flew high into the sky, mooing loudly. As everyone watched it with a sense of surreal disbelief, it landed in the middle of the Death Eaters, crushing one completely.

"George," Harry said slowly, "did you just hurl a large, live cow at the Death Eaters?"

George nodded and looked very pleased with himself. "It's a Muggle tradition," he explained solemnly. "All battles begin with taunting and a cow hurled by trebuchet."

Harry stared at him for a long moment. "And just who, pray tell, told you that?"

"Hermione, of course! We figured we'd insult the Dark Tosser by doing things the Muggle way, so we asked her for details. She was great! She made us visual guides and everything."

"Was it a real cow?"

George assumed an injured look. "Of course not! That wouldn't be fair to the cow! We Transfigured one of Neville's Giant Devil's Snare, just in case somebody cast a *Finite Incantatem* on it."

"Get back downstairs, you lunatic," Harry said, trying to hide his laughter.

"Yes, my general," George saluted before vanishing.

Harry shook his head and grinned, wondering how long it would be before the Weasley twins found out they'd been pranked by the least likely person in Hogwarts.

Harry turned back to the rampant and pretended to be surprised. "Are you still here?" he demanded of Voldemort.

Voldemort appeared to be hopping mad, and a team of Death Eaters were dismantling the wards that were stopping them. They succeeded, and ran forward, only to hit another hidden one. A few random cries of "Ni!" drifted down from the children on the ramparts.

"Your childish wards won't be able to stop us for long," Voldemort snarled. "We know your plans, and we know that you're not ready."

Harry looked away from Voldemort. "Close the trap," he ordered.

"Wards are up," came Bill's replies a few seconds later.

"About that, Tom," Harry said. "You see, your death today is about as likely as Bellatrix and Narcissa divorcing their husbands and joining me."

Voldemort smirked, until two female voices shouted, "Avada Kedavra!" Lucius Malfoy and Rodolphus Lestrage fell to the ground, extremely dead. Bellatrix activated her Mmail Portkey immediately. Narcissa paused momentarily to flatten Marcus Flint with a Blasting Curse and then followed suit. Both women vanished before any of the Death Eaters knew what was going on, appearing next to Harry.

Harry reached out and grabbed Bellatrix's arm. Without hesitation, or with any real gentleness, he launched himself into the Dark Mark and quickly severed all ties she had to Voldemort.

Bellatrix screamed and fell to the floor. "Damn," she muttered. "You certainly pack a punch," she said with smirk as she climbed back to her feet.

She cast a *Sonorus* charm. "Consider this my resignation, you half-blood bastard," she yelled. "I'm going to dance on your grave, you misogynistic prick."

Voldemort's face glowed molten red as he screamed in rage.

Narcissa cast her own *Sonorus* charm. "Did you really think I was going to be a whore for you, you disgusting, ignorant, illiterate, illegitimate son of a goat? The dance lessons were Harry's idea, and he played you like the monkey you are. And believe me, when you're decomposing, doing something useful for the first time, I shall join my sister in dancing on your grave!"

"Dementors, attack," Voldemort ordered, sweeping his hand forward. The Dementors came from behind the Death Eaters, gliding forward in their typical eerie manner.

"I didn't know they were coming," Bellatrix said apologetically. "Want me to go down there and scare 'em away?"

Harry looked at her and groaned. "Oh Merlin, you're going through that 'I've just been released from Voldemort' high, aren't you?"

She winked at him.

"Go find your boyfriend, and make sure he survives," he ordered.

She grinned and dashed away. "What about me?" Narcissa asked.

Harry indicated his friends. "You're with them."

She nodded and walked over to stand next to Ginny. "I think you're the first girl who's ever had her boyfriend arrange a complete revolution just so he can get some time to get her naked."

Ginny laughed, and offered her hand. "It's nice to meet you in person. Harry's actually said some nice things about you."

Narcissa shook her hand. "Well, we can catch up later, but for now, we have some Dementors to deal with."

"Okay guys, let's round 'em up. *Expecto Patronum*!" Harry's Patronus rocketed out of his hand like it had been shot from a gun and then floated down to the ground. It was soon joined by Ginny's wolf, Hermione's otter, and Ron's Jack Russell terrier. There was another incantation and a large bear joined the others.

Harry looked at Narcissa, who shrugged.

"I *am* a Black," she pointed out.

The five Patronuses seemed to have no problem rounding up all the Dementors, and because they were so far away, the depressing effect didn't reach them.

"*Youngling, leave the soulless ones to us,*" Gwyneth's voice echoed in his ear.

"Prepare yourselves," Harry ordered.

"For what?" Narcissa asked.

"Another of Harry's little surprises," Ginny replied cheerfully.

"There they are," Harry called, pointing to the east. With sunlight glinting on their wings, a flight of dragons swooped toward Hogwarts. There was an overwhelming feeling of freedom and triumph coming from the dragons. Gwyneth was in the lead, with Charlie and Crenth flying next to her. They dived down, and as one, seemed to take a deep breath, before they exhaled, launching a torrent of fire straight at the Dementors.

There was an unholy scream of agony, and a black cloud of smoke slowly rose toward the heavens. The dragons turned, still in perfect formation, and flew straight through it, breaking it up.

The five Patronuses on the floor padded around silently as they looked at each other, and then slowly faded out of existence.

Gwyneth flew around and perched on the battlements near Harry.

"*Perfect timing,*" Harry told her.

She smirked and nudged him firmly. "*It's going to take us a while to recharge,*" she said silently.

Voldemort looked stunned at the ease in which his secret force had been decimated. "Werewolves, attack," he called.

The werewolves started to run toward the castle, and then vanished suddenly.

"Oh," Harry said, as he looked at Tom. "Did I forget to mention that the werewolves work for me as well? I am getting forgetful in my old age."

"Oh my," Narcissa murmured, looking down at the field. "Voldemort is upset, isn't he?"

"This will only delay your death," Voldemort roared. "Trolls, Banshees, Red Caps and Vampires, attack!"

As one body, nearly a thousand Dark creatures of various sorts started their charge toward the doors of Hogwarts.

Ron pulled out his wand and set off a firework high into the sky. From behind him, a cheer went up as Arthur launched the first barrage of caltrops into the air. They fell, spread over a large expanse of grass, in front of the charging creatures.

Another firework from Ron, and a hail of arrows came out from the Forbidden Forest, landing in the middle of the charging army.

As the banshees moved to the front, Ron cast a spell, and ten students, led by Neville, ran out from the castle. They were wearing thick ear muffs. Each carried a basket, from which they pulled out mandrakes. The plants immediately started to scream – the noise unearthly and inhumane, even from the distance that Harry and the others were.

The banshees shrieked and tried to stop, only to be trampled from behind by the Red Caps.

“Get out of there, now,” Harry’s voice rang out. The students turned and sprinted back to Hogwarts, stuffing the mandrakes back into the baskets as they ran.

The Red Caps were the first to meet the ever-thickening zone of caltrops, as Arthur launched more and more into the sky. They seemed to ignore them – right until they stepped on them. Then they screamed in agony and started to attack each other.

It was absolute carnage, and the vampires and trolls had no chance as their erstwhile allies turned on them.

“What was Snape’s potion?” Harry asked curiously as they watched Voldemort’s forces enthusiastically attack each other.

“Bloodlust mixed with confounding and hallucinogenic potions,” Arthur replied as he watched the carnage. “They have no idea who they are fighting at the moment.”

“Voldemort doesn’t seem to know what to do,” Ron noted.

“He’s not used to surprises,” Narcissa said. “He’s used to everyone bowing and scraping to him. This is the first time he’s met organised resistance, and the first time that he hasn’t had complete control over a situation. The Death Eaters are going to be more of a handful than these beasts, though.”

“Arthur, send up another load of caltrops, see if you can land them on the remaining fighters.”

“Aye, Harry,” Arthur replied and sent up another load. “That was the last batch.”

“I know your tricks, Potter,” Voldemort shouted. “You might have dealt with those mindless beasts, but your dragons can’t help you with their fire anymore, and now you are going to face the might of my finest soldiers. Enjoy your last few moments alive.”

From down at the bottom of the castle, the faint sounds of music started. Harry blinked in surprise before he started to laugh. The music slowly gained in volume as first one person, then another, cast a *Sonorus* spell.

Harry turned back to face the Dark Lord and prepared to join in.

“Harry, what’s going on?” Hermione asked.

“The twins haven’t finished with Voldemort yet,” Harry whispered, his head turned away from Voldemort. He took a deep breath, and with the backup of a thousand combined voices, he started to sing.

*Oh Tommy boy, the wands, the wands are calling
From lake to lake, and down the old schools side
The summer’s gone, and all your men are dying
‘Tis you, ‘tis you must go and I must bide.*

“That’s awful,” Hermione groaned.

“So you don’t want to hear the rest of the lyrics?”

“I do,” Narcissa murmured. “I’ve never seen Voldemort quite that shade of puce before.”

“Mm. Looks like he’s been taking lessons from my Uncle Vernon,” Harry muttered before starting the next verse.

*And if you flee, when all your men are dying
And I’m not dead, as dead you soon will be
I’ll come and find the place where you are lying
And kneel and say a curse or two from me.*

“Did I ever mention that I love my brothers?” Ginny asked. “They were drunk the first time they sung this.”

“I’m not surprised,” Hermione sighed. “You’d have to be drunk to butcher ‘O Danny Boy’ like this. But,” she said after a brief pause, looking down, “I’ve never seen anyone be literally hopping mad before. Give me those lyrics.”

*And you shall hear, tho' soft I tread about me
And all my dreams will warm and sweeter be
If you'll not fail to tell me that you hate me
And you will rot in Hell for all eternity.*

"Prepare to die, all of you!" Voldemort screamed, as spittle flew haphazardly from his mouth. The Dark Lord raised his arms, and with a huge blast of magic, every caltrop was blown apart, and every ward between the Death Eaters and Hogwarts was destroyed.

"Oh bugger," Harry groaned, before he cancelled the *Sonorus* spell and jumped off the parapet.

Voldemort went down on one knee, exhausted from the massive expenditure of magic. "Attack!" he ordered his Death Eaters.

"Bugger?" Narcissa asked, ignoring the cheers from the Death Eaters below.

Ron smirked at her. "That was for the Dark Tosser's benefit. The people downstairs aren't just here for their musical ability."

"Which is probably a good thing," Narcissa murmured. "Hogwarts is not known for singing lessons."

"Well, Miss Black," Ron said, "a few weeks ago I'd be either trying to curse you or be swearing that you're evil because you're Draco's mother, but I've been forced to grow up a little, and even I can see how you've helped Harry. So, welcome to Hogwarts. I hope you enjoy your stay."

Narcissa smiled faintly. "Thank you, Mr Weasley. And congratulations on your brother's new job."

Ron nodded. "This is my girlfriend and, I hope, my future wife, Hermione Granger."

Narcissa looked at her for a long moment, and then took a deep breath. "I've heard so much about you. We probably have a lot to talk about. Would you be willing to help me learn what it's like to come into our world?"

"I would be delighted, Miss Black."

Harry smiled. "Okay, Ron, Hermione, you two stay up here and direct things – listen for my prompts before you start activating the traps. Ginny, Narcissa, get downstairs and join the others. Arthur, keep the young ones up here, it's going to get messy down there."

"What about you?" Ginny asked.

Harry leaned over and kissed her quickly. He grinned at Gwyneth before he looked back at Ginny. "I'm bait," he said with a grin as he jumped onto the parapet, and back-flipped off.

Narcissa jumped forward and stared down. "I thought he was a wolf?" she asked in a stunned voice.

"He is," Ginny said, "and a hawk as well. Now come on, we don't want to miss the start of the dance."

Harry swooped down and came to the stop in front of the great doors. The Death Eaters were still a goodly distance away as they ran toward him past the corpses of the dead Dark creatures, doing in the occasional still-rampaging Red Cap as they went.

"Grass," he ordered quietly.

There were screams of agony as the first of the traps was popped. Minerva's Spellwork turned the grass to needle-sharp glass. Harry gulped as his enhanced eyesight allowed him to pick up what happened when the front line of Death Eaters tripped and fell face first onto it.

"Explosions," he whispered.

Four discs exploded from the ground and hovered, waist high. With a devastating suddenness they exploded, flinging potion-coated shrapnel at the invading wizards, who had stopped to deal with the glass.

The effect was devastating, as scores of Death Eaters were, literally, cut down. Harry could hear the sounds of panic from them, but Voldemort's voice kept them attacking. A cry went up, saying that they were trapped, but they had no escape. They had to keep going. Any sign of desertion was met with a Killing Curse from Voldemort.

A number of Death Eaters cast '*Finite Incantatem*' to take care of the grass. In the wash of magic, the cow turned back into a giant Devil's Snare, which started rolling towards Voldemort like a malevolent tumbleweed, forcing the Dark Lord to divert his attention for a few critical moments.

"Ron, Hermione, take over the traps now. Would everyone else like to join me?"

The doors to Hogwarts swung open, and the werewolves streamed out, going to the far right. After them came the Aurors, going to the left. In absolute perfect unison, all two hundred and eleven goblins, Mackrack and Blutwood at the fore, marched out to take the centre. Finally, behind the goblins, came the Hogwarts and Beauxbatons students, all proudly wearing their school uniforms.

"We were wondering when you were going to allow us to join you," Blutwood grunted. "We were getting worried that you were going to kill them all before we could get any."

Harry smiled. "Don't worry – there's plenty for everybody."

He cast another *Sonorus* spell, keeping an eye on the Death Eaters.

"This is it, my friends," he said, his voice echoing around his allies. "Remember your training, trust the people behind us to do their jobs, do not get killed, and remember that we are fighting for our dream, we are fighting for our future, and we will not be defeated."

"This is the greatest army that has been assembled for nearly a thousand years. Each group is capable on its own, but together, as a team, we are unbeatable. So raise your weapons, face the enemy, and attack. Attack for your families, attack for your future, attack for the freedom they are trying to take away. Everything we have practised for is standing before us, and at the end is a party that you will never forget."

Harry called his sword and raised it aloft. It started to glow with its own light as he poured his magic into it. "Riddle, I'm coming for you," he yelled. "Charge!"

Harry started to run, his sword held aloft like a beacon, and behind him, the others started to run as well.

Up ahead of him, Ron and Hermione were activating the traps left, right, and centre. The combined intellect of some of the most Machiavellian minds ever to grace Hogwarts wreaked havoc and chaos in the attackers.

Death Eaters found themselves transformed into small animals that were promptly squished by their comrades. Some found themselves completely distracted as hexes and jinxes were cast on them, and they were soon cut down. Others found themselves attacking their own comrades.

"Avada Kedavra!" The first offensive spell from the Death Eaters was cast directly at Harry. He didn't stop, or even do anything to protect himself. From behind him there was a shout, and a wall appeared in front of him. It exploded as the curse hit it, allowing Harry to run through the dust. A Cruciatus curse was met with equal contempt.

And then Harry met the first Death Eater. His sword swung out as he jumped into the fray, foregoing magic, concentrating on fighting as hard and as fast as he could. He wasn't particularly skilled with a sword, but he didn't need to be.

The Death Eaters didn't seem to know what to do with a physical attack from even one person. Then the werewolves and the goblins arrived, and they were totally outmatched. The werewolves were carrying all sorts of melee weapons that Remus had picked from the Hogwarts dungeons. The elves had made sure they were all razor-sharp and coated in some of Snape's finest potions, ensuring that they were deadly. Remus was in the fore, with Sirius next to him, both using their wands to protect the werewolves as they hacked their way into the Death Eaters.

The goblins didn't even slow down as their charge encountered the enemy. Screams of agony and pain marked their progress as their axes cleared a path. Blutwood and his friends seemed to be having a wonderful time as they hacked and chopped their way through the Death Eaters. They might not have had much magic, but their weapons were more than capable of diverting spells aimed at them, which the Death Eaters found to their cost when their own Killing Curses were reflected back to them.

There was a huge volley of curses from the massed Hogwarts and Beauxbatons students and Aurors. The Death Eaters, already stunned by the sheer savagery they faced, were unprepared for actual magic.

Harry could vaguely hear Ron and Hermione's voices as they called forth more traps and directed the attacks. He absently cut down a couple of Death Eaters who were doing a waltz, before he leaped into the air and turned into his hawk, the sword becoming part of his form just like his armour. He swooped high so that he could look down on the whole field.

It was absolute carnage. A slaughter. The Death Eaters, unaccustomed to working together, unused to anyone standing up to them, and reliant primarily on two curses that simply weren't working, all tried to escape, self-preservation at the fore of their minds.

Unfortunately for them, there was nowhere to go.

To the south, their way was blocked by the lake. To the north was the road to Hogsmeade and freedom, but to Harry's surprise, a herd of centaurs, led by Firenze, had broken out of the forest and galloped across the grounds to block that route with a hail of arrows. Retreating toward Voldemort, of course, was certain death.

The fact that Voldemort's right hand man, Lucius, had been cut down before the fight even started was another point against them. They had no one to lead them, and everyone remaining had seen what had happened to the creatures that had tried to attack a supposedly defenceless Hogwarts – utter annihilation.

Harry could see Voldemort look on from the back, and could feel that he was slowly regaining his power, though some of it had been wasted on the attacking Devil's Snare, which had been blown to bits, the individual parts incinerated. The Dark Lord's expression was that of absolute rage as he looked at his Death Eaters being overrun.

To the left, he watched as two Hogwarts students carried a wounded werewolf from the battle. They were weaponless and completely dependent on the students casting the shield spells behind them, but they didn't appear to be worried.

Ginny, Blaise, Narcissa, Snape, Bellatrix and most of the Weasleys were fighting together, and while there were a lot of very good fighters out there, it was Bellatrix who was doing the most damage. Her power and ability was second to none as she tore through her former associates with a vengeance and viciousness that made Harry wince.

Some Aurors to his left looked like they were having some problems, but before he could react, Ron's voice roared out orders and the Beauxbatons students moved to help them out.

There was a bellow of triumph from Hagrid as he came running around the castle from the north. Flying above him, in a wedge shape, were the Thestrals that Harry had asked Hagrid to train. The invisible skeleton horses rampaged through the Death Eaters, biting and kicking. The centaurs followed on the ground, not using their arrows for fear of hitting the thestrals, but corralling any Death Eaters that were trying to get away and throwing them back into play.

With the realisation that everything was under control, Harry flew down into the middle of the largest group of Death Eaters left and went back to the job at hand – destroying Death Eaters.

There was a loud thump next to him, as Gwyneth landed, squashing four Death Eaters. She roared and attacked; her claws and teeth truly terrifying.

"I surrender," a Death Eater shouted as Harry aimed for him. Harry thought about killing him for a second, his wolf's instincts calling out for more blood. He repressed the thought and stunned him, making the spell as obvious as possible. Seeing their salvation, more and more Death Eaters started to surrender, laying down their wands.

The surrenders were accepted, but those who didn't surrender faced the Aurors, faced the Hogwarts students, faced the Werewolves, and faced the implacable Goblins. And those remaining faced Harry.

Some of the Death Eaters tried to fight, launching curse after curse. Harry could see out of the corner of his eye as members of his army were cut down and picked up by the stretcher bearers, who carried them back to Poppy and the other volunteer nurses.

A rumbling spell caused Harry to change directions. Voldemort had finally joined the fight.

That allowed some of the Death Eaters a clear chance to escape, but they soon ran into the wards that Bill and Fleur had erected to stop anyone escaping. Harry almost winced as they were decapitated. Bill had certainly given the wards teeth.

Harry reached Voldemort and batted a Killing Curse to one side, before kicking the Dark Lord in the stomach. He grabbed Voldemort's head, and pulled it forward as he drove his knee straight in to Voldemort's face.

Voldemort screamed and cursed Harry, throwing him high into the air. Harry changed into his hawk and dived back down, turning back as he landed in front of Voldemort. "*Diffindo*," he chanted, and a wave of magic swept out of his hand.

Voldemort diverted the spell. "*Accio* glasses!"

Harry's glasses flew from his face. "This will be fun," Voldemort smirked as he cast the Cruciatus at Harry.

Harry swayed to one side. "Forgot my eyes were fixed, didn't you?" he taunted as he threw a few spells back. "Severus makes some good potions. Did you honestly believe that you were going to be able to defeat me with an '*Accio*'?"

Voldemort blocked the spells easily and snarled. He was about to throw one back when a loud cheer went up.

Harry and Voldemort looked around, to find that there were no Death Eaters left. The attack had been completely routed. "That didn't go very well, did it?" he asked Voldemort.

"Incompetents," Voldemort sneered. "When you are dead, I'll have no problem rebuilding them."

"You've lost, Tom," Harry told him, as nearly a thousand of the defenders gathered around.

"Not yet," Voldemort sneered. "I'll defeat you, and with you gone, it won't be hard to take out these traitors."

"*Crucio*!" Bellatrix's voice rang out, and the curse hit Voldemort directly. "Yeah," she crowed, as she danced on the spot. "Who's the daddy now, bitch?!"

"Bellatrix raises a good point," Narcissa agreed. "*Crucio*!"

The Dark Lord screamed in agony as he fell to the ground.

"*Crucio*!" Snape's voice sneered. "See how you like it, you snake-faced bastard!"

"Is this a private party, or can anyone join in?" Sirius asked politely.

"Be our guest," Severus replied cheerfully.

"*Crucio*!" Sirius shouted. "Come on, Remus, this is fun."

Voldemort was shaking on the floor, his voice almost completely gone as he screamed his agony to the sky.

"*Crucio*," this time the spell came from around a hundred different voices as every Auror present seemed to think that it was a good time to get some revenge in.

"You can't die until I kill you," Harry said as he approached the Dark Lord who was still writhing under all the curses. "I had so many plans on how to defeat you, so many moves I've practised. But the problem was that, despite thinking that you were an incompetent, I still over-estimated you. You are a nothing that only got where you have because of the incompetence of the people who were supposed to be fighting you."

"I was planning on fighting you in a duel, but as Bellatrix pointed out, why should I? You would not give me the same honour, so I'm not going to lose any sleep as you suffer your favourite curse."

He pulled out his sword and stepped forward. With an almost anti-climatic sweep, Voldemort, all two pieces of him, breathed no more.

Gwyneth walked up to Harry and nudged him to one side. She opened her mouth, and the Dark Lord's remains were incinerated.

"Thanks," Harry said to her as a huge cheer went up. The grounds thronged with celebrating people, but Harry had to check on the injured before he could allow himself to join in. He headed for the field hospital that had been set up in the shadow of Hogwarts' walls.

"Poppy, what's the score?"

"Absolutely no deaths," the school nurse said proudly. "I've had to re-attach a few limbs, but not much else. The children protecting against the Killing curse and the Cruciatus were outstanding! I've treated fifteen goblins and thirty-two werewolves as well. Everyone will be back on their feet shortly. We were well stocked with all the potions we needed, and our Hufflepuff team were brilliant at rescuing people."

"All right!" Harry cheered, as Ginny, who had finally caught up with him, jumped on him and they kissed firmly.

"How many Death Eaters?" he asked, holding Ginny against him.

"We've got thirty-seven still alive, out of the nearly four hundred who attacked," Percy said. "The courts are going to be very busy over the few weeks, and Severus has agreed to supply us with some extra Veritaserum."

"Mackrack?" Harry called.

"You run an exhilarating fight, Harry," Mackrack said. His father was next to him, polishing his axe with a Death Eater's robe. "The way we like it. Complete and total annihilation of the enemy, with minimal damage to our own people."

Harry grinned and then looked at the carnage staining the grass in front of Hogwarts.

"Oooh, time for us," Fred said to George and Aberforth.

"Indeed it is," Abe agreed. The three of them raised their wands, and the last of their toys were deployed. Spikes appeared from the ground and they started to spray a clear liquid. The liquid bubbled whenever it met blood and flesh, and after a few minutes, the grass was pristine again.

"I guess," Harry said, as Arthur and Molly appeared with the younger kids, "that the only thing left is for me to say 'Thanks'." Gwyneth nudged him, and he reluctantly released his girlfriend and jumped onto the dragon so that he could be seen. "I said beforehand that this was the moment we had been waiting for, and we have succeeded beyond our wildest dreams. We've defeated our enemy, and the next time a Dark Lord thinks about taking control, he will look at today and he will shudder!

"So, the only thing left to say is that in the kitchen, the house elves have been preparing a feast the likes of which have never been seen. There is food for everyone, drinks for all – and you can all invite your families to come and join in!"

There was a huge cheer from Harry's army.

"Albus, can you invite the Centaurs to join us? I'm going to get our refugees and the rest of the Beauxbatons people. Madame Maxime, will you mind if I bring everyone?"

"Of course not," she said, a proud look on her face as she surveyed her own students. "This is the time for a real party!"

"Minerva, Filius, Blaise, Susan, Padma, Parvati, Lavender, Luna, Ron, Hermione, Ginny, and all the Weasleys and partners, can you create everything we'll need?"

"No problem, Harry," Ginny said happily.

"Abe, Fred, George, go get the Butterbeer." There was another cheer as they nodded in agreement.

"Hagrid, can you get some cows for our dragon friends?"

"Course I can, Harry!"

"Everyone else, invite your partners, get out of uniform, and prepare for a party we'll never forget!"

There was another roar as Harry finished and he vanished from Gwyneth's back. He appeared at Beauxbatons, where all the students were talking softly, worried looks on their faces.

"You won!" Dudley shouted as soon as he saw Harry.

Harry grinned and nodded.

"Woohoo!" Sheryl yelled, as she started to celebrate wildly, before she grabbed Dudley and kissed him passionately. The cheer was taken up by the others. Gabrielle and Jenny both ran up to Harry and hugged him.

"Come on," Harry shouted, Gabrielle translating next to him. "We've got a party going on at Hogwarts and you're all invited!"

There was another cheer as Harry made another rope Portkey.

Back at Hogwarts, the party was already in full swing, having taken over the Great Hall, the entry hall, and several of the courtyards for the centaurs, who didn't feel comfortable indoors. The humans, werewolves and goblins were mingling freely, as were the French and English students. Harry smiled widely; this was *exactly* what he had wanted.

As he walked around, he started to hear the stories of the heroism that he had missed during his fight. How Albus and Minerva had fought as a team to ensure that no Hogwarts students were killed, how Filius and Pomona had directed the students responsible for the shield charms, and had ensured that they kept their focus. How Arthur and Molly had shielded the younger students from the carnage.

The noise level was incredible as more and more people joined the party, either Apparating in, just outside the wards, or coming through a Floo opened in a fireplace just off the Main hall. He could see Luna talking to her father, describing the battle, while Colin Creevey was already showing off the pictures he had already developed.

Gwyneth was with Charlie, Crenth and Hagrid, and Hagrid looked like every dream he had ever had had come true at once.

He walked over and hugged each of his friends, one by one, to be hugged back in an exuberant manner.

He found Narcissa talking to Draco and Terry. "Potter," Draco called. "Thanks."

Harry nodded at him, clapped Terry on the back. Then he hugged Narcissa. "You're not bad, for a pureblood."

Narcissa laughed. "Albus has your sense of humour," she told him.

"Oh?"

"He offered me a position as the Muggle Studies professor next year. Professor Thornwhistle is retiring."

Harry blinked at her. "Are you going to take it?"

She nodded slowly. "It would certainly force me to examine all my prejudices closely, and I'll have almost a year to prepare. I told him that as long as I get Hermione as an assistant, I'd do it. Besides, someone once told me that living off your ancestors' accumulated wealth was somewhat despicable."

Harry smiled at her. "Good," he leaned in closer and whispered, "and we still have our lessons to finish."

Narcissa kissed him on the cheek. "We do indeed, Benjamin."

"Pansy's dead, if you're wondering," Draco drawled.

Harry looked at him. "Oh?"

"Bitch tried to attack Ter in the back."

"She probably blamed me for turning you gay," Terry pointed out.

"You didn't turn me gay, I always was."

Harry looked at Narcissa, as the two boys bantered while holding hands. She rolled her eyes at him and winked.

Harry bowed to her and turned, looking for Bellatrix. He couldn't see her, so he wandered into Hogwarts.

Snape was leaning against a wall, as he watched Bellatrix and Neville.

"You ruined my life," Neville shouted.

"I did a lot of that to a lot of people," Bellatrix agreed. "What are you expecting to get out of this? An apology? Sure, I regret what I did. I'd like to pretend that it was the Dark Mark that made me do it, but it wasn't. I was doing what I thought was right. I was wrong."

Neville growled and punched her.

Bellatrix dropped to the floor, but was soon back on her feet, her wand in her hand. Neville stared at her, his eyes practically glowing with wrath. "You're not worth it," he finally said. "I'm not going to spend the rest of my life hating someone like you. You helped save my friends' lives, so you walk. But I hope we never meet again." Neville nodded to Snape and walked toward Harry.

He looked at Harry, and then offered his hand. "You did the right thing; it just hurt. I'm sorry."

Harry took it and shook it. "I'm not the only one who has grown up, Neville Longbottom."

Neville nodded. "It happens to the best of us."

Harry clapped him on the back, before he walked over to Snape. "Do you take responsibility for her?"

Snape sighed and nodded.

“Bellatrix, your actions have earned you your freedom, or perhaps your damnation.” He cast a spell on her, and then on Snape. “Your magic is now under Serverus’ control,” he said. “Look after him.”

Bellatrix slowly smiled. “Thank you,” she whispered, before pouncing on Snape and kissing him senseless. There were cries of “Eeewwww!” from the nearest groups of students, who quickly found other places to be. The sight of Snape being snogged was just too much for most of them.

Harry smirked and turned back to Neville. “Snape’s loved her for a long time, and if she even thinks of being bad, Snape can cut off her magic now. And I trust him to make the right decision.”

Neville nodded. “I still wish she was dead,” he confessed.

“Me, too,” Harry sighed. “But we can’t have everything. Now, let’s go back to the party, and you can finally tell Hannah you like her.”

Neville flushed bright red.

Hours later, the party was still going strong, but Harry no longer cared. He’d checked to make sure everyone was alive and danced with a few people, including a delirious Orla, a delighted Jenny and a radiant Gabrielle. He’d talked to Luna’s dad and deciphered his annoying and alienating alliteration, and spent time with all his friends and family.

As far as he was concerned, his job was officially over now.

From: Harry James Potter

To: Weasleys, Future Weasleys, Hogwarts Staff, Close Friends, my Godfather, Hagrid, Werewolves, Goblins, Students, Abe & Everyone else I can think of

Subject: Me.

For the past month, I’ve practically taken control of the nation in one way or another. I’ve usurped power left, right, and centre. I’ve forced some of my alpha instincts to the fore to ensure that Voldemort wouldn’t stand a chance.

And he didn’t. He is now thoroughly dead, with the only regret being that we didn’t leave enough for Narcissa and Bellatrix to do their victory dance on.

So, I hereby cede control of Hogwarts back to Albus, retract my claim to alpha status of the werewolves, and remove my claws from Percy.

I’m sixteen years old. What I want from the next two years is to spend quality time with my girlfriend, teach some decent defence lessons to the Hogwarts students, spend a term in Beauxbatons with Madame Maxime and Gabrielle, learn some new spells for fun, and generally be a teenager again.

That means that I won’t be available to pull your irons out of the fire.

Fred, George, and Abe: I’m happy to do some promotional stuff, but it will be up to you guys to manage your business.

Percy: you know what the Ministry needs, so do it – and remember that your brothers will be mocking your every move, so it won’t go to your head.

Molly and Arthur: thanks for all your help.

Lavender, Parvati and Blaise: we can still talk about your new shops; just don’t expect me to make any decisions for you. I’m here for advice only.

If anyone else is thinking of a new business, study the amount of work that Blaise put in; that’s the sort of professionalism I’ll be expecting in a proposal.

It’s been an incredibly fun few weeks, full of drama, fighting, and more time in Poppy’s care than I wanted. The only time I want to see her now should be for lessons in healing people, not learning new ways to kill them.

Remus, Sirius, that means you two are again nominally in charge of me. Of course, you should remember that I am a stupidly powerful wizard who just took out Voldemort and I am an assistant professor – just a friendly warning.

Oh, and Remus, as a close friend of yours – that moustache of yours, it REALLY makes it seem like you prefer the company of other men, if you get my drift.

As general statement: No, I’m not going to talk to the press, nor am I going to give autographs, pose for chocolate frog cards, join the Cannons, or utilise what just happened in any other way. I am going to snog the hell out of my girlfriend, play Quidditch and study.

Thank you all for letting me take control when I needed to, and thank you for trusting me despite the fact that I was flying by the seat of my trousers half the time.

I’m prouder than I can say of every single one of you who stood up and was counted when it was needed. We’ve sent a message that will

reverberate throughout history – that if a few strong people stand up and are counted when times are dark, the Dark Tossers will simply have no chance.

With profound thanks,

This is Harry James Potter signing off and going back to being Harry, a somewhat normal teenager.

--

Audaces fortuna juvat The final taunt to Voldemort: Your mother was a hamster and your father smelt of elderberries

Harry stalked through the dance floor, and grabbed Ginny, as the whole room seemed to light up with Mmail notifications.

“Hey,” she said, kissing him soundly.

“I need some help.”

“Oh?”

“Trousers are itchy.”

Ginny looked confused, before she slowly blushed. “Really?”

He nodded and smiled at her. “Abso-bloody-lutely, love.”

Ginny grinned and took his hand, and dragged him away from the party, heading straight toward his room.

From: Hermione Granger

To: Ginny Weasley

Attachment: Spell.pmt

Subject: Silencing Charms

Ginny, please find attached some very powerful silencing charms.

Please use them!

A disturbed Hermione

From: Blaise

To: Friends

Subject: Current Harry and Ginny Scorecard

I went to Harry’s room to fetch my dress shoes, but the door was charmed shut with a most amazing combination of spells. For reasons unknown, a silencing spell was not among them, which let me hear the most amazing collection of sounds.

Here’s the current count:

18 religious declarations

16 exhortations for more

15 expletive based encouragements

14 non-verbal sounds

8 verified completions

And the night is still young...

We need to get Professor Dumbledore to arrange for Harry to teach some sex education classes for the other guys.

B

From: Luna

To: Professor Snape

Cc: My friends

Subject: Potion for Ginny

Dear Professor Snape,

Please can you make a voice restoration potion for Ginny, it sounds like she is going to need it.

Yours,

Luna

--
The Truth Is Out There

From: Gabrielle

To: Big sister

Subject: What Harry and Ginny are doing.

It certainly sounds like a lot of fun. Can I try it with Harry next?

Gabby

From: Fleur

To: Little sister

Subject: Re: What Harry and Ginny are doing.

I'll explain what they're doing when you're (much) older, I promise. You wouldn't want to do that, trust me.

Fleur

From: Gabby

To: Fleur

Subject: Re[2]: What Harry and Ginny are doing

Fleur, my lovely sister, please allow me to point out that, just like you, I am Veela and, as such, know exactly what they are doing...

Hence my question.

Gabby

From: Fleur

To: Little and YOUNG sister

Subject: Re[3]: What Harry and Ginny are doing

Oh.

In that case.

HELL NO! NOT WITH HARRY, AND NOT WITH ANYONE ELSE UNTIL YOU'RE THIRTY!

Fleur - Your BIG sister who knows ALL the Veela secrets!

From: The prettier sister

To: The Ugly Sister

Subject: Re[4]: What Harry and Ginny are doing

Spoilsport!

Gabrielle

From: Seamus

To: Dean

Subject: Potter

You do know that he's my God, right? Never mind defeating Voldemort, the man's a machine!

Seamus

Albus Dumbledore sat in his office, his feet on his desk, and a glass of Butterbeer in his hand. Today had been a wonderful end to a wonderful week. He could feel the stress caused by Voldemort falling away from him.

He looked at the shelf in front of him and smiled at the destroyed ornaments that held pride of place: an old ring, a diary, a locket, a cup, Wormtail's silver hand, and the newest piece, a snake's head. His Order had managed to find each and every one.

He soon turned away. Tomorrow was another day, and he suspected the party was going to continue through most of it. His school was full of life, full of people who had gathered around one extraordinary boy – a boy who had managed to find allies and arranged for Voldemort to reveal his own incompetence.

In the end, it had been easy, but that was probably the point. Voldemort was only ever as dangerous as the world allowed him to be – and once the world stood up and took notice, or at least the parts of the world that counted, he was dispatched as he should have been many years before.

He was incredibly proud of Harry, and was looking forward to another day of talking about what had happened and hearing about how remarkable his students truly were.

He didn't think he would have been able to be any prouder of Harry, until he had read the boy's last Mmail. To give up so much power spoke volumes for Harry's character, and his pride in Harry had increased another notch.

He was quite sure that Harry was going to be planning pranks, and generally being a teenager, and he found himself looking forward to them immensely.

He paused as a faint sound drifted through his ceiling. He really needed to talk to his new professor about silencing charms!

From: Ginny

To: Sirius

Subject: That "Talk" you gave Harry.

All is forgiven.

Thank you! Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you!

Thank you,

Ginny

--
Audaces fortuna juvat

Fin.