

## Hope 1 - Beauxbatons

The wind rushing in his hair always made him forget his troubles. It allowed him to forget that he was basically unhappy with life. He'd never thought that his life would get worse after defeating Voldemort but, in a way, it had. He'd lost the freedom he'd fought for. Everywhere he went he was treated like a rock star. The press hounded him every time he took a step out of his small home.

As the sun set over the horizon, the air temperature dropped a little bit, causing his cheeks to turn numb, and his knuckles to turn white. It wasn't comfortable, but it was a sure sign that he was still alive, despite everything.

Relationships were impossible with the amount of pressure his girlfriends were subjected to. Even an attempt at something more than a platonic relationship with Ginny had lasted till they had kissed and realised that they really didn't feel that way about each other. His other girlfriends had wilted under the pressure, or only wanted to be with him because of another aspect of his life that he hated: his fame. He'd been willing to chalk it up to experience the first time an ex-girlfriend had appeared in the press with a "kiss and tell" article about their time together. Even the fact that it had been extremely flattering had not been of comfort.

The second time it had happened – especially when the reason they had split was that he wasn't willing to take her to all the parties she wanted to go to – had caused him to swear off women altogether.

He rolled and flew upside down under one of the opposing Chasers, distracting them so that they missed a catch, and one of his team mates intercepted, before going on to score.

With Ron and Hermione living the fairytale and being married for two years now, it left him very much alone with few friends that he could really call on for companionship. Even his relationship with Ginny had deteriorated over the years, mainly because she had still been in school when he had finally defeated Voldemort, and they had never regained the closeness they had enjoyed before he had left. He was still welcome at the Weasleys', but he didn't want to be an imposition.

What hadn't helped was that he had gone for a career in the only thing he loved – playing Quidditch.

The reason it didn't help was because he had proved to be very good at the game. Exceptionally good.

And now, three years later, he was the Seeker for England in the final of the World Cup. Below him, thousands and thousands of wizards and witches were cheering him on; opposite him Viktor Krum circled the stands, looking for the Golden Snitch.

The match was well-balanced, at one hundred points each, both teams playing at the top of their game, and it was obvious that the game would be decided by the skills of the Seeker.

It had been billed as the ultimate match up between the two best young stars in the game. But where as Viktor courted the fame, Harry hated it, but he put up with it as a necessary evil for playing the sport that he loved.

As he swooped over a stand, he could see Ron and Hermione cheering him on. Ron had surprised everyone by entering the Ministry, where as Hermione, having spent two years in a Muggle University, graduated with top honours in record time. She was now Head of Muggle Research for the Ministry, and was currently working with the Healers on a way of integrating Muggle Medicine with Magical.

He paused his thought as a glint of gold caught his eye, but shook it off as he realised it was the pocket watch of a dignitary.

He closed his eyes and idly criss-crossed the pitch, dodging Bludgers without really trying. This position hadn't come easily for him; he'd been injured several times, once having his shoulder destroyed as he'd allowed himself to get hit so he wouldn't miss the Snitch. That had been last year in the quarterfinals of the League Cup. The Cannons, the team he played for during the regular season, had been knocked out of the semi-finals, as he'd been unable to play.

Ron still hadn't forgiven him.

His ever-growing fame meant that even getting out of his house and going shopping was becoming impossible. People gathered around him, asking him questions, demanding his attention – as if everything he had sacrificed wasn't enough. And the press were voracious; every thing he did was worthy of print and pseudo-genuine psycho-analysis.

It was at the stage now where he felt like an outcast in his own country. He had no freedom, and no chance of making new friends. Even the D.A., his old school friends, treated him more with awe than with friendship. The way he had battled Voldemort impinged permanently on their consciousness.

A roar from the crowd focused his attention, and he saw the Snitch – it was hovering about forty feet off the ground. He put his broom into a racing dive, aware out of his peripheral vision that Viktor was doing the same.

He kept his eyes firmly on the Snitch as he urged yet more speed out of his broom. Viktor swung into him, trying to nudge him off course, but he ignored the other Seeker, all his concentration on the small golden ball.

He reached forwards, trying to get that extra inch, and could see Viktor mirroring him.

As they got nearer, the Snitch suddenly shot straight up and over their heads.

Without thinking, Harry raised his legs onto the broom and leapt off backwards. He somersaulted once, and shot his hand out, catching the Snitch one-handed.

He raised his fist in jubilation before he realised he was still falling.

He hit the ground with a thump that echoed around the suddenly silent stadium.

He shakily raised his hand, showing he still had the Snitch, before he fainted from the pain in his other shoulder.

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“Hermione, Ron, dis is my father, Jean-Sebastian,” Fleur said with a small smile and a cute little bow. She retreated a few steps and stood next to Bill.

“Enchantè, but please, call me Jean,” Jean said, holding out his hand to Ron, and then, after shaking it, he kissed Hermione’s hand suavely. “It’s a pleasure to meet you both. William has told me a lot about you.”

“Thank you,” Hermione replied. “It’s a pleasure to meet you as well. I must complement you on your accent.”

“Ahh,” Jean smiled. “I’m afraid that my daughter likes her accent and has no wish to change. I, on the other hand, have no need of artifice.”

“Papa!” Fleur complained.

Jean shot a smile at his daughter. “Won’t you please take a seat?”

Ron, Hermione, Bill, and Fleur sat down around the elegant table and Jean sat at the head.

“I have a problem,” Jean said slowly. “And I need your advice on how to proceed. I am in a, how do you say, awkward situation for a man to be in?”

Hermione exchanged a long look with her husband and turned to face the French politician. “Why don’t you tell us what the problem is, and how we can help?”

“What do you know about Veela?” he asked.

“Descended from Mountain Nymphs. Veela have the power to enthrall a man with a simple look, and when angry, can change into a birdlike form,” Hermione recited instantly.

“Bravo,” Fleur clapped. “She is excellent, non?”

“Indeed,” Jean agreed.

“So, is this about Harry?” Hermione guessed. There weren’t many other reasons that a senior French politician would ask to see them.

Jean nodded.

“And?” Ron prompted.

“It relates to your fourth year, and the second task of the Triwizard tournament.”

Ron frowned, “Harry rescued me from the Merpeople. And he rescued Gabrielle.”

“Oui,” Fleur whispered softly. “E saved my little sister’s life.”

“But we weren’t in any real danger,” Ron pointed out.

“You weren’t,” Jean replied softly. “Gabrielle, on the other hand, was quite definitely in danger.”

“From what?”

“From ze filthy Merpeople,” Fleur spat angrily. “They do not like ze Veela. Zey are jealous swine.”

Ron and Hermione swung their heads to look at Jean.

“In simple terms, Fleur is correct,” he agreed. “It’s not widely known that the Veela and the Merpeople have been in a state of permanent hostility for several centuries. When Gabrielle was placed in their control, they persuaded the Grindylows to focus on Fleur. They hoped that with her out of the way an ‘accident’ could happen, and Gabrielle would be dead.”

“But why?” Hermione asked.

“To be honest, I’m not sure,” Jean explained. “It’s an enmity that has been going on for a very long time, and the truth of how it started is buried in the sands of history.”

“Zey betrayed us,” Fleur muttered, but went quiet as Jean stared reproachfully at her.

“I was most displeased when I heard that Gabrielle had been placed in danger, and I had a very firm talk with Madam Maxime. She was horrified when she found out. She had believed Albus when he had assured her that there was no danger. She has agreed that she will never again place a child in any form of danger, even in a tournament like that, without full parental consent. I let Gabrielle go to Hogwarts because I thought it would be educational, not life threatening.”

“So, what’s the problem?” Ron asked, moving back onto the matter at hand.

“When Gabrielle realised that she had been saved by ‘Arry, she immediately decided that ‘e waz ‘er mate, and let herself be mated to ‘im.”

Ron lowered his head and banged it softly against the table. “I really don’t want to know the answer to this, but what, exactly, does that mean?”

“Veela are not human, Ron,” Jean explained. “A Veela can be like a normal person, but once they have chosen a mate, it is for life. A Veela will never leave her mate, never cheat on them, and will remain loyal for the rest of their life. If their mate dies early, they will fade away slowly. It is the most powerful form of commitment known to the Wizarding world.”

“But she was only eight!”

“Age is no barrier to Veela emotions,” Jean sighed. “Eight, eighteen, eighty, it makes no difference. When a Veela makes the decision, it is unalterable.”

“I was lucky Fleur hadn’t already made that decision,” Bill interjected with a smile.

“Can’t you just bring Gabrielle over, she whacks on the Veela power, Harry has a fun night, they see if they are compatible, and if not, we all go home?”

Hermione elbowed Ron firmly in the side. “You’ll have to excuse him; he hasn’t quite emerged from the Cro Magnum stage yet.”

Jean tilted his head to one side and nodded. “There are two problems with your scenario,” he explained softly. “The first being that Harry appears immune to Veela powers, and the second that my daughter wants a full relationship with him. And my daughters are nothing if not headstrong.”

“Papa!” Fleur complained for a second time. “We get it from you.” She turned to face Ron. “I tried to put ‘Arry under ze Veela spell, with Bill next to me. ‘E just looked at me and asked me to stop politely.”

“I didn’t think anyone could do that?” Ron half-stated, half-asked.

“Occlumency,” Hermione explained, having put it together quickly. “He’s now a master at keeping his thoughts locked up. Even we have no idea what he’s thinking half the time.” She turned to face Jean again. “So the problems we have are: getting Harry and Gabrielle together, getting Harry to overlook the fact that he’s six years older than her, and persuading him to get into a relationship with her.”

Jean nodded once, sharply. “Alors’, those are indeed the problems.”

“Wait a second,” Ron interrupted. “Exactly why should we be doing this? What does Harry get out of it? He’d really hate being manipulated into a relationship, and well, it sounds like Gabrielle gets what she wants, but what about what Harry wants out of life?”

“A second ago, you were suggesting a one night stand,” Bill pointed out exasperatedly.

“Exactly,” Ron agreed. “A bit of fun – nothing life-changing. This whole thing sounds like you’re planning some sort of marriage for him. He’s only twenty-two and shows no sign at all of settling down.”

“He has to, Ron,” Hermione said softly. “Because if he doesn’t, Gabrielle will go mad.”

“Huh?” Ron asked.

“Veela emotions are tied to their magic. She has mated herself to him, and if she doesn’t have him permanently in her life, she will go insane as her magic takes over her emotions.”

“Wonderful. Sometimes, I really hate the Wizarding world,” Ron sighed. “So, we just tell Harry what the problem is; he’s the most honourable bloke I’ve ever met, so he’ll do the right thing, and Gabrielle can be saved. He’ll give up his future for anyone who needs him.”

“But Gabrielle wants ‘Arry as a lover, not as a man doing ‘is duty. She wants ‘im to be ‘appy as well.”

“Well, that’s all very well and good,” Ron said dryly. “And I applaud the thought, but exactly how is she planning on winning Harry over? The last time I checked, Harry doesn’t exactly hang around with Beauxbatons’ students.”

“That is where you come in,” Jean said with a wry smile. “And is why you are here.”

“You seem to be very calm about this,” Ron grumbled.

“Alors’, I am not. I have, however, had eight years to get used to this idea.” He turned to Bill. “Are you sure you want to get involved with a Veela?”

“Papa!” Fleur complained for the third time.

“Quite sure,” Bill said with a smile. “The benefits do outweigh the negatives.”

“Agreed,” Jean said with a proud smile at his daughter. “But we are sidetracked. I want my daughter sane and happy. To do this, we have to get Harry and Gabrielle in the same location, so that Gabrielle can at least try and win his heart. I have told her that she has eight months before I will tell Harry the truth.”

“This is a bad idea,” Ron sighed. “If there’s one thing Harry hates, it’s being manipulated. I still think we should just tell him the truth.”

“We can’t, Ron,” Hermione replied. “This could be good for Harry. We both think he needs a proper girl. Why not Gabrielle?”

“Because I hardly know her? Because she’s only sixteen? Because we’re having a meeting discussing how to trick Harry into getting close to her?”

“But apart from that?” Hermione asked.

Ron smiled slightly. “It could possibly be a good idea.” He looked up at Jean. “Harry now has a year free. The injury he got in the World Cup final destroyed his shoulder again. The Healers have told him that he can’t be hit by a Bludger for at least a year – if he does, he’ll lose the use of that arm. So at the moment, he’s in a state of shock that the only thing he loves doing has been taken away from him.

“He’s still in St. Mungo’s, in a private ward, so that the press can’t get to him.”

Jean frowned, “That is unfortunate news. I find myself reluctant to take pleasure in the fact that it helps us out.”

“Yeah,” Bill agreed. “Can he still fly?”

“Yes, but not competitively,” Hermione said. “He had his scapula completely destroyed, and while we were able to re-grow it, we can’t speed up the healing any further.”

“Then that is the answer. Beauxbatons needs a new flying instructor,” Jean said.

Hermione turned to Ron. “It could be a good idea, love. Ignore the whole Gabrielle thing for the moment. We both know Harry isn’t happy at this time. He could go to Hogwarts, but he’s still barely on speaking terms with Dumbledore. He can’t do anything else in this country, because the press won’t leave him alone.” She paused and turned to Jean. “You can keep the press out of the school?”

“I can,” he said simply. “Madam Maxime is fully aware of what the situation with Gabrielle is, and feels somewhat responsible for it. If she hadn’t allowed Gabrielle to be taken down, Gabrielle would never have decided that Harry was her mate.”

Hermione turned back to her husband. “So Harry can have a place to recuperate, it will get him out of his house so he doesn’t spend the year moping, and it might make him realise he can be a bit more open around people.”

“He doesn’t speak French,” Ron said.

“I can teach him magically,” Hermione said excitedly, as she realised that Ron was giving in. “He’ll be fluent in a week.”

“I still don’t like it,” Ron sighed. “But I’ll accept that apart from the Gabrielle issue, it could be good for him. I don’t like the idea of him being so far away, but it’s probably better for him.”

“The school is on the international Floo network,” Jean added quietly.

“And I still think we should just tell Harry, but I understand why we can’t.” He turned to Jean. “If you arrange for Madam Maxime to invite Harry to take up the post for the year, we’ll persuade him to do it.”

“Thank you,” Jean said softly, inclining his head. “I will look forward to dealing with you in the Ministry.”

Ron flushed and returned the nod.

“Excellent,” Fleur clapped excitedly. “So we can tell Gabrielle now?”

“Oui,” Jean nodded. He raised his wand and pointed it at a large double door to one side. The door opened, revealing a girl who had frozen, mid-pace, as she looked up at the door.

Ron whistled under his breath and muttered, “It might have been an easier decision if we’d seen her beforehand.”

Hermione elbowed him firmly.

“Papa?” Gabrielle asked, as she entered the room.

Jean smiled slightly. “They have agreed to help. We are going to try and persuade Harry to become your flying instructor at Beauxbatons.”

Gabrielle started to smile massively, "Thank you, both," she said in flawless English. "I can't tell you what this means to me."

"Your English is as good as your father's," Hermione commented with a smile.

"Of course," Gabrielle smiled. "If I'm going to be the wife of Harry Potter, I can't go around mispronouncing words and smiling cutely at it."

"Oi," Fleur said. "Brat."

Gabrielle smirked at her. "If the shoe fits, sister dear." She turned back to Hermione. "Would you mind if I asked just how bad his shoulder is?"

"Destroyed scapula," Hermione replied softly.

Gabrielle sighed, "I thought it would be bad. The fall was horrendous. I felt like I was going to burst when he leapt off the broom. It was the most heroically idiotic thing I have ever seen."

Ron laughed suddenly. "If that doesn't sum up Harry, nothing does." He looked at Gabrielle directly. "You do know that he's not exactly a ball of sunshine these days?"

"Is it any wonder?" Gabrielle demanded, a slight scowl appearing on her face. "When your disgusting paparazzi won't let him visit the bathroom without a four page picture spread."

"That from ze girl who 'as every one of thoz picture spreads," Fleur smirked.

"I had no choice," Gabrielle protested. "As some people wouldn't let me approach Harry when I wanted to."

"It's bad enough that I have to help my sixteen year old daughter," Jean said sternly. "There was no way on this planet I was going to let my fourteen year old daughter do it."

"I'm not human," Gabrielle pointed out. "Fleur had her first boyfriend at fourteen."

Jean swivelled to look at Fleur.

"It waz notheeng," she sniffed. "Juzt a small romance. 'E was an idiot – could not 'andle a Veela."

Jean sighed and shook his head. "If you haven't come to an arrangement with him two months before your birthday," he reminded Gabrielle. "I will tell him exactly what is happening."

Gabrielle nodded. "I know, Papa." She turned and sat at the foot of the table, and looked at Ron and Hermione. "Would you mind if we talked about Harry for a bit? I want to check that my research notes are up to date."

Ron looked at her thoughtfully and then nodded. "Go ahead."

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Harry sighed and stared at the ceiling. He contemplated getting up from the couch, but his doctor's instructions were for him to avoid being touched, and to not do anything stressful, or do anything strenuous, like fly, so he couldn't actually do anything.

The only light in the room was a thin blade of sunlight glaring through the tightly closed curtains in the corner.

He'd never imagined that his life would end up with him alone like this. He figured that if he'd defeat Voldemort, he'd be able to have a normal life. How wrong he'd been. Instead, he was hiding in his cottage, in a self-imposed exile.

A rushing sound announced that his Floo had been activated.

"Are you breeding the dank in here?" he heard Hermione complain, and a few minutes later his curtains were violently opened, flooding the room with sunlight.

"Good to see you, too, Hermione," he said dryly, blinking rapidly as his eyes got used to the daylight.

"When was the last time you shaved?"

"A few days ago, *mum*," Harry replied and grinned as he heard Ron snicker.

"That's enough from you," Hermione muttered to her husband.

"Yes, dear," Ron smirked as he walked into the front room. "Oh jeez, you need a shower, mate."

"I'm not allowed to get the cast wet," Harry mumbled.

"Are you, or are you not, a wizard?" Hermione demanded. "I swear, we leave you alone for a few days, and you turn into a vampire."

"Hey," Harry complained. "I got comfy."

"Ron," Hermione said, ignoring Harry completely. "Get him into the shower while I clear up this mess."

Come on,” Ron said, pulling Harry up by his good arm. “You stink.”

Harry went to protest, but then inhaled. “Perhaps I do,” he said with a sheepish grin.

The shower, after Ron applied a stay-dry charm on his cast, was extremely pleasant, and he found himself in a better mood after washing away the grime of several days.

He managed to dress himself, even casting an enlargement charm on a t-shirt so that it would fit, and he walked downstairs.

Ron was in the kitchen, cooking, while Hermione was casting various house cleaning spells to get rid of the dust bunnies that were capering in the corner.

“Go sit in the kitchen,” Hermione ordered.

Harry smiled to himself and walked past her into his combined kitchen/dining room. It was times like this that he was reminded of when they were at school, and she was ordering him to do his homework with Ron. They were some of his best memories.

“Sit down, mate,” Ron grinned. “The pasta should be done in a few minutes.”

“I hadn’t realised I was hungry.”

“You wouldn’t. Sitting in the dank doesn’t exactly make your taste buds jump up and down.”

“I was thinking,” Harry explained softly.

“Moping,” Ron corrected.

“Well, that too. I’ve got no idea what I’m going to do for the next year.”

“Luckily,” Ron smirked. “Your friends have.”

“Oh?” Harry asked warily. Ron’s smirking normally meant that something was up.

“We’ve got you a job,” he said brightly.

“You’ve done what!?”

“Got you a job,” Ron replied cheerfully, stirring the pot in front of him, then tasting it and adding some more salt and pepper.

“What on earth for?”

“Because you can’t sit on your arse for a year, you lazy git.”

“Do you have any idea how impossible it is for me to even go outside, never mind hold down a career when the bloody press won’t leave me alone for more than thirty seconds? And that’s if I wear a disguise. It’s ten otherwise.”

“Which is why you have a job in a place that the press can’t get to you,” Ron replied.

Harry blinked and then growled, “If you mean Hogwarts?”

“No, I don’t,” Ron interrupted him. “And put your magic away; you’ll curdle the milk.”

Harry paused for a second, and then laughed suddenly. “Do you have any idea how much you sounded like your mum then?”

Ron shrugged and pulled out three plates from a cabinet. “It worked, didn’t it? I swear, if you’d just show a temper in public the press would leave you alone more.”

“And treat me like Voldemort,” Harry grunted. “But don’t change the subject. Exactly why do I need a job? I’m not exactly short of cash.”

“No, you’re the second richest person in the country,” Hermione said as she entered the kitchen. “Not that you could tell from how you live. Spending a bit of money on yourself isn’t a bad thing.”

Harry shrugged. “Nothing I really want.”

“*Anyway*,” Ron interrupted as he poured the pasta onto three plates and added the sauce. “You need a job because if you don’t, you’re going to get more and more miserable and end up hating everyone, including us.”

Harry went to protest, and then paused. He really did need to get out more, he just couldn’t find anywhere to go – and well, wallowing in his own misery was kinda comforting.

“So,” Hermione said, digging into the pasta. “You start at Beauxbatons in three weeks’ time.”

Harry, who had just taken a bite of the pasta, spit it out. “What!?”

Ron, sliding to one side to avoid the flying pasta, said, "You're their new flight instructor. Madam Maxime was most grateful when we told her you'd accepted her offer."

"But..." Harry spluttered.

"Yes, I know," Hermione interrupted. "But I've taken a week off to teach you French, so you've got no excuse."

"But..." Harry tried again.

"It will be good for you, and it means that you'll make new friends; you'll remember that the Wizarding World does have some good points, and you'll be busy for a year. Then you can go back to winning the Cannons the cup. Beauxbatons is on the international Floo network, so we'll be able to visit you just as much as we do now. And if you do get homesick, just remember which of us can Apparate half way across the world without trying."

"But..."

"It's all arranged," Hermione said brightly, taking another mouthful. "This is really good honey," she praised, before turning back to Harry. "You get what you need, they get what they need, *and* you'll have fun. Of course, if you don't take it, well, I'll just have to tell Albus that you turned them down, and that you need help."

"That's blackmail," Harry protested.

"Yes, it is," Hermione agreed cheerfully. "Now, eat your pasta."

Harry sighed and took a mouthful. He'd never been able to argue when his two best friends agreed on something. And since they had married, they'd agreed a lot more than ever before. They'd cut out the bickering between them and had settled into an adult relationship where they supported each other.

If the truth was told, he was a little jealous of them. They had the sort of relationship he had always dreamed of, and they were both very happy with it.

"Guys," he said, as he finished the meal.

"Yes, Harry?" Hermione said.

"Thanks."

"You're welcome," Ron said. "But of course, you still have to learn French."

Harry just groaned.

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Harry Apparated outside the Wards of Beauxbatons, and immediately removed his coat. While England was having its standard rainy summer, the Mediterranean was enjoying its normal gorgeous weather.

With a tap of his fingers, his glasses darkened, allowing him to see without protection. After Hermione had failed to cure his eyesight, she and Ron had given him new glasses for his twenty-first birthday. Apart from being stylish, they were charmed to repel water, turn into sunglasses when needed, and could be summoned with a word.

With a shrug, he started walking toward the elegant castle. Where as Hogwarts looked like it had been made to withstand a siege, Beauxbatons looked like it belonged in a fairytale.

In front of him was a huge garden with a path leading straight to the castle. In the middle of the garden was the biggest fountain he had ever seen. Behind the fountain stood the castle surrounded on each side by some deep woods. The left side of the castle had a large circular tower that stood a couple of storeys above the rest of the castle. To the right was a large outbuilding, giving the castle an L shape, which while not symmetrical, was as beautiful as Hogwarts was imposing.

His luggage floated behind obediently, as he started to walk to the castle. It had felt very strange to pack a trunk again, but it had seemed the best way to pack all the stuff he wanted. There wasn't that much; his broom, some clothes and some books. Hedwig had flown to the school on her own.

He was aware that he lived a simple life, but it suited him.

There was a pop next to him, and he turned, his hand out. Old habits died hard, and his reaction to a surprise was still to prepare for a fight. "Dobby?" he asked.

"Harry Potter sir!" Dobby said delightedly. "Dobby heard that Harry Potter was coming to work for Beauxbatons, so Dobby switched schools, to make sure Harry Potter is taken care off properly."

Harry blinked. "It's good to see you, Dobby," he admitted. It was strangely reassuring, and it made him feel better about the whole thing, knowing that someone he was comfortable with was around.

"Dobby will take your luggage," Dobby continued and with another pop, he vanished, leaving Harry alone.

I wonder if he came or was sent," Harry whispered to himself, before shrugging and putting it out of his mind for now.

He continued to walk up to the castle door, absently moving his now cast-free shoulder, enjoying the feeling of being able to move again. He made a mental note to take a closer look at the fountain later.

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"So, are you ready?" Fleur asked, in her normal French.

"Nervous," Gabrielle replied. "How do I look?"

"Beautiful, of course," Fleur replied with a smile. "But how could you look anything else?"

"That's not the point," Gabrielle sighed. "I'm about to meet the man I'm going to marry for the first time in eight years; am I not allowed to be a little nervous?"

"Don't worry, you'll be fine. Harry can be a little grouchy, but he's still the sweet sensitive boy underneath."

"How did you go through school not being in love with someone?" Gabrielle asked, suddenly curious. "It makes everything a lot easier for me; I have a focus for the changes we go through."

"It was difficult," Fleur said with an elegant shrug. "But I managed by driving most people to distraction. It was the only thing that made it better. I hated being more grown-up than everyone else, so I acted younger."

Gabrielle nodded. "You're still talked about as a legend in being difficult. If you weren't so beautiful and charming, they'd have thrown you out."

"I know," Fleur smirked. "And I played up to that. My Veela powers got me out of more trouble than I can think of."

"And all the time Papa thought that you were the golden girl."

"I know," Fleur giggled and then sighed. "I can't believe my little sister is mated."

"You could be as well," Gabrielle pointed out. "Just let yourself go to William."

"I've thought of it," Fleur confessed. "But it scares me a little. I've been unmated for so long, that the idea of settling down to one man is scary."

"You've been with him for nearly five years," Gabrielle said.

"I know, and it's fun, and I'm enjoying it," Fleur sighed.

"Then do it, Fleur."

"I need to know if he wants it," her sister replied softly. "If he proposes marriage to me, I will allow myself to mate him."

"Excellent," Gabrielle clapped. "Now, I've got to start working on mine."

"You do know that you're going to have your work cut out for you?"

"William's seven years older than you are," Gabrielle pointed out.

"But I met Bill when I was nineteen," Fleur responded. "And I had left school."

"I've not got that luxury," Gabrielle said with a shrug. "And since I have no particular wish to go mad, I need to get it right."

"Are you sure you just won't tell him?"

"No," Gabrielle stated incontrovertibly. "I don't want a caged tiger. I want him free to choose."

"It's a big gamble."

"So is life, so is waking up. I could win everything, or I could lose everything. But if I win, it'll be worth it."

Fleur sighed and hugged her. "Good luck, my little angel."

"Thank you," Gabrielle said, and she relaxed into her sister for a few seconds. No matter what happened, she knew that Fleur would always be there for her.

She moved from her sister's embrace, picked up a clipboard and squared her shoulders. According to her research, Harry was attracted to intelligence and confidence. The two main females in his life, Cho and Hermione, had both been exceptionally clever. While she might not be up to Hermione's standard, and she was happy to admit that not many were, she was above Cho academically. The confidence...well, she was working on that.

The other girls in his life hadn't really counted. Ginny was over before it started, according to Fleur who had paid close attention and given her a report.



She checked her watch, her sister forgotten, and frowned as she realised she had another few minutes before she was meeting him.

With ruthless efficiency, she shoved her nerves away and had another brief look through her notes. Harry was rarely complicated; his favourite food was Shepherds pie with gravy. With no knowledge of how to cook herself, it hadn't been hard to persuade Dobby to switch schools and help her out. It had been a little unfair of her to use her Veela charms on a house-elf, but she wasn't going to let that stop her. Harry needed a friend to help him stop being homesick.

Of course, that's if he would feel homesick. It wasn't as if he had a home. The reports she had on the place he lived had it as a small cottage that he basically used as a base. According to her notes, there were no personal artefacts on the mantelpiece, and only a picture of him teaching the D.A. in the front room.

It was like he had no real roots. It was something she was going to have to change. It was obvious that he didn't have any idea what a home was, and it was going to take someone to show him how to make one.

She looked at her watch again and plastered a polite smile on her face. It wasn't her original plan - to jump on him and kiss him till he gave in, but she suspected that at least the one she was going to follow wouldn't end in him Apparating back to England faster than she could say, "Golden Snitch."

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"Mr Potter, welcome to Beauxbatons."

"Thank you, Madame Maxime," Harry said, offering a small bow.

"Please call me Olympe; as a member of my staff, I must insist," the bejewelled teacher said with a smile. "And I must complement you on your accent - very Parisian."

Harry smiled slightly. "Thank you, but I'm afraid all the credit must go to my friend Hermione. When she gets going on something, like teaching French, it's much easier to just go along with her, than it is to fight. I actually quite enjoyed learning another language. It's one of the failings of the Wizarding world that we don't teach our children how to speak a second language."

"Why, Mr Potter," Olympe said, falling into step besides him. "I do feel that we are going to get on famously."

"We will," Harry said dryly. "If you stop calling me Mr Potter and start calling me Harry."

The Headmistress threw back her head and laughed loudly. "I will indeed, Harry. It's good of you to agree to spend a year with us. I can't tell you how excited the students are to get flying lessons from a World Cup winner."

"I just hope I do okay. I've not really taught properly before."

"Nonsense," Olympe disagreed firmly. "I have a full report of your efforts with the D.A.; they are famous through out the world. It is remarkable the level of skill you managed to impart."

Harry blushed slightly. "It was mainly my friends, I was just the leader."

"Modest as well, Harry. I'm afraid that I have had many independent reports, and both your friends have pointed out very firmly your tireless efforts."

Harry shrugged, not sure what he could say to that.

"If you'll step this way," Olympe said with gesture. "We'll go to my office."

"Of course," Harry said absently, as he looked around the grounds. "I wasn't sure what to expect."

Olympe laughed at his expression. "This chateau was built before the French Revolution, and it was handed over to us in 1769. Obviously, it was added to by the Headmaster at the time, Gaston Robèrt, who spent the next twenty years adding the necessary magic to turn it into a full magical school. We moved from our ancient premises around three weeks before the Revolution, and as such, it passed us by completely.

"The decoration has remained the same ever since; it is now almost as much as a museum as a school and is one of the finest examples of the work of the time. King Louis himself visited shortly before it was finished and marvelled at the sheer beauty and class."

Harry nodded. "It is amazing."

"We had some fantastic artisans in those days. People who could literally paint magic; alas, the skill has fallen out of fashion, and all people want to do is play Quidditch or work for the Ministry."

"Erm, sorry?"

Olympe blinked and then smacked him on the shoulder. The weight of the smack reminded him that he was dealing with a half-giant. "I wasn't talking about you, Harry," she said with a smile.

"And to be honest, I would much rather my students had you as a hero, than the incompetents in our Ministry."

"The French Ministry aren't that bad," Harry said with a slight smile as he looked around at the elegant portraits lining the hall.

You didn't see how long it took to convince them to help out during the war. They were convinced that I was talking nonsense about Voldemort's return. It was only when Jean-Sebastian and some high level politicians got involved that they finally agreed to allow the Aurors to help."

Harry smiled slightly and nodded – he knew that the French Ministry was no where near as bad as their English counterparts. They proceeded along an elaborately carpeted corridor, the pictures on the wall saluting them as they walked past.

Madam Maxime placed her hand on the doorknob of a door with her name imprinted on the front and opened it. "You'll find that all the doors in here are charmed, so that passwords are not needed," she explained. "We'll set you up shortly. You'll have the same access as the rest of the staff."

"Thank you," Harry said with a smile.

"Now, Harry," Olympe said, as she sat behind her huge desk. It was actually bigger than Dumbledore's back in Hogwarts. "I'm afraid that I have several meetings in Paris over the next week. The bureaucrats are trying to cut my budget again, and I need to remind them that it would be a bad idea."

Harry nodded, somewhat surprised.

"So," she continued. "I've arranged for you to have a guide."

"Oh, okay," Harry said with a shrug. At least he would have someone to show him around the school.

There was a knock on the door. "Come," Olympe said.

Harry turned, curious to see who his guide would be.

The girl who opened the door was possibly the most beautiful girl he had ever seen.

Her long blonde hair curled elegantly around her face, and it fell in a soft wave down to her shoulders. Her clear complexion was dominated by the largest pair of azure eyes he had ever seen, which rested above a regal French nose and cupid bow lips.

"Gabrielle?" Harry asked, suddenly recognising her from photographs Fleur had shown him over the past few years.

"Harry," she smiled warmly at him.

"I wondered if you would remember her," Olympe said with a smile.

"How could he forget the girl whose life he saved?" Gabrielle asked.

"Oh, I didn't do anything," Harry shrugged.

"I think you'll find you did," the Headmistress pointed out firmly. "We will have to talk about your self-esteem at some stage. It's all very well being modest, but at some stage, one has to have pride in one's achievements."

"Anyway, Gabrielle will show you to your room and will be your guide for the next few days."

"If you want to come this way, I'll show you to your room first, and then take you around the school."

Harry nodded. "I'll see you later?" he asked the Headmistress.

"At dinner, yes," she said with a nod. "I leave for Paris tomorrow morning."

Harry nodded and walked out after offering a half bow of respect. He followed Gabrielle down the hallway and back to the main entrance.

"Why are you in school during the holidays?" Harry asked, as they walked.

"Papa is busy in the Ministry," she explained with a cute shrug of her shoulders. "They are having a second honeymoon. Fleur is too busy with Bill to look after her little brat of a sister, so I decided I could take an extra course or two and get a head start on the school year."

Harry nodded and smiled. "Sounds like something Hermione would have done. Do you mind showing me around and interrupting your studies?"

"Not at all; I was ahead anyway. The professors' quarters are on the first floor," she said, as she led him up one of the two sweeping staircases that dominated the huge entrance hall.

"The professors' quarters at Hogwarts were very well hidden," Harry pointed out, as he followed her.

"Because of the pranks?" Gabrielle asked. "The Marauders legacy is famous even over here, not to mention the Weasley twins."

"I hadn't thought about it like that," Harry laughed.

"Well, there are wards in place around this corridor to stop students getting in."

"They're not stopping you."

"Ahh, but I'm not any student. I'm the Head Girl," she smiled.

“I thought you were only sixteen, so you’re in your sixth year?”

“I’m surprised you remembered.”

“Oh, I remember you were eight during the Tournament. It’s not hard to add another eight to that.”

Gabrielle smiled faintly. “Indeed. But yes, I’ve always been a little precocious, and my record warranted it.”

“Didn’t the seventh years complain?”

“A little, but a dash of Veela charm helped that out.”

“Ahh,” Harry said with a nod.

Gabrielle stopped and turned to look at him directly. “Is it true that you are immune to Veela powers?”

Harry nodded sharply.

“Would you mind if I turned them on? I’ve never met anyone who isn’t immediately enthralled. It would be extremely educational for me.”

Harry smiled slightly. He had been about to say no, when she had pointed it was for her education, and he could see why. “Go ahead,” he invited.

“Can we do it inside?” Gabrielle asked, indicating a door. “I don’t want anyone else to be caught.”

“Good point,” Harry agreed, although he hadn’t actually seen anyone else yet.

“The door will be charmed to your signature when you open it,” Gabrielle said. “So, just touch the handle.”

Harry reached out and took the handle and looked at the girl as nothing happened.

She frowned, the expression actually increasing her cuteness. “That’s strange,” she said slowly. “It’s supposed to pick up who you are.”

“Oh,” Harry said, suddenly feeling embarrassed. He closed his eyes for a second and turned off the nullifying field he kept around himself. There was a click as the door opened, and he walked in, leaving Gabrielle to follow him.

The room was probably the most singularly stunning room he had ever set foot in. The walls were cream with huge, dark outlined cream panels. In front of a small fireplace was a series of ancient looking antique chairs in cream and red, to the left was a large desk with a rather uncomfortable looking chair. He walked over to the right and looked through the door at his bedroom.

The bedroom was of similar quality, a single antique dresser stood before a large golden oval mirror. The bed itself was draped in a crimson red spread with four yellow dress pillows along the usual pillows. The bed was flanked by two small bedside tables with candelabras lit with never-ending candles. Two matching stools were at the end of the bed.

He turned, and found Gabrielle was sitting demurely in one of the chairs in front of the fire, and he decided to explore more later and sat opposite her. He was immediately gratified when he realised the chair had a comfort charm on it, and he sank down happily.

“Can I ask why the door spell didn’t work for you?” Gabrielle asked. She was holding a quill in her left hand and had the clipboard perched on her knee.

Harry looked at her slowly, trying to decide if he should tell her. “I would appreciate if you didn’t tell anyone else this.” He paused and was mildly surprised as the quill seemed to vanish from her hand. “I keep a low-level magic nullifying charm around me at all times,” he explained quietly. “It negates most magical devices and a lot of charms and curses.”

“That’s what helped you defeat Voldemort,” Gabrielle stated excitedly. “I didn’t know that was even possible.”

“It’s not, normally,” Harry smiled. He found her enthusiasm infectious, as was her willingness to learn. It reminded him a little of Hermione when she was younger. “It was a spell that Hermione, Ron, Padma Patil and a few others at Hogwarts developed. Most people simply haven’t got the power to keep it up. It makes it more difficult for me to fly a broom, as I have to include the broom in the spell so it will still fly. It doesn’t give me any advantage though; I had to let the League officials check me out before they would allow me to play with it.”

Gabrielle nodded. “How do you keep a spell running all the time? Normally, when you cast a permanent spell on an external object, you give it enough power to last for as long as you want it to, and then forget about it. It’s one spell.”

“This works differently. I hooked the spell into my power centre, so that it’s a permanent drain, but the power it takes to run actually helps my power level.”

“How?”

“It’s like resistance training.”

“Ahh,” Gabrielle interrupted, clapping delightedly. “So your magic is used to running the spell, and has grown to be able to handle it, and if you turn it off, you have more magic available to you.”

"Pretty much," Harry agreed. "So, I turned it off for a few seconds and let the spell work. It means I'll have to be a bit careful to remember to do that."

"I wonder if you could charm a card to act for you," Gabrielle said. "Like a key of some sort."

"Good idea," Harry said, a little impressed.

She smiled at him, and her quill appeared back in her hand. "So, can I turn on my Veela powers?"

"Go ahead."

He settled down into his chair, and looked at her thoughtfully. The last time Fleur had tried it on him, it had irritated him slightly, especially as Bill was in the room.

As he looked at her, he lowered his Occlumency shields. He wanted to see what it was like to be hit by her. The first thing he noticed was that her eyes seemed to grow bigger, that he could see deep into her soul, and that all she wanted was him. He felt like the rest of the room was fading into nothingness as everything centred on her. Her hair seemed to move slightly, as if caught in a soft breeze.

He felt her power levels increase, and he raised his shields to match, before he slammed them firmly into place. The psychological battle with Voldemort had left him with more than a few mental scars and an impenetrable shield. He had been possessed and attacked for several years, and he had learnt the hard way what it was like. Not even Albus could get anything out of him these days.

He watched Gabrielle dispassionately and realised that her looks were only enhanced a little by the power – the hair swaying and the eyes growing, but the vast quantity of their effect was mental.

She stopped, and settled back down, breathing hard. She looked at him thoughtfully. "It was like throwing myself against the castle walls," she said softly.

Harry nodded softly. "It was interesting to watch."

Gabrielle noted a few things down on her clipboard and smiled. "Would you like an hour to relax and unpack before we start the tour?"

Harry thought for a second, and then nodded. "Please, yes."

Gabrielle stood and walked out to the door, before she stopped, and turned slightly, looking at him over her shoulder. "It is good to see you again," she said, blushing a little and smiling at him.

He smiled at her, "It's been good to see a friendly face."

She nodded and let herself out of the room.

Harry looked around slowly, and shook his head. The room was more palatial than anything he had ever seen, even putting Malfoy Manor to shame. It was a far cry from his two-bedroom bungalow in the Lake District.

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Gabrielle slumped into a chair and stared at the ceiling.

"Well?" Fleur asked excitedly. "How did it go?"

Gabrielle shook her head tiredly. "How much power did you use when you tried to enthrall him?"

"Not much – I didn't want to get Bill as well. I just focused on him and tried to get him to react in some way."

Gabrielle nodded. "I just went full power on him."

"Gabrielle!" Fleur shouted. "You know you shouldn't do that."

"I had his permission," the younger girl responded tiredly. "And I wanted to see what it was like to actually really let go. It was all I could do to not transform at the end. It was like attacking solid metal – there were no cracks, nothing I could get into at all. It was almost painful. I've never seen anyone so powerful, not even Professor Dumbledore."

"Does it scare you?"

"No," Gabrielle smiled slowly. "Do you know what it means?"

"What?"

"I can have a normal life," Gabrielle smiled. "I can let go with him without having to worry about accidents."

Fleur was silent for a few moments. "I think I am a little jealous," she said softly.

"Perhaps Harry could help teach William?"

Fleur smiled faintly. "It would help, but Bill is just a normal wizard."

Gabrielle nodded. “And Harry certainly isn’t that. I had an example today of just how extraordinary he is.”

“Oh?”

“Sorry, I promised not to tell anyone.”

“I’m not anyone; I’m your older sister.”

Gabrielle waved her hand airily, “Then be a nice sister and pass me a drink. I’m going to show him around in an hour, then bring him to dinner.”

“His first French meal,” Fleur smiled, as she walked over to the sideboard and poured his sister a glass of orange juice. “It will be a culture shock for him to see how real people eat.”

“Harry is ‘real people’,” Gabrielle sighed.

“I know, I know, I’m teasing,” Fleur replied defensively. “And why won’t you tell me what you meant earlier?”

“Because I gave my word, and I need to be trusted by Harry. I can’t do that by giving up his secrets at every turn.”

Fleur smiled slowly and nodded her head. “He told you about the nullification field. I’m glad he did. It means that he thinks of you as a friend, and he doesn’t have many of them.”

“You know?”

“I’m Bill’s partner; Harry gave Bill permission to tell me. Bill swore me to secrecy before telling me, but it explained a lot. Like why we have to use special owls to send mail to him, as normal ones try and find him – and can’t – these owls are trained to find his house.”

Gabrielle nodded and smiled. She turned to her sister and kicked off her shoes and folded her legs under herself. “You forgot to mention that he’s more gorgeous in person than he is in the photos.”

“Did I?” Fleur asked with a wicked grin. “Fancy that.”

“It wasn’t fair,” Gabrielle pouted. “It mucked up all my research when I got in there, and I was almost bowled over.”

“Research isn’t everything, my little angel. You can’t research your way into his heart. You have to feel things.”

“I do feel,” Gabrielle protested. “But if I give into my feelings I’ll scare him away. I have to approach this scientifically.”

“I think you’re underestimating yourself.”

“You didn’t just sit there, under full power, and feel his eyes bore into you, and realise that he has a power over you that you do not have over him. I’m vulnerable to him, and it’s not something I’m used to. That is one thing I never thought I would be. Sure, you are planning on mating with Bill, but you will never understand what it is like to be powerless before a man. No Veela has ever had to deal with that before. On top of that, I haven’t got a choice about it; I have him or I go insane.

“And with that, I have the knowledge that at any second I could tell him the truth, and I could have him. I could be sleeping with him tomorrow and be safe. And I know if I do that I will kill a part of him.

“He has sacrificed everything so far in his life. He feels like an outcast in his own country, his family is dead, he has exactly two close friends, and a slightly wider circle of good friends, and he can’t even do the one thing he loves anymore.”

She paused, tears in her eyes, her chest heaving. “So please, my darling court flower,” she whispered. “Don’t tell me I’m underestimating myself. I know exactly what I have to do, and how I have to do it.”

A moment later, Gabrielle found herself back in her sister’s arms again, and she let the tears flow down her cheeks.

## Hope 2 - Paris

Harry looked at himself in the mirror, as he did up the buttons of his black dress shirt. Hermione had insisted that he improve his wardrobe, and she had dragged him around Muggle London one Saturday to ensure he had clothes that were suitable for his new job.

He bent and quickly did the laces on his black shoes, absently rotating his shoulder as he did. It felt better than it had in a while, but he had been told, *very* firmly, just how fragile it really was.

He absently ran his fingers through his hair, which was still unmanageable despite Hermione's best efforts. He had drawn the line when she had wanted to start casting identification spells to see if his hair had been cursed.

There was a gentle knock on his door, and he opened it, letting Gabrielle in.

Gabrielle was wearing an off the shoulder ivory coloured pleat dress, with a black blazer over her shoulders, and flamenco black patent and cream sandals on her feet.

"You look very smart," Gabrielle said with a smile, looking him up and down in a way he hadn't expected.

"Thank you," he said, turning back to the counter and pulling on his watch. "You're looking very good as well."

"Why, thank you," she replied with a wide smile. "It's an Yves Saint Laurent special."

"Muggle designer?"

"One of the best," she nodded.

"It suits you," he smiled. "Shall we?"

"But of course," Gabrielle said with a cute little curtsy. "I thought that we could start outside at the Quidditch Pitch."

Harry smiled, "Sounds like a good idea." He followed her out of his room and down one of the corridors.

"You shouldn't get lost here," she said. "It's very logical. All rooms are called after the floor they are on and their location."

Harry nodded. "In Hogwarts, some of the rooms move when they feel like it. It makes it very difficult at times."

"Hogwarts has always fascinated me from an academic perspective," Gabrielle smiled. "But I don't think I would want to go to school there. It doesn't seem very friendly to the students."

"It's not that bad," Harry replied. "It just means that you have to pay attention a lot more." They descended one of the wide staircases and walked outside into the sunshine. "I could get used to this weather."

"You're not blonde," Gabrielle laughed. "If I spend too much time without protective spells, I turn into a hideous lobster."

"I doubt you could be a hideous anything," Harry replied, before stopping himself from saying anything else. He was a little concerned that he was engaging in mild flirting with a future student of his.

Gabrielle smiled at him and turned the corner.

"This looks new," Harry said, as he looked up at the Quidditch Pitch.

"It is," Gabrielle agreed. "And the students can't wait to learn how to play properly."

"Sorry?" Harry asked, a little confused.

"We have never played Quidditch at school before," Gabrielle explained. "It was considered to be too dangerous for students to play. However, after the embarrassment of our national team being knocked out by Gambia in the World Cup, our politicians decided that we needed to be taught how to play at a young age so that we could find the natural talent and develop it."

Harry smiled slightly. "So I'm going to be helping France find the people who will be playing against me in the future."

"Yes."

Harry nodded and walked out into the middle of the pitch. "It looks very familiar," he smiled.

"It should be, Madame Maxime borrowed the plans from Professor Dumbledore. Over here," she said, walking to one corner. "Is the equipment shed."

Harry followed her and hid a smile. A shed, it was not. Like the rest of the school he had seen so far, it was luxurious. Against one of the walls were twenty brand new brooms, all of them top of the range. He walked over and examined each one closely.

"The brooms were donated by each of the French League clubs. They wanted to encourage this project. They all pointed out how you and Oliver Wood, to name two, were products of the Hogwarts scheme, and Viktor Krum of Durmstrang."

"Do you have the equivalent of Houses over here?"

"We don't," Gabrielle sighed. "I believe that Madame Maxime will be talking to you about the best way to encourage competition between the students."

Harry nodded thoughtfully. He'd probably suggest a House type system, only without the Sorting Hat. The idea of interschool competition itself was a good one, but when you had houses sorted by personality, you didn't get much of a diversity, which in itself had led to Slytherin being a breeding ground for Death Eaters.

"How are the students separated, for sleeping purposes?"

"We are separated by year," Gabrielle explained, as she led him back outside into the sun. "Each year has its own common room and dormitories attached to it."

"As Head Girl, how do you think the students would react to the concept of Houses? I don't want to go down the Hogwarts route of separating people by personality, but a random grouping to match people of all talents and experiences."

"I think they would find it strange, but also a little exciting. I think that we have suffered from lack of competition for some time. Once in the real world, we often find it hard to compete with the rest of the world for a few years, until we get used to the fact that life isn't fair. Last year I did a project where I interviewed some of our alumni, to see what they thought of life after Beauxbatons. It was very illuminating."

Harry smiled faintly at her. "Fleur didn't seem to have any problems with the Tri-Wizard Tournament."

"You mean apart from coming last?" Gabrielle pointed out. "She was out of her depth and used her arrogance and Veela powers to cover it neatly."

Harry nodded. Back in the school, they walked into one of the common rooms. It looked like a giant library, with study desks grouped into four that were scattered around the room. There were several large fireplaces with comfortable-looking furniture arranged in front of them. "This room wouldn't have lasted long in Hogwarts," he said with a smile. "Especially not in Gryffindor. We had old furniture for a reason."

"Because of the pranks?" Gabrielle asked. "We do not have many played here."

Harry smiled crookedly. "They can be good for breaking the tension, especially at times of stress."

Gabrielle nodded and didn't comment, giving him the impression that she wasn't sure he was right.

She glanced at the slim watch on her wrist and looked at him. "We have time to see one of the classrooms, before we will meet for dinner. Is there any class in particular you would like to see?"

"How about Potions?" Harry asked, curious to see how it compared to the Dungeons back in Hogwarts. As they didn't have much time, he decided to see the more important rooms later.

Gabrielle nodded, "That is on the fourth floor."

They walked out and up two more flights of stairs. Harry paused by a window and looked out.

"The view from the roof is even better," Gabrielle said with a slight smile as she looked out at the grounds.

Harry nodded and followed her down the elegant corridor to the classroom. Inside was an obviously custom-designed room. Each desk had a small cauldron and fire built into it. Around the walls, between the large windows, were informative posters, reminding students about proper behaviour, which showed them how to do some of the simpler tasks. It was something he would have found very useful, rather than the endless shouting he had endured from Snape.

Gabrielle looked at her watch again. "If we leave now, we should be suitably late," she said with a smile.

"Late?" Harry asked.

"But of course," Gabrielle smiled. "It is never polite to turn up on time, fifteen minutes late is much preferred."

Harry nodded and followed her downstairs, squaring his shoulders a little. It had been a long time since he had eaten with a number of people, and he was more than a little nervous about it.

"Don't worry, Harry," Gabrielle said softly. "Part of my job is making sure you fit in and have a nice time. Just follow my lead, and you'll be fine. You

may be asked some personal questions; if you don't want to answer, say so politely. Madame Maxime and I will be careful to make sure people don't cross the line with you."

He tilted his head slightly and looked at the girl and slowly smiled. It was a little disconcerting that she could read him so well.

She paused in front of an imposing set of double doors, and then reached up and lightly pressed a small corner of one of the panels. The doors swung open regally before them, revealing a room that was simply magnificent.

Mahogany cabinets flanked each wall that were separated by statues and paintings, most of which were magical. Along the centre of the room was a long, single table, although there was room for a lot more. Unlike Hogwarts, the ceiling wasn't enchanted; it was painted a light blue with white fleur-de-lis shapes imprinted in it.

Around the room, small groups of people were standing engaged in conversations. Everyone seemed to be holding a wine glass. He could see Olympe at the far end of the room.

"Papa," Gabrielle said, as an older gentleman approached them. "I would like to introduce Harry Potter, Harry; this is Jean-Sebastian, my father."

Harry held out his hand, and as the other man grasped it, he clapped his other hand against the man's elbow. "It's good to see you again, Jean."

"As it is you, Harry," Jean smiled. "I wasn't sure if you would remember me."

"How could I not?" Harry smiled. "If it hadn't been for your help, we might never have got the French Aurors involved in the fight."

"It was the least I could do," Jean smiled. "Can I offer you an aperitif?"

Harry nodded and raised the glass he was offered to his nose, sniffing it. He was hit by a rich aroma and smiled slowly.

"Château de Laubade, 1948," Jean said with a smile. "One of our best."

Harry nodded and took a sip, hiding his surprise that Gabrielle was drinking as well. He'd forgotten that Hermione had told him that French children were often allowed to drink wine with their elders.

"Has Gabrielle shown you the Quidditch Pitch yet?"

"She has been an extremely helpful and patient guide," Harry replied with a smile. "She was more than willing to stand around while I had a look at each of the brooms."

Gabrielle flushed cutely at the praise. "It was nothing."

"Some of our professors will be arriving by Portkey shortly," Jean said. "Dinner will start soon afterwards."

Harry nodded. "This whole place is beautiful."

"It is indeed," Jean agreed. "I am fortunate enough to be on the board of Governors here. I try to spend at least one night a week here. It also gives me a chance to keep up with my daughter," he finished with a fond smile at Gabrielle.

"Papa," Gabrielle smiled and gave him a quick hug.

"Gabrielle mentioned that you've been having a second honeymoon?"

"I have indeed," Jean replied with an easy smile. "We came home yesterday after spending some time in the Canary Islands."

A large clock in the corner rang six and a half times, and with a slight pop, four more professors arrived.

Harry was moving before they even finished appearing. His senses were in full swing; his magic raised to its full. "No one move," he snarled in a French accent that was a little more common than the one he had been using before. His wand was in his left hand; his right hand was glowing slightly.

There was absolute silence around the room, as everyone stared at him.

"One of you is carrying Dark Magic; who?" he demanded. It was another product of the war, the ability to sense Dark Magic – magic designed to inflict death or misery on others.

As none of them moved, he made several sharp gestures with his right hand, separating the four and lining them up. With quick movements, he shot a beam of white light at each of them. One of them glowed for a second. With a casual movement, he released the other three and stalked towards the single professor left.

She reminded him a bit of Trelawney, with the same bird-style hairdo and unruly robes.

With his left hand he pointed his wand at her, moving it up and down. It stopped at her right hand, pointing. Without really thinking about it, he froze her in place, with a modified Petrificus spell. As carefully as he could, he magically pulled a ring off her hand and summoned a bowl of water next to him.

He placed the ring in the water and whispered, "Reveal yourself," under his breath in English. Half of his concentration was still on the professor. If



She moved, he was quite prepared to kill her first and ask questions later.

A gasp echoed around the room as small hooded figure appeared above the water. "I am the Ring of Assassination," it intoned in French. "One touch from me with the command of power is fatal. I have killed forty-six times." The figure sunk back into the water, and was gone.

Harry turned to the professor who was staring at it in shock. "Exactly why are you carrying an assassin's ring?" he demanded coldly. He released his control over her head so that she could respond.

"I-I-I didn't know," she replied.

"Liar," Harry spat.

She looked around desperately. No one seemed willing to help her or cross him.

"It's a family heirloom," she said. "I'd heard rumours about it, but that's it."

"Why are you wearing it?"

She looked away from him.

"Look at me," he snarled. Her head snapped back towards his.

She slowly blushed. "I had heard rumours that you could detect Dark Magic, and I wanted to see if it was the truth."

Harry looked at her disgustedly. This was exactly the sort of thing he had wanted to avoid, acting like some form of show pony. He growled and used his temper to power a spell aimed at the bowl of water containing her ring. The bowl burst into flame, the water evaporating instantly. He poured more of his magic into it, till he felt the Dark Magic vanish, signifying the ring had been destroyed.

He looked around and sighed, as people were staring at him in shock and dismay.

He turned to Olympe who was looking at him curiously. "If you'll excuse me," he said with a sigh. "I've lost my appetite." He didn't wait for her reaction. He waved his hand to free the professor, and walked out of the Hall, the doors opening for him and slamming shut behind him.

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Gabrielle watched as Harry stalked out of the Hall and shook herself slightly. She'd heard, mainly from Ron and Hermione that he could be the most imposing person on the planet, but hadn't really believed it until she had seen that display. She'd never felt so much pure magic in her life. It had made the hair on the back of her neck stand up on edge.

It was suddenly very clear to her how he had defeated Voldemort. Things like self-preservation went out the window, to be replaced by the determination to do what was needed, regardless of personal cost.

She turned to face the professor and tried very hard to keep her temper in check. It wasn't working, so she took a step forward, prepared to tell her exactly what her opinion was, in the basest possible way.

A hand on her shoulder stopped her, and she looked up. Her own temper vanished as she saw the expression on her father's face. The quiet rage was visible in his eyes, and she was thankful it wasn't aimed at her.

Like Harry had earlier, Jean stalked forwards. "Exactly what were you thinking," he hissed.

The professor looked up nervously.

"Do you have any idea how hard I worked to bring Mr Potter to Beauxbatons?" he demanded. "I gave my word to his friends that he would be able to heal here, to remember what it is like to be a normal person. I promised them that it would be beneficial for him.

"I saw him when he defeated Voldemort. Whilst you were cowering in your classroom, an eighteen-year-old boy was standing up to the most evil creature I have ever seen, and he won. He was magnificent, taking punishment that had me wanting to tell him to stop, to give in. But he wouldn't. He pushed himself for the rest of the world. He fought so that you would be safe to continue to teach.

"The French government, in a rare display of competency has given me full backing to make sure Harry is looked after here. France always pays her debts, and we owe that young man an impossibly large one. Every government in the world would love to be in the situation we are in, to give him some reward. Although he has not been presented with it, he has been awarded the Legion of Honour.

"His courage and ability is only outshone by his modesty. He truly desires nothing more than to be treated normally. It was something that I felt that Beauxbatons would be perfect to provide for him." He paused and turned to glare at everyone else in the room. "I hope there will not be a repeat of this," he said quietly, the thinly veiled threat evident in his voice.

"There will not be," Olympe rumbled firmly. "Madame Prévoyez, you will wait for me in my office."

The professor nodded and literally ran out of the room.

"I am sorry, Jean," Olympe said quietly. "I should have expected someone would be stupid enough to do that."

Jean sighed and walked over to a seat and collapsed down into it.

“What I want to know,” Professor Bayard, who was Beauxbatons’ defence professor, said. “Is will he be willing to work with our defence class? That was some of the most impressive magic I’ve ever seen.”

Jean smiled slightly. “You should see him when he really gets angry. I don’t know. I suspect that if you ask him the right way he might not be too objectionable. But don’t forget that he was trained for two years with some of the best in the world, and like all good students, it didn’t take him long to outshine his teachers. And when you combine that with an intractable will and determination, a firm set of morals that guide him clearly in matters of right and wrong, you have a Chevalier.”

“Papa,” Gabrielle said as she walked over to him. “Harry hasn’t eaten since lunch.”

“How are you doing with him?” he asked.

She thought for a second. “It was going fine until Professor Idiot interfered.”

“You’re not worried about the magic?”

“Of course not,” she sniffed. “I do not carry Dark Magic on me.”

Jean smiled slightly and reached into his pocket. He pulled out his wallet and handed her a number of notes. “Here; Muggle money. Take him into Paris and get him something to eat. He should be okay with just the two of you.”

“How will we get there, I cannot Apparate?”

“Harry could probably Apparate the whole school,” Jean said dryly. “He won’t have trouble with one girl.”

Gabrielle smiled and gave her father a quick kiss on the cheek. “I’ll do my best to reassure him that she was an idiot, and he shouldn’t judge everyone else by her.”

“Good girl,” he praised. “Now go; he’s probably feeling a little guilty about the way he handled it.”

“I agree, although I don’t see why,” she sniffed. “I would have hit her.” She grinned at her father, offered a formal bow to Madame Maxime, and dashed out of the room.

She ran up the stairs to Harry’s room, and listened carefully at the door. She could just make out the sound of swearing.

She calmed herself down a little and lightly tapped on the door.

There was a pause, before the door swung open, and she had to restrain a gasp. His eyes were passionate balls of emerald fire. His shirt was slightly unbuttoned, showing off some of his chest, and his sleeves were rolled up.

She wanted him to look at her like that. She wanted to see him that out of control due to her, she wanted him to kiss her looking like that, as if all he wanted to do was consume her soul. She wanted him. Badly. Right now.

She ruthlessly thrust those feelings away. “I am sorry,” she said, looking down. “We didn’t expect Professor Idiot to do something so stupid.”

There was a pause, and she looked up hopefully. The passion seemed to leave his eyes, replaced by amusement. He leant against the doorframe and laughed under his breath. “Professor Idiot?”

“An informal nickname,” Gabrielle replied with a small smile. “Her real name is Prévoyez. She is our divination professor.”

Harry sighed audibly. “My divination professor was obsessed with predicting my death.”

Gabrielle nodded; she had heard about Trelawney. “Anyway,” she said softly. “My father tells me that you can Apparate two people?”

Harry nodded, looking at her quizzically.

“In that case, let us go and get something to eat.”

Harry looked surprised.

“You do not want to eat with the others tonight, correct?”

He nodded.

“Then I shall take you into Paris, and we shall eat among the Muggles, where we will be left alone.”

He smiled at her slowly. “I think I would like that,” he confessed.

“Then come,” she said. “You will not need a coat; the weather this evening will be perfect.”

He nodded and stepped forwards, absently doing up one of the buttons on his shirt.

“My father is most upset with Professor Idiot,” she said, as she guided him away from the entrance and down another hallway. “He made a promise to your friends that you would not have to deal with that sort of thing here. He feels that his word has been broken, and he made his feelings very

clear.”

Harry frowned, “It wasn’t Jean’s fault. I have always found him to be an honourable man.”

Gabrielle opened a door to a room with an intricately-patterned doorway. “This is our Apparition point,” she said. “The wards will allow you to leave from here, but not come back.”

Harry smiled slightly. “This would have been useful at Hogwarts. Where are we going?”

“Can you take the destination from my mind?” she asked. She had no worries about him reading her mind to deeply; he simply would never do that. He was much too honourable to do so.

He nodded and then paused, looking at her, a little embarrassed. “I’m afraid that you’ll have to be close for me to Apparate us,” he explained.

She smiled at him. That sounded perfect to her. She walked forwards and hugged him, feeling his arms go around her. She turned her head to one side and felt the warmth of his chest, and could hear the reassuring thud of his heartbeat. She felt so at home, as only the touch of her mate could allow her to feel. Her head fit under his chin perfectly. She started to struggle to keep herself from responding to him. She really wanted to move against him – her Veela nature was calling for it with a passion she had never experienced before.

There was a brief feeling of nothingness before they arrived in an alleyway. She had chosen it because it was out of the way and they would not be seen by Muggles. She felt him release her, and she moved backwards reluctantly. She missed the feeling instantly and used it to fire her determination. Life being held by him was what she wanted with every fibre of her body, and whatever it took, she was ready to do. Well, nearly anything. She was not prepared to tell him the truth – she didn’t want him like that, no matter what the cost was for her. She would rather go insane than trap him for life because of her own stupidity.

“Down here,” she said as she smiled at him, shaking of her depressing thoughts and pointing towards a busy street. She had only taken a few steps when four youths dressed in red leather jackets walked around the corner.

“What have we here,” one of them sneered. “It’s our lucky day. Give us your wallet and the girl,” he said to Harry. “And we might let you live.”

Gabrielle felt a cold hand of fear wrap around her heart. She looked at the four, unable to move. She’d never been in a situation like this before, and she found her mind blank as she tried to remember her Defence classes.

“Or,” Harry drawled. “You turn around and run away, and I don’t kill you for interrupting my evening.”

The thug pulled out a large knife. “Yeah?” he taunted.

She took a step closer to Harry, moving behind him a little, needing to be closer to him as she stared at the man in front of them.

Harry simply smiled, and they gasped. “You are messing with things you cannot understand,” he said chillingly. “You can expect to pay the price.”

She felt his arm wrap around her, lifting her easily. “My beautiful lady,” he said, his voice echoing up and down the alleyway hypnotically. “You will wait here for me; you will not move. I will take you to the utmost ecstasies as you submit your life force to me. But for now, I shall teach these ruffians what happens when they interrupt Nosferatu’s dinner.”

Her eyes were locked on the fangs she hadn’t noticed before, as he turned away from her. She couldn’t move anything but her eyes, so she looked at the four thugs.

“What the hell are you talking about?” the lead demanded.

Harry laughed chillingly. “Little boys playing with knives in the dusk. Four more statistics for the police. Come to me. Come to your eternal sleep.”

There was a moment of perfect stillness.

As one, the four men turned and ran as fast as they could, straight across the street, causing some of the cars to brake hard and swerve to avoid them.

He turned back to her, the fangs gone, and smiled softly. “Are you okay?”

She burst into tears and felt him pull her close.

“Shhh,” he whispered. “It’s okay.”

“I’m so sorry,” she sobbed.

“Whatever for?” he asked.

“I just stood there,” she cried into his shoulder. “I froze; I didn’t even try and help you.” She felt so guilty, like she had let him down personally, and hated the feeling. She’d never been so afraid before, both for him and for herself.

“Shhhh,” he whispered, patting her back gently. “It’s okay. Honestly, it’s fine. They were never going to be a problem.”

“But I should have done something,” she whispered. “I’m a Veela, I should have enthralled them or something. Done anything, not just stand there like a lemon.”

He laughed softly. “Do you want to go back to the school?”

“No,” she said, shaking her head. She didn’t want to return as a failure to her father. She had said that she was going to make sure he was okay, and she was going to do that. “Let’s go and have dinner.”

He smiled at her and turned.

“Just one second,” she called. She reached into her pocket, pulled out a mirror, and had a look at the damage her crying had done to her face. Luckily, it wasn’t much, and she was able to repair it with a tissue and a quick burst of her Veela power. She squared her shoulders.

It had seemed so easy beforehand. She had learnt to duel in classes like the others, and had been the best at it. Academically, she had the skills, but the first time she had a chance to impress him, she had frozen and been worse than useless. It was something else she was going to have to work on. She needed to be able to deal with her fear so that she could stand beside him.

And then there was his vampire impersonation. He had looked dark, mysterious, and elegant. He looked like he was dangerous, like a wolf. It was by far the sexiest thing she had ever seen. Even through her fear, the idea of submitting her life to him, having him drink from her was the most erotic thing she had ever experienced.

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Gabrielle walked into her room and kicked off her shoes. She threw her jacket onto the bed and casually stripped the rest of her clothes off.

“Back, are we?” Fleur’s voice asked through the Floo.

“Come on through, Fleur,” she called, as she walked into the bathroom. She returned a few minutes later, dressed in a pair of pyjama bottoms and a baggy t-shirt.

Her sister was sitting in a chair, sipping a cup of coffee.

“How is he?”

“Sexy? Beautiful? Amazing?” Gabrielle said as she walked into her little kitchenette and made herself a cup of tea.

“How can you drink that stuff?” Fleur asked.

“It took practice, but I’m a little addicted now.”

“Dad told me about what happened.”

Gabrielle nodded and curled up in the chair opposite her sister. “I went to get him, and I saw what he looks like when he’s feeling passionate about something. It took everything for me not to jump him there and then.

“He put his arms around me so we could Apparate, and I could have spent the rest of my life there in perfect pleasure.”

She took a deep breath. “And when we arrived, four thugs tried to mug us.”

“What?” Fleur demanded.

“Four thugs tried to attack us,” Gabrielle repeated.

Fleur started to laugh. “Oh dear. Did Harry leave them in a recognisable state?”

Gabrielle smiled slightly. “He was amazing. He did a wandless charm to make himself look like a Muggle’s idea of a vampire. He told me to stay still, before he told them they were going to pay the price for interrupting a vampire’s lunch.

“I think one of them lost control of his bowels, as they all turned and ran like, well, a vampire was on their tails.”

“And?” Fleur asked.

Gabrielle looked down at her toes. “I froze. I was so scared. He was taking care of the four of them, and I forgot that I was even a Veela and a witch.”

Fleur walked over in front of her and dropped to her knees. “It’s okay. I froze the first time as well. Most people do. If you’re lucky, you’re with someone who can look after you.”

“Harry didn’t freeze the first time.”

“You can’t compare yourself to him. Harry is a hero – he’s unique.”

Gabrielle sniffed and nodded. “Well, afterward we did have a good meal. And he transported me back in his arms again.

“But he’s going to think that I’m useless. Or worse, like that Chang girl.”

Fleur laughed softly. “No, he’s not. He’s going to think that you’re Gabrielle. And that’s a good thing.”

“It is?”

“Yes,” Fleur said firmly. “It is. Now, it’s late, so get to bed. I’m going back to Bill’s for the next few days. If you want me, holler.”

“Thanks sis.”

“You’re welcome,” Fleur smiled. “And hang your clothes up before you go to bed,” she said as she hopped into the fire.

Gabrielle sighed and walked around the room, turning the lights off, before she popped into the bathroom to wash and do her teeth, and eventually she climbed into her bed.

She tried to imagine what it would be like to have Harry in bed with her, the body heat he would generate, and how it would feel to have him there, under her fingertips.

She felt a tear run down her face and land on the pillow beneath her. For the first time she was sorely tempted to tell him the truth. It had been easier to have her morals before she had met him, before she had been held, no matter how platonically, by him.

As the tears continued to fall, she curled up around a pillow, and eventually fell into a troubled sleep.

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“Good morning,” Harry said, as he entered the Headmistress’ office.

“Good morning, Harry,” Olympe smiled. “Did you sleep well?”

“I did, yes. It took me a few minutes to get used to the bed, but I was tired.”

“Did you enjoy Paris?”

He smiled and nodded. “Look, I want to apologise for yesterday.”

“You have absolutely nothing to apologise for,” Olympe interrupted firmly. “It was the most idiotic thing I have ever seen. Madame Prévoyez and I had a very long talk about her behaviour, and she is now on probation. That sort of thing is not tolerated here.”

Harry smiled slowly, pleasantly surprised. “Thank you.”

“I do have one question though.”

“Please.”

“Would you mind having a talk with our defence instructor? He was very excited with seeing you in action, and he would love the opportunity to discuss some of the techniques you have used and how he can teach them to our students.”

Harry looked thoughtfully at the half-giant. “I’ll meet with him,” he said slowly. “On the condition that he doesn’t push me for answers I don’t want to give. I’m sorry, but there are some things about me that are not for public consumption.”

“Of course, Harry,” Olympe said with a smile. “I’ll have a talk with him myself beforehand, to emphasise the point. Has Gabrielle been looking after you properly?”

“She has been doing a splendid job,” Harry said with a smile. “I am a little worried about propriety though. I remember from my school days that I was never in a professor’s quarters.”

Olympe nodded. “The rules don’t really apply to Gabrielle,” she said carefully. “Apart from being Head Girl, she is a Veela. Do you know anything about them, Harry?”

“Very little,” he admitted freely.

“They grow up at different rates to humans, but as they live in the Wizarding Society, they have to follow the same rules as we do. We have tried to help her out, by allowing her to be Head Girl early. In some ways, she is far beyond her years.”

Harry nodded. “She did well last night.”

“May I ask what happened?”

“We had some Muggles try to rob us,” he said with an amused grin. “She was scared, but kept her head enough to move out of my way and do exactly as I told her.”

“What did you do to the Muggles?”

Harry smiled, showing his teeth.

“Vampire?”

Harry nodded and smiled again as his teeth vanished. “Yep. I made them think that they had interrupted a Nosferatu feeding on Gabrielle, and they

ran like the wind.”

Olympe laughed softly.

“Gabrielle was quite harsh on herself, as she felt like she should have done more than freeze. To be honest, I was pleased she didn’t do anything. It could have got messy otherwise.”

“She is at the top of her defence class,” Olympe said slowly. “But with very little practical experience.”

Harry nodded. “I was more impressed with afterwards. She didn’t let it get her down and carried on as normal. I was quite grateful for a quiet evening.

“She did talk to me about some plans you have for starting a Quidditch series here?”

Olympe nodded and tilted her head, staring at him. “I think, Mr Potter that I am going to be a lot more forward with you than I thought. I’m going to be in Paris for a few days. When I get back, I’d like to hear your proposals for Quidditch and how you would like to set up the teams as well. I expect you to work with Gabrielle closely, as she is the students’ representative.”

Harry smiled slightly. “Can I make recommendations further than that, or stick strictly to Quidditch?”

Olympe grinned at him. “You can make recommendations about anything you like. I don’t have to follow them.”

“True,” Harry grinned. “Is there a way I can talk to Jean? Gabrielle said that he was a little upset last night about what happened, and I wanted to reassure him that it wasn’t his fault.”

“An excellent idea, Harry,” she said, as she turned to her Floo. She threw some powder into it and whispered a name.

“Olympe?” Jean’s head asked.

“I’m on my way to Paris,” she replied. “But Harry wanted a word with you, so I’ll leave you two alone. Harry, I’ll see you in a few days time.”

Harry nodded and took her seat as she walked out.

“Hi, Jean,” he said with smile. “I just wanted to tell you not to worry about last night.”

“It was an idiotic thing for her to do,” Jean sighed. “But I’m relieved that you are still in shape. Fleur told me about what happened in Paris last night. I have to admire your restraint. From a legal point of view, if you had done anything else, it wouldn’t matter.”

“I don’t like fighting,” Harry replied. “But I will to protect others. They weren’t even a slight threat. I could have stopped them without magic, but decided a good scare might be more effective in the long run.”

“The Muggle police picked them up this morning. They were very drunk and talking about Vampires drinking the blood of Angels.”

Harry laughed softly. “Gabrielle can have that effect on people.”

Jean nodded and smiled. “Why don’t you come to my home for the weekend? Fleur and Bill will be here, and my wife would love to meet you.”

Harry nodded. “I will,” he agreed.

“Excellent,” Jean said. “I shall see you then.” He bowed and vanished from the Floo.

Harry reached up and grabbed the Floo powder, and called Ron and Hermione.

“Alright, mate?” Ron said with a grin. “How’s France – met any onion sellers yet?”

“Ron,” Hermione sighed and pushed him to one side. “Hi, Harry,” she smiled at him. “How’s your first day been?”

“Interesting,” he said with a slight sigh, as he made the mental change to speak in English again. “I went to dinner last night, and one of the other professors thought it would be a good idea to bring an assassin’s ring in with her.”

The two faces in the flames winced as one. “Your Dark Magic detectors went nuts?” Ron asked.

“Yep. I destroyed it, but it was the sort of thing I was really hoping to have left behind me. Olympe and Jean have both apologised though, so it’s dealt with.”

They both nodded, causing him to smile. “So, apart from alienating most of my future colleagues, I think I made a friend.”

“Who?” Hermione asked.

“Gabrielle Delacour.”

Ron and Hermione both smiled. “She’s a wonderful person,” Hermione said. “And if you’d come to a few more family functions, you’d have found that out beforehand.”

Harry shrugged. "You were right, by the way, Hermione. Muggles are terrified of Vampires."

"What have you done now?" Hermione sighed.

---

Harry walked slowly through the school, looking around at some of the amazing details. He stopped occasionally to have a chat with the paintings, and he found out that there were no ghosts in Beauxbatons.

Without really realising it, he ended up outside the door that Gabrielle had indicated was hers. He knocked gently.

"Harry?" she said with a smile, as she opened the door.

"I'm going for a fly," he said. "I thought I'd invite you, as Madame Maxime has recruited your services for me."

"As more than a guide?" Gabrielle asked.

Harry nodded. "I'll explain later."

"Let me just get changed," she said. "Come in."

He followed her in. Her room was a little like his, only with a much smaller kitchen area. He guessed it was because she would eat most of her meals with the other students.

He sat down on one of the chairs and smiled slightly. The room had some of the clothes she was wearing the night before strewn around carelessly. It gave the room a lived in look, which combined with the pictures strewn around haphazardly, added to a domesticated feel.

Gabrielle walked out of her bedroom; she'd changed into a pair of jeans and a white shirt. "Ready?" she asked.

He nodded and they walked to the Quidditch Pitch.

"You're not using your own broom?"

"Nope," Harry said, as he pulled two of the school brooms off the rack. "Mine is a little over the top for here. It's a custom model; the Firebolt Corporation built them for Viktor and me to use in the World Cup.

"I need to be using the same broom as you anyway, so I know what they can do."

Gabrielle nodded and followed him to the centre of the pitch. "How good a flier are you?" he asked.

"Average," she said, smiling.

"Well, let's get up in the air." He watched as Gabrielle methodically placed her broom on the ground, and then called it to her hand. She mounted it daintily and flew up to around fifty feet.

"Coming?" she yelled.

He smiled slightly and casually leaped into the air, sliding his broom between his legs, and taking off in a single movement. A second later, he was hovering in front of her, upside down. "That was a very formal take off," he noted.

"That was the way we were taught," she explained, looking down a little.

"What did you do after you were in the air?"

"Laps," she explained. "The purpose of flying a broom is to get from point A to point B with as minimum fuss as possible."

Harry slid his broom to one side, performing a horizontal loop so that he was the right way up. "Your teacher told you that?"

Gabrielle nodded.

"Haven't you even flown for fun?"

"We've not been allowed to," Gabrielle explained. "Flying is a little boring, unless you're playing Quidditch."

Harry shook his head slowly. It sounded like the person he had replaced had sucked all the fun out of flying. "Do you trust me?" he asked.

"Of course," Gabrielle replied instantly, as if it had been a silly question.

"Follow me down," he commanded and dropped like a stone, pulling up just before his feet brushed the ground.

Gabrielle came down more sedately, touching the ground with absolute precision.

"Climb onto mine," he said, sitting back a little.

She nodded, and left her broom, walking over to him. She sat in front of him, in the same formal pose she had used before.

He reached out and grabbed her waist, pulling her back against him. He was a little surprised by how light she was again. “Right,” he said into her ear. “Your teacher forgot one of the most important things about flying.”

“What’s that?” she asked.

“To have fun,” he grinned and shot the broom up vertically. He held on tight as Gabrielle’s back pressed into his chest, as he urged the broom on. He pushed the broom faster and faster, before pushing it into an arc.

“Swallow a few times,” he shouted, “It will normalise the pressure in your ears.”

He felt her follow his advice, and then turn her head and twist to look at him. “Are you insane?” she asked, a wide smile on her face.

“But of course,” he grinned. “All Quidditch players are insane. Ready to have some fun?”

“I’m yours,” she laughed.

“Then hold on tight,” he smiled, as he nudged nose down, sending them into a corkscrew dive.

He could hear her scream over the rushing wind.

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Olympe sighed and kicked off her shoes. Far from being cut, her budget had been increased for the coming year. She knew exactly why, and she wasn’t sure she should be happy about it. The French Government, as Jean had predicted, were falling over themselves to ensure that Harry was doing okay. The political kudos that they were gaining from all over the world was making them very happy.

The fact that Harry had left his own country and taken residence at Beauxbatons was a source of great pride to them.

Harry just wanted to be left alone, to be allowed to live his life. He didn’t care for the political side of things, and that was why she felt guilty about her budget. She felt like she was benefiting from the things that made him unhappy.

She was very curious to see what he was going to come up with for the Quidditch matches. The excitement from the professional clubs in France had been immense when they had heard that Harry was going to teach at school, and she had been practically ordered to allow them to help. The result was the finest Quidditch training ground in the world.

“Olympe?” a voice called from her fireplace.

“Albus?” she said with surprise, as she walked over.

“It’s good to see you again,” the Hogwarts headmaster said cheerfully in perfect French. It always made her a little uncomfortable that his French was better than her English, and she wasn’t sure if he did it on purpose.

“And you,” she replied dryly. She still hadn’t forgiven him for putting Gabrielle in danger, and while he had claimed to be as ignorant as her, she wasn’t so sure.

“I hear you have one of my former pupils working for you now.”

Former pupil were not the words she would use to describe him. “I have,” she agreed.

“Excellent,” Albus smiled. “I believe that you are going to play a few Quidditch matches this year as well.”

“Albus,” she sighed. “I’ve had a long day; I really don’t want to play games with you. Can you please get to the point?”

“I thought it would be nice if we had an inter-school Quidditch tournament,” he said with a smile. “I’ve already talked to Durmstrang, and they are willing.”

“I hardly think that we should be participating our first year,” she sighed.

“Nonsense,” Albus disagreed, his blue eyes twinkling merrily. “It would be good to get the students involved in some gentle competition that is slightly less dangerous than a Tri-Wizard Tournament.”

“I’m sorry, Albus,” she replied. “I might be more interested next year.”

“Of course,” Albus said, as if he hadn’t heard her. “I would be willing to put a prize up. Say, the Cup of Throbus.”

“You have that?” she gasped.

“Indeed,” he said with a smile. “It would be a fitting prize for the winning school, don’t you think?”

She frowned, realising that she had been manipulated into accepting. “Fine,” she gave in with a sigh. She couldn’t risk her kinsfolk hearing that she had backed away from a chance of winning their ancestral heirloom. “We’ll play in your tournament.”

“Excellent,” Albus said with a smile. “I’ll have a talk with Durmstrang, and we can arrange the matches. I propose we each play each other, and the two teams with the best results, play a final match to determine the victor.”



She nodded. “That sounds acceptable,” she agreed. “Obviously, each team will be made up with students who are already attending each school, so transfer students would unfortunately be forbidden.”

Albus paused for a moment, and then nodded. “I agree.”

“In that case, Albus, if you will excuse me, I’ve had a long day.”

“Congratulations on your budget,” he said, and closed the Floo.

She walked over and sat in front of a large mirror, suddenly very worried. “How am I going to tell Harry that he’s going to have to go back to Hogwarts?” she asked her reflection.

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“So, what did you want to talk to me about?” Gabrielle asked, as she sat down daintily on the grass.

Harry frowned slightly and snapped his fingers, a blanket appearing in his hands.

It was that sort of casual display of magic that she found hypnotic to watch. To most people, magic was a musical instrument. It was something they practised with a lot and could normally manage to only produce a decent tune. For Harry, magic appeared to be a part of him, like thinking or breathing. It was as if the normal rules had looked at him and decided that he wasn’t going to follow them, so they wouldn’t even talk to him.

She had no idea if he had conjured the blanket, pulled it out of a hidden storage area, or even *Accio* ’d it. He’d just decided that he wanted it and had made it happen. She wondered if he’d let her do a project on him. On the positive side, it would give her a fascinating subject to do a dissertation on, but on the other hand it might invade his privacy a little too much.

He spread the blanket out on the grass and he lay down on his side comfortably. She crawled over to the blanket and then sat cross-legged in front of him. She hid a blush as she realised that if she’d worn a skirt, he’d be in perfect position to see up it. She followed that quickly by cursing herself for not thinking ahead and wearing one. Nowhere in the books she’d read, had it said that you should always plan ahead in case an opportunity came up.

“What did you want to talk to me about?” she asked, shutting away the distracting thoughts for now.

Harry smiled at her, and she wished he’d take his sunglasses off. As good as they looked on him, she couldn’t see his eyes and she didn’t like that. “I talked to Madame Maxime, and she graciously gave me permission to make any suggestions I like about the organisation of the school on a competitive level.”

She smiled and pulled out a quill and note pad. It was a movement she had practised endlessly, and she could now do it so fast, most people thought it was magic.

“You didn’t use magic to do that,” he said.

Most people but Harry, obviously.

“How did you know?” she asked.

“I was watching your magic,” he said with a slight smile. “There was no flare.”

That was possibly the strangest thing she had ever heard. She had no idea what he meant at all, and decided that she would talk to Ron and Hermione for advice on how to ask him to let her study him. She nodded, filing the information away for later. “So do you want to go down a House-type route?”

“Not really,” he said with a frown, rolling onto his back and staring into the sky. “I don’t want to change anything too radically, especially not if it would involve changing the sleeping arrangements of the students. And I kind of like the idea of people in the same year together like that, as it means that everyone will meet everyone else at some stage. There were people in my year that I’d hardly even met.

“But we do need a way of drawing people together in a way that will inspire pride.”

Gabrielle absently nibbled the end of her quill. “There’s probably too many regions of France to use. How many do you want?”

“Four or Five is a good number,” he said absently. “How about important buildings in Paris?”

“Hmm,” she said thoughtfully. “We could have Pont Neuf, Notre Dame, Versailles Palace, and La Bastille.”

“I’ve heard of Notre Dame, but what are the other three?” Harry asked.

“Pont Neuf is the oldest bridge that crosses the Seine. It was made in 1548 by some of the best engineers in France, and some of the best wizards. It has stood up to every flood since.

“Versailles Palace started out as a small hunting lodge for Louis XIII. It was Louis XIV, with the help of his council of Wizards, who expanded it into the huge palace it is today. It’s famous because the Muggle first World War ended there, with the signing of the Versailles treaty.

“La Bastille is the home of the French Ministry of Magic. As far as Muggles can see, it is a monument to the Bastille, the prison that was stormed

by a mob in 1789, which marked the start of the Revolution.”

“They sound perfect,” Harry said softly, as he looked at her in a way she hadn’t seen from him before.

“We could also make it so that each group does an academic project on the magic and Muggle mix behind each one.”

“Good idea,” Harry smiled, rolling onto his side again. “You know about Hogwarts points system?”

She nodded. “Our discipline procedure is based on personal responsibility. If you do something bad, you get bad grades, and you fail the course.”

“Adding a point system to that might add an element of competition, but might also take it too far. Rather than points, how about a merit scheme? You do some good work, you get a positive merit you do bad work, and you get a negative. At the end of the year, they get totalled up.

“It takes away the arbitrary nature of points, and stops one professor adversely affecting the results.”

She nodded and noted down everything he had said. It was obvious he was basing it on the Hogwarts scheme but trying to fix the deficiencies.

“Will each group have a Quidditch team?”

“Of course,” he grinned at her. “And a captain, chosen by me. Any one in the school will be eligible to play for their group. And we need to come up with a name for them.”

She smiled slightly. This was fun, lying in the grass in the bright sun, talking with her mate, having an intelligent conversation. If only it had the promise of a kiss at the end of it. “I think we might end up with houses,” she said slowly. “Every word I can think of sounds wrong.”

“Yeah,” he agreed. “Okay, so we’ll call them houses anyway.”

“We need to make sure that people who are doing well academically get rewarded as well,” she said after a few minutes of silence. “Maybe we should have an art competition at the end of the year and some form of quiz. Art and Academics should be equally as important as Sport.”

He sat up and folded his legs, sitting like she was. “And that means more people can be involved,” he said. He flashed her a brilliant smile. “Good idea.”

“Thank you,” she said, fighting both a blush and the urge to jump him.

“What’s the plan for this afternoon?” he asked.

“What do you want to do?” she returned.

“Fly,” was his simple answer.

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“I like your ideas, Harry,” Olympe said as he finished presenting them. The last two days had been spent mainly with Gabrielle, exploring the school in depth. He was pretty sure he knew his way around now.

He was ready to Floo with her to her parents’ house this evening.

“But before I give an answer, I’m afraid I have to tell you something.”

“Oh?” he asked, wondering what it was. He’d had a good time so far – the best he’d had in a very long time, as there hadn’t been a single press photographer that he had seen. The press coverage of his visit had been factual and low key, something he was very grateful for.

“While I was in Paris, Albus Floo’d me.”

“Oh?” he said again, aware that his voice had gone cold.

She nodded and looked a little nervous. The expression seemed out of place on her large face. “He asked Beauxbatons to join Hogwarts and Durmstrang in an inter-school Quidditch tournament.”

“I really don’t want to go back there.”

“I know,” she sighed. “And I said no, but Albus pulled out his trump card. He has the Cup of Throbus, and is offering it as the prize.”

“What’s the Cup of Throbus?” he asked slowly.

“It’s the equivalent of the Holy Grail,” she explained quietly. “It’s the cup that the first Giant carved back in the dawn of time.”

“And typically,” Harry snorted. “A priceless item is being used to play his petty little games.”

“I couldn’t say no. My people would never forgive me.”

“You do realise that the chances of us winning, with students who have never played competitively before, is slim to none?”

She nodded. “If anyone can do it, it would be you.”

"I find your faith comforting, if misplaced. I've taught people how to play Quidditch before."

"That is the least of my worries," she said, shrugging her shoulders. "Are you going to help me?"

"It's my job," he said, sounding resigned. "I should have known that I might escape the press, but I will never escape the manipulations of that old man."

"You don't have to do this," she said softly.

He tilted his head and stared at her. "What example would I be to the students if I didn't turn up to their match?"

"Harry, can I ask why you are so reluctant to go back to Hogwarts?"

He frowned and then sighed. "It's not so much Albus, him I can deal with. What I can't deal with is my opposite, their flight instructor."

"Who is that?"

"Draco Malfoy," Harry spat. Even saying the name filled him with a desire to Apparate to Hogwarts and finish him off once and for all.

"I thought he was a Death Eater?" Olympe asked, looking confused.

"He claimed he was under the *Imperio* us, the same defence his father used. He used his fortune to bribe the judges, and escaped innocent but broke. Albus gave him a job, claiming that it was for the best."

"And you don't think so?" she asked.

"He cast the Cruciatus Curse on Hermione. He was not under the *Imperio* us Curse when he did it. I broke his nose, but didn't have time to do anything else. From what I hear, he is exactly like Snape. Between them, they are ruining another generation of Slytherins."

"Wouldn't it be a challenge to beat him?"

He smiled slightly, recognising her tactics for what they were. "In a fair fight, he wouldn't have a chance, which is probably why Albus has organised it this way. So be it, if he wants a tournament, he'll get one. It might cost him his flying instructor, but that's a small price to pay."

"You can be quite scary at times."

"I know," he said, a little glumly.

"It's not a bad thing, Harry. At least when you aren't the target."

He smiled slightly. "Thanks, I think."

"In that case," Olympe smiled. "I will check your proposals over with Jean. I do like the idea of Sports, Arts, and Academics being given equal footing. I would have probably turned it down otherwise."

"In which case, you were very wise to assign Gabrielle to me. It was her idea."

Olympe nodded slowly. "I thought as much. Well, if you're going to Jean's tonight, you better get going."

Harry nodded. He stood and bowed to the Headmistress, before walking out the door and up to his suite of rooms.

He looked at his watch and then jumped onto the bed, stretching out. Something very strange was going on, and he wanted to know what it was. Everyone was being very encouraging towards him and Gabrielle, and it didn't really make sense. Even if she was older than normal, he was still a professor.

He'd noticed that she was certainly interested in him. He'd dated enough girls to recognise the signs of that by now, and he wasn't exactly fourteen anymore and a lonely virgin.

Gabrielle herself wasn't a problem. Apart from being the most beautiful girl he had ever seen, she was smart, well educated, and could hold a conversation. She also treated him as if she'd known him all her life. When Fleur had tried to Enthrall him, it had been very different to when Gabrielle had done it, and it had made him a little suspicious.

He walked over to the Floo, and threw some powder into it. "Hey Harry," Ron said cheerfully. "Looking forward to the weekend?"

"Yeah," he replied in English. "Look, I've got a question."

"Go ahead," Ron said, sitting down in front of the fire.

"Do you think it's right for a professor and a student to get involved?"

"That depends on the student," Ron said promptly.

"Gabrielle," he said.

"Well, you're not really a professor," Ron pointed out with an easy smile on his face. "And Gabrielle is a Veela, and we all know that they grow up differently. And she's a complete fox, so I'd go for it."

"Would you, Ronald Weasley?" Hermione demanded, as she sat next to him.

"If I didn't have a beautiful wife," Ron said with a smile.

Hermione rolled her eyes. "I like Gabrielle," she said to Harry.

"I didn't know you'd spent that much time with her," Harry replied slowly.

"Oh, I spent some time with her over the summer," Hermione admitted freely.

"So you think she would be someone I could date without trouble?"

"I do," Hermione said firmly.

"Okay, thanks guys," he said. "I might pop over and see you on Sunday."

"Bring Gabrielle," Ron suggested.

"I just might," he agreed and closed the connection.

Now he was very suspicious. That whole conversation had the feeling of a snow job. He sighed softly; despite his occasional mood swings, he was no longer a teenager. And if being with Albus for so long had taught him anything, it was how to recognise when he was being manipulated.

But *why*, was the question. And why with such attractive bait. Why was everyone so eager for him to get close to Gabrielle? Why was Jean, a man he knew to be honourable, completely at home with him taking Gabrielle to Paris for an evening? Most fathers that he knew would at least be a little curious about their relationship.

He sighed softly again; it seemed that no matter where he went, he couldn't escape being the pawn in someone else's game, and he was more than a little fed up with it.

He shook his head and made a decision. He wasn't sure if he wanted a relationship with the girl, but tonight he'd ask Jean directly for permission to date Gabrielle. It might seem a little underhanded to deliberately push the situation, but he needed to know that he wasn't being paranoid, and it would give him a very good indication of whether he was being manipulated, or if it was just all in his head.

## Hope 3 - Normandy

Hermione Granger-Weasley was smart. All her life she had been told by everyone just how clever she was. If it was in a book, she knew about it. If it was lost, she could find it.

Even after she had left school, she continued to be smart. She managed to teach Harry Potter to speak French perfectly, like a true Parisian, and to finish off the job, she'd even taught him how to speak like a lowly dockworker.

Feeling stupid was not something she was used to. Feeling stupid was, in fact, something she had so little experience with, that the thought she had been stupid was almost paralysing.

"Hermione?" Ron asked. "Are you all right?"

"Bugger," Hermione said, shaking her head in denial.

"Bugger?" Ron asked, looking concerned. "What's the matter? Everything went according to plan, didn't it?"

Hermione looked up at her husband and sighed. "How many of Harry's girlfriends have we ever approved of?"

"Ginny?" Ron offered.

"Exactly," Hermione said and she felt a headache start to form. "I need to talk to Jean."

"Jean? Why?"

"Think, Ron. Harry Floo'd us, talking about a girl he's interested in, and what do we do?"

Ron blinked and looked thoughtful. "We tell him to go for it?"

"With all the subtlety of a bull in a china shop; what is Harry going to think?"

"Bugger," Ron swore as he reached the same conclusion she had and went very pale.

"Exactly," Hermione moaned. She stood and took a few steps forward, throwing some powder into the fire. "Jean-Sebastian Delacour," she called.

A bald head in the fireplace appeared. "Delacour residence," it said in French.

"Is it possible to speak to Jean?" Hermione asked, switching languages easily.

"I'm afraid that he has left orders not to be disturbed, as he has an important guest this evening."

Hermione nodded. "Can you please ask him to Floo me as soon as he is available?"

"I will," the butler nodded.

Hermione closed the connection and sat down, wrapping her arms around her legs.

"What happened?" Ron asked.

"Jean has told everyone not to interrupt him while he is with Harry. I can't get through to him. Even if we Owled him, it would be too late," she sighed softly. "Harry's going to hate us, isn't he?"

"Isn't that something we should have been worrying about when we started this?" Ron asked dryly.

"But it was the perfect answer to everything," Hermione sighed. "It was going to get Harry out of his moods, out of his house, and even find him a beautiful girl who loves him for himself, not as Harry Potter. And it was going to save Gabrielle!"

"And instead of telling him all that, we manipulated him into it," Ron said calmly.

"How can you be so calm?" Hermione demanded, frowning at him.

"Because I figured this would happen," Ron said, wandering over to the kitchen. He started to make a couple of cups of tea.

"Then why didn't you say anything?" Hermione shouted from the living room.

“I did,” he said as he walked back in and passed her a cup of tea. “But there’s no point in talking about it now; we have to deal with it as it comes up.”

“Harry is going to hate us!”

“For a bit, sure; but we’re friends, so he’ll forgive us eventually.”

“But I don’t want to lose him, even for a bit.”

“Look, if you want, I’ll say it was my idea, and you didn’t know anything about it.”

“You’d do that?” Hermione asked.

“For you, yeah.”

Hermione smiled and got to her feet. She walked over to her husband and kissed him softly. “Now there’s the man I married,” she smiled. “And no, you’re not taking the blame for this. I’ll just tell Harry the truth and hope he listens.”

Ron tightened his arms around her.

“Why didn’t you try harder to stop me, Ron?”

Ron leaned back, all traces of levity gone from his expression. “A lot of the time, the only way you’ll learn a lesson to go through and experience it yourself. You get ideas in your head, darling, and you won’t let anyone sway you, regardless of their experience or expertise. Until you have seen first hand the other side, you think that you are always right. You thought you knew best about this, and nothing I could have said would have dissuaded you. Don’t get me wrong, I like Gabrielle, and I like a lot of what has happened; I just think it would have been better to lay the cards on the table and not hide it from Harry.”

Hermione looked at him, her eyes wide with shock. “You’ve done that many times,” she whispered.

“Let you find out for yourself that something was a bad idea?”

She nodded.

“I have,” he agreed.

“All this time,” she mumbled, “I thought I was handling you, but you’ve been handling me.”

Ron nodded.

She slowly smiled, “When did you get so smart?”

“It probably rubbed off from you,” he said with an easy smile. “Don’t worry about Harry; we’ll deal with it together and you will be able to promise to never do it again.”

Hermione nodded fervently.

“So let’s go out for dinner and have a nice time.”

“I love you,” Hermione whispered.

“I know. I love you too.”

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Harry looked at his bed and frowned thoughtfully. Underwear, socks, suit, jeans, t-shirt, jacket, tuxedo, several shirts, and a pair of swim shorts were neatly folded on his bed alongside three pairs of shoes. He couldn’t think of anything else he might need.

He pulled out a bag and packed everything away neatly, Hermione’s packing tips echoing through his mind.

He walked over to the mirror and gave himself a quick glance-over. He was wearing very dark trousers with a cashmere boat neck sweater. He touched his glasses absently, changing them to be more transparent, and walked over to the Floo.

A second later, he was on his way. He still hated travelling by anything other than his own steam, but had at least learnt how to keep clean. He kept a dirt-resistant spell around him and a balance spell for when he landed.

Normal people, of course, didn’t need those spells, but Hermione had taken the time to work out exactly why he was always forcefully ejected from the Floo, and she’d discovered that as the Floo was powered by a wizard’s own magic, the fact that he had a surplus meant that he always travelled faster than everyone else.

“Welcome to my humble abode,” Jean greeted him as he stepped out of the fireplace.

“Humble?” Harry asked dryly, looking around at the magnificent interior.

Jean's lips twitched, and he nodded. "Indeed," he said with a self-deprecating shrug. "The ladies are preparing themselves for dinner, so I thought we could take a stroll outside."

"Sounds like a fine idea," Harry said. "I could do with the exercise."

Jean took his bag and placed it on the floor and then led him down a long wooden panelled corridor, and out a large set of double doors onto a huge stone terrace.

They walked in silence down into the garden and over a small moat bridge, before Jean stopped and turned.

Harry looked back at where they had walked and he whistled under his breath. "It's as big as Hogwarts," he muttered.

"Not quite," Jean said with a slight smile. "This is actually the fourth castle to have been built on this site. We're in the heart of Ouche country, in the lower part of Normandy. The first two castles were built by the barons of Ferté-Fresnel in the tenth century. The third one was a baronial manor house called "Le Colombier" and was an imitation of the earlier castles, which was built in 1766 by Baron D'Hericy. This castle was built in 1853 by a Parisian architect by the name of Stores, who was also the State Buildings Inspector.

"We've turned a lot of it into a hotel for Muggles, as it helps us pay for the upkeep."

"Good plan," Harry said dryly. "It would seem a waste for all those rooms to be permanently empty."

"I agree," Jean said with a nod. "And with the judicious placement of charms, we never actually see or hear them. We are totally isolated from them, and it gives us complete privacy."

They walked around the building, with Jean pointing out more of the castle's features, before he looked at his watch. "Ready to eat?"

"Absolutely."

They walked back into the castle and up a sweeping staircase into a formal dining room.

"I see our other guests have arrived," Jean remarked, indicating a tall red-haired man.

"Bill," Harry greeted him with a smile. "It's good to see you again; how are you? And how's the job?"

"Whoa," Bill said in English. "Slow down a minute, Harry; my French isn't that good."

"Oh, sorry," Harry apologised, switching effortlessly to English. "You know, you should really get Hermione to teach you."

Bill shrugged and stuck out his hand. "Some of us simply do not have a natural aptitude for foreign languages," he sighed. "I can understand most of what is being said, but when people launch at me with that rapid fire stuff; it takes me a while to work through it."

"William is at least trying," Jean said dryly, also in English.

"You've met Fred and George," Harry grinned. "They are *really* trying. Bill's an amateur compared to them."

"Thank you," Bill said, matching Jean's tone to perfection. "Fleur's been looking forward to this dinner since Jean invited us."

"Excellent," Jean said with a clap of his hands. "We always enjoy your visits, William."

Bill smiled and nodded. "As do we."

The door to the left opened and an older French woman entered regally.

"Aimée," Jean said formally in French. "I would like to introduce Harry Potter. Harry, this is my wife, Aimée."

Harry moved over to her and took her proffered hand, gently kissing the back of it. "It is an honour, Madame, to greet the lady who is so obviously the source of both her daughters' good looks."

Aimée raised her eyebrows at her husband for a second and then moved forward and lightly took Harry's arm. "Come," she said gently, "and we shall talk."

Harry nodded and accompanied her to the table, holding out her seat for her to sit. He sat next to her.

"It's so rare to find someone of your generation with true manners."

Harry blushed uncomfortably.

"Relax," Aimée said with a slight smile. "Contrary to whatever William might have told you, I do not bite."

"I'm afraid that William hasn't told me anything about you at all. Your husband, on the other hand, spent many an hour over a glass of wine talking about you during the war."

Aimée looked up and smiled at her husband for a brief second. "I do thank you, Harry, for allowing my husband to return to me, fully intact."

Harry laughed softly. "I didn't do much, Madame; Jean is more than capable of handling himself."

"Harry," Aimée said firmly. "First, please call me Aimée. And second, if you hadn't stopped that monster, he would not have returned as I like him."

"Those were dark days," Harry half-whispered. "But they're in the past, where they belong. I don't think anyone really likes remembering them."

Aimée nodded. "Very true, Harry. So we shall talk about lighter matters. Are you looking forward to teaching our students to fly properly?"

"I was very surprised at the formal way of flying they had already been taught."

"So I heard. Gabrielle told me how wonderful it was to fly with you. It was quite a treat to see her so animated about something that isn't in a book."

Harry looked around conspiratorially and then leaned in a little closer. "To be honest, I've got plans for her," he said with a soft wink. "She has very good balance on a broom and has very good eyesight. I'm going to make her into a Seeker."

Aimée smiled slowly. "Do you think she has the potential to do well?"

"I do," Harry said with a smile. "I'm sure she'll do well. Being a Seeker is as much about mental strength as it is about flying and ability. It was something that my opponents at Hogwarts never quite grasped. You have to be able to watch the play, watch for the Snitch, and help your teammates, while having the fate of the game resting on your shoulders."

"It is the position that is the hardest, but it's also the most prominent. I'm sure that Gabrielle already has the mental strength and I can teach her everything else that she will need."

"What do you think of the interschool matches?"

"May I be blunt?" Harry asked, a smile hovering across his lips.

Aimée leaned closer, her blue eyes twinkling. "But, of course."

"If you ignore the subtext, I am positive that secretly, Hogwarts and Durmstrang are looking forward to beating Beauxbatons."

"Really?"

Harry nodded and then smiled ruthlessly. "But we shall show them that underestimating these students is a very bad idea. I've got a school team mentally picked out, based on their abilities in other sports and their general physiques. As long as we can convince them to participate and teach them to fly properly, we should surprise a few people."

Aimée smiled delightedly. "I am very pleased to hear that. Our national team is a disgrace, and this country truly needs something to cheer about at the moment."

"Indeed it does," Jean said in English, sitting opposite his wife at the head of the table. Bill sat down diagonally across from Harry, leaving two spaces for Gabrielle and Fleur.

"It was a bad idea to let Fleur go and see Gabrielle beforehand," Bill said dryly as he glanced at his watch.

"The day my daughters are on time for a family dinner has yet to arrive," Aimée said as she shook her head. Like her husband, her English was perfect, with just a trace of a French accent. "They have always had the amazing ability to lose sight of the time when they are together."

A butler seemed to materialise next to Jean. With a few deft twists of his wrist, he opened a bottle of wine and poured a small amount into Jean's glass.

Harry watched, fascinated, as Jean first seemed to examine the wine against the white of the table cloth, before he swirled it gently. He started to move his hand, and paused, looking at Harry. "You've never tasted wine before serving it?"

Harry shook his head. "I don't drink much of it. Alcohol and athletics do not go well together."

Jean motioned to the butler, who smoothly walked around the table and poured a small amount into Harry's glass.

"Tasting wine is an art," Jean said reverently. "But it is not just about the taste; it is about the colour and the aroma as well. First, we look at the wine itself. This should be done against a white backdrop, so that you can examine the colour clearly. The colour of wine can vary tremendously; white wines can range from green to yellow to brown. As a general rule, the more colour you can see, the older the wine is; although, brown may indicate that the wine is not fit for dogs. Time can dramatically improve a good red wine, but it ruins most whites. Red wines can range in colour from a pale red to a rich burgundy, and usually become lighter as they age."

"Now, tilt your glass slightly and look at the edge. What colour do you see?"

"It seems to be a kind of brown orange," Harry replied.

"Exactly," Jean said with a smile. "A sign of a mature wine. If it had a purple tint, it would be a very young wine. Now we swirl the wine." Harry swirled his carefully. "This has several purposes – it releases the molecules, allowing us to smell the bouquet of the wine, and it allows us to visually inspect the body of the wine; to see how it reacts. This wine," he said, looking at it, "has, how do you English put it? Oh yes, it has 'good legs,' which means that it has a thicker body and a slightly higher alcohol content. Now, take a quick sniff of the wine, make an initial impression, and



then take a deeper sniff.”

Harry did as he was told and frowned slightly as he concentrated. “It smells slightly spicy.”

Jean nodded. “Now take a small sip.”

Harry raised the glass to his mouth and let the wine wash over his taste buds, before he swallowed. “It’s very similar to the wine we had at Beauxbatons,” he said. “It has the same pleasant aftertaste, but it is slightly better... It seems to be more... grown up.”

“Bravo,” Jean applauded. “It is from the same vineyard, only ten years earlier.” He nodded to the butler, who quickly poured out six glasses. “This is an excellent wine, Harry; one of the very best. Later, we shall be unspeakably brave together, and we will taste some bad wine, so that you can compare them.”

Harry chuckled and nodded. “It sounds like fun,” he said with a grin.

Jean shuddered. “Wait until you’ve tried some of the vinegar that Muggles are passing off as wine these days.”

“Oh, Papa,” Gabrielle sighed theatrically from the door. “Surely you are not corrupting Harry with your obsession over wine already?”

“Gabrielle,” Jean said sternly. “Every young man should learn the difference between a good and a bad wine. I am merely giving Harry his first lesson.”

Harry and Jean both stood, Bill following their example a second later, as Harry sat Fleur next to him, and Bill sat Gabrielle.

“It is good to see you, Fleur,” Aimée said.

“It eez good to be back.”

“And you still have that silly accent,” Aimée sighed.

Fleur shrugged and grinned. “It eez cute,” she said with a flounce of her hair.

“And irritating,” Gabrielle muttered under her breath.

“Brat,” Fleur sniffed.

Gabrielle grinned, and then turned to her father. “What is on the menu tonight, Papa?”

“Anton has prepared one of his finest meals,” Jean replied. “We are starting with Bouillon de poule, with grated black truffles, followed by roasted truffle of foie gras with caramelised endives. Then it will be lobster tortellini with a herb velouté and crustacé vinaigrette. Pan fried fillet of St. Pierre with a light coriander nage will proceed the main course – Roast saddle of lamb with sautéed salsify baby spinach and a glorious thyme sauce. We shall finish with caramelised Granny Smith apple compote with natural yogurt and granité, and dark Valrhona chocolate parfait with milk ice cream.”

“Blimey,” Harry whistled.

Jean and Aimée both laughed together, before Aimée lightly placed her hand on Harry’s arm. “That meal is a little over the top, but I’m afraid our chef was so delighted to be cooking for you, that we didn’t have the heart to hold him back.”

Harry smiled faintly and nodded.

“I know you do not like using your fame,” Aimée continued, “but you did something you were very good at to help others, so you must not mind when others do the same for you. For it is only fair and natural that way. Our chef wanted to repay you for your efforts by doing what he does best – cooking the very finest meal he is capable of. He is honoured to be able to find a small way of saying thank you.”

“I hadn’t thought of it that way,” Harry said, a little surprised.

Aimée smiled. “Now, as much as I did not approve of Madame Prévoyez’s actions, I am pleased that the outcome has meant that your first truly French meal will be with us.”

“And believe me,” Bill said with a grin. “Anton is a truly masterful chef.”

Four hours, seven courses, and three bottles of wine later, Harry agreed completely with Bill’s statement. He couldn’t remember having had a finer meal – and that included the restaurants where he’d dined in London or while on the Quidditch tours abroad.

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“Would it be possible for me to thank Anton personally?”

Jean smiled. “Gabrielle, will you show Harry to the kitchen and then meet us in the lounge?”

“Of course, Papa,” Gabrielle said. “If you will accompany me, Harry, I will escort you to the kitchens, and then give you a quick tour of our chateau.”

As Harry and Gabrielle walked out, Aimée turned to her oldest daughter. “Will you and William excuse us for a few minutes?”

Of course, Mama,” Fleur said, standing. “Bill,” she continued, holding out her hand to him.

Aimée fixed her husband with a look and waited until the two had left the room.

Jean looked back at her and then slowly shifted in his chair.

“That,” Aimée said, indicating the door Harry had just walked out through, “is a charming, honourable young man.”

“I agree,” Jean said, warily.

“So exactly why are we agreeing with this ridiculous scheme of Gabrielle’s to manipulate him into a position where they might, or might not, fall in love – with the guarantor that if they don’t, you will tell him anyway?”

Jean raised his hands defensively. “I know you want to tell him, but I happen to agree with Gabrielle that a caged tiger is one that has lost something.”

“I think you are underestimating that young man.” She sighed softly. “Do you truly believe that this is the correct course of action?”

“No,” Jean sighed. “But I can not think of a better one for Gabrielle.”

“This is not just about her.”

“I know, I know. I had forgotten just how likeable Harry is.”

“Or just how stupid Gabrielle was,” Aimée said sadly. “Despite everything we told her, despite the warnings that I, and Mama, both gave her, she still mated herself to him at that unconscionable age.”

“Aimée,” Jean said softly. “That is in the past. We can not change it.”

“Nor do you want to, Jean-Sebastian Delacour. You want him as a son-in-law, do you not? I know you far too well for you to hide something from me. Why?”

“It’s not for my politics,” Jean said instantly, proving that he had at least learnt a few things in their marriage. “What does any man want for his daughter, but the best possible partner for her? There are not many chevaliers left in the world anymore, and I want the best one for my daughter.”

“She has you wrapped around her little finger,” she said with a slight smile.

“She is the most like her mother,” Jean replied, “intelligent, beautiful, and with a degree of stubbornness a kilometre wide.”

Aimée laughed softly. “Too much like me,” she admitted ruefully. “We have always had a tumultuous relationship.”

“A fact that has pleased our vase maker to no end,” Jean grinned.

“Rogue,” she retorted. “I shall not ruin your scheme, Jean, but I truly hope you are not wrong. There is a volcano inside that young man, and its eruption would be very dangerous.”

“I saw him in the battle, going one on one against Voldemort, my dear,” he whispered softly, his eyes going distant as they always did whenever he talked about the war. She had heard this story many times, in many late nights, but she let him talk anyway.

---

Jean looked around and threw a couple of spells at some of the Death Eaters. He was leading the French Aurors, while Kingsley Shacklebolt was leading the English. They were both approaching in a classic pincer movement, each coming from a different side.

With the Horcruxes destroyed, and the Death Eaters’ location discovered, they had launched one final attack to try and end it.

To one side, the D.A., forever now known as the Defence Association, had just joined the battle – their job was slightly different then the Aurors. They had to get Harry close enough to Voldemort.

They seemed unstoppable, running in perfect unison up the field, bursting through Voldemort’s defensive perimeter and allowing Harry to dash into the middle.

As planned, the D.A., led by Ron and Hermione, backed away and separated into two groups, each helping and joining with one of the groups of Aurors.

It had been a plan a lot of the D.A. had disagreed with, but Harry had insisted on it. The argument between them had grown extremely vocal, before Harry ended it with a suddenness that surprised everyone.

Harry had attacked his friends, using every non-lethal spell known to man. In less than sixty seconds, every member of the D.A., every Auror, every politician, and everyone else in the room was rendered completely immobile.

Jean had been hit by a spell that left him unable to speak, and his arms tied behind his back.

Harry walked over to the table and took a long drink of water. “This is not up for discussion,” he said simply. “You will get me near Voldemort, and

then you will help take out the Death Eaters and leave the rest to me. I need to be able to concentrate on what I am doing and not be looking out for anybody else. None of you have the skills to survive against Voldemort.”

Hermione was the first to break free from the silencing spell. “But Harry,” she begged. “It will be you against ten of his finest!”

Harry shrugged. “I know, Hermione. I know. But this is the only way we can do it. Jean-Sebastian’s plan for attack is the best one I’ve heard yet. We have the chance, we have the opportunity, and we have the people. It’s time to end this.”

Harry waved his hand absently, releasing everyone, and walked out.

“Merde,” Jean had whispered. “I have no doubts left. Let us do what we are told.”

Ron had sighed and nodded, and they had all agreed, with great reluctance, that Harry was right. None of them would be able to keep up with him, and in the end, would hinder him as he tried to look after them as well as himself. It was bravery, almost suicidal, but no one had ever accused Harry of lacking in the courage department.

Curses of all shapes and colours were flying around now. He could see the red hair that signified the Weasleys, and he sent up a quick prayer that they would survive, as he launched more curses into the massed ranks of the Death Eaters.

He could see Harry, on top of the hill, fighting like a demon. But he could see him being hit as well – one of his arms was dangling uselessly; or it was, until Harry cast one spell at a Death Eater, spun, cast a spell on his own shoulder, and continued.

Jean shook his head – emergency field medicine, in the middle of a fight? That took guts, because it was almost as painful to fix it that way as the original damage that caused it.

“For the Glory of France,” he yelled at the top of his lungs. “Charge!”

From across the field, he heard an echoing shout. “For England and for Harry! Charge!”

He ran with the others, all thoughts of safety long forgotten as he was caught up in the fight. A Death Eater stood in his way, casting a curse at him; he twisted violently, letting it fly past him, and sent back a vicious cutting curse that decapitated the Death Eater.

He looked around and winced as he saw Harry on his knees, two Death Eaters holding him, while a third was torturing him.

When he looked again, Harry was back on his feet, with more dead Death Eaters around him.

They *were* winning; the number of moving Death Eaters was significantly less than the Aurors and D.A. members now.

He stood to one side and headed toward Harry trying to see if he could help, but more Death Eaters got in his way, and he was forced to fight them.

When he, with the help of some of his Aurors, had defeated them, only Harry and Voldemort remained.

The boy was in a bad state. The same arm as earlier was hanging at his side, and he could see that Harry was bleeding from cuts and gashes all over his body.

But he was fighting Voldemort directly and was taking a lot more punishment.

It seemed horrific. Even in the midst of the dead and dying around here, the punishment that Harry was taking was too much; it was wrong. No one should have to take that many curses.

Voldemort was laughing, taunting Harry as he held the Cruciatus curse on him for what seemed like an eternity.

He screamed, as did Harry; he wanted to tell Harry to stop, that it wasn’t worth it, nothing was worth *that*.

But Harry suddenly surged to his feet, casting the same spell again to fix his shoulder. Even under the Cruciatus, Harry ran at Voldemort and grabbed the Dark Lord’s wrist with one hand while moving his other hand against Voldemort’s hand.

There was a snap that seemed to echo around the field, as everyone turned to watch.

Harry pushed forward. Voldemort’s wrist now pointing the wrong way into the Dark Lord’s body, with Harry’s wand next to Voldemort’s.

“*Avada Kedavra*,” Harry yelled, and two distinct flashes of green illuminated the landscape.

There was a silence, an absolute silence, before Voldemort fell to the ground, dead.

There was a huge cheer, as Ron, Hermione, and the other D.A. members ran to Harry.

“We need to get those cuts looked at, sir,” a voice to his left said.

He looked at the owner of the voice and then down at his robes. They seemed inconsequential next to the wounds Harry had suffered. “That man is a chevalier,” he whispered.

“That he is, sir,” the French Auror agreed. “Now let’s get you to a surgeon.”

Aimée waited a few seconds and then gently said, “It’s time to join the others.”

Jean jumped slightly and nodded. “Right,” he said with a grin, shaking his head to clear it.

“We shall spend tomorrow morning by the pool,” she said. “Gabrielle will look lovely in a new outfit I have for her.”

“So you’re not completely averse to this,” Jean teased lightly.

“Regardless of any scheme, Harry is a suitable match for Gabrielle, and he is a male. All heterosexual males should be able to admire a female in her bathing costume, and if he does not, your scheme will never work.”

“True,” Jean remarked dryly.

“Sir,” the butler said, appearing at one side.

Jean tilted his head.

“A Mrs Weasley has requested that you call her as soon as is convenient.”

“Thank you,” Jean said. “If she calls again, please tell her that we already know about Dumbledore’s Quidditch tournament, and we are dealing with it.”

“As you wish, sir,” the butler said.

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Harry looked around his room and whistled under his breath. He had stayed in some amazing places so far, and this room was no exception. A Louis XVI room; it had a lot more browns than the blues of Louis XV.

He walked over to the mahogany wardrobe and smiled slightly; his entire luggage had been unpacked, ironed, and expertly put away.

The evening had been a lot of fun. It had been a little strange to talk in English so much, but it had a familiar-ness that reminded him of home. The conversations had been very wide ranging, proving without doubt that all the Delacour’s were highly intelligent but without being overly so.

Aimée Delacour had been a lot of fun. While appearing frigid and reserved, she was very warm and caring underneath, with a wicked sense of humour that she used mercilessly on family and friends alike. As importantly, she was quite happy to receive the humour as well.

He kicked off his shoes and pulled off his pullover, before walking to the door as he heard a faint knock.

“Bill?”

“You’re a git, Harry,” Bill said with a grin as he wandered in and took a seat.

“I am?” Harry asked dryly, sitting on the bed casually.

“Yep,” Bill said firmly. “Guests to the Delacour residence are not supposed to charm Aimée within thirty seconds of getting to know her,” he grinned.

“Whoops?”

Bill laughed. “Fleur’s saying goodnight to Gabrielle, so I figured I’d check to see if you were okay.”

“Yeah, I’m fine,” Harry smile. “It’s not been that difficult to get used to this luxury.”

“It’s not, is it?” Bill smiled. “I had a few troubles when I first realised just how stinking rich they are, but actually, they are a lot like you.”

“Like me?”

“Stand-offish, but once you get through that, really nice people.”

“Ahh,” Harry smiled. “Yeah, I can see that a little. You know what was a little strange?”

“What?”

“When I met Anton. I’m used to people fawning over me and making me uncomfortable. He shook my hand, thanked me seriously for killing Voldemort, and then we talked about cooking for ten minutes. It was,” he paused for a second, “Nice.”

Bill nodded slowly. “The problem you’ve had Harry, is that you’ve only met fans of yours, and they tend to be so awed by you that they spend the first fifteen minutes of any conversation squeeing, and you’ve already moved on by the time they have finished. There are people like Anton all over the world, who are grateful for what you have done and would love to just talk to you as a normal human being.”

“Squeeing?” Harry asked, “do I even want to know what that means?”

Bill laughed. “You spend too much time in exalted circles,” the curse-breaker smirked. “It’s the noise your fans make as you are walking toward

them.”

Harry thought for a second and then winced. “It is a strange kind of squeeing sound, isn’t it? I break out in a cold sweat whenever I hear it.”

“Leave Harry to get some sleep, darling,” Fleur said from the doorway in French, speaking slowly.

“Night, Harry,” Bill replied in English, winked at him, and left.

Harry shook his head slowly, smiling. He would have been hard pressed not to wink, if a gorgeous blonde wearing the same negligee that Fleur had been wearing had told him to go to bed.

He quickly stripped off the rest of his clothes and climbed into bed.

He stared at the ceiling willing sleep to take him, but it wouldn’t.

And it probably wouldn’t for hours yet.

These past few weeks had been a lot of fun and it had given him a sense of optimism. And if one thing had been proved in his life, it was that as soon as something went well, something would go wrong with it.

It was about time for the other shoe to drop.

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Harry walked out of the bedroom, dressed in his swimming shorts, with a towel over his shoulder. He had found some flip-flops next to his bed, along with the towel, and had smiled slightly – amazed at how discreet the staff were, and that they didn’t use house-elves.

He walked out of the castle and into the grounds, adjusting his glasses with a touch to protect his eyes from the bright sunlight.

“Come on, Harry,” Bill shouted from the other end of the pool. “The water’s great.”

Harry nodded and walked over to a sun-lounger; he placed his towel down and kicked off his flip-flops. He pulled off his glasses and cast a seeing-spell in front of his eyes. The spell didn’t last for long, but it at least allowed him to see when he was swimming.

He turned and took three quick steps to the edge of the pool and dived in cleanly. He’d been taught how to swim properly after the first time he had destroyed his shoulder, and he had soon overcome his fear of it. Swimming was excellent exercise, and he’d swum miles to help his shoulder, and fallen in love with it. It was a solitary pursuit, like flying, where he could just relax and completely let go, while tiring himself out. He powered up to Bill with confident over-hand strokes.

“So,” Bill grinned, “you think you’re hot stuff? Let’s race.”

“Are you sure you can keep up, old man?” Harry asked.

“Eight lengths,” Bill growled playfully. “I’ll show you ‘old man’.”

“On three?”

“Three,” Bill said instantly and started swimming.

“Cheat,” Harry yelled, as he watched to see how fast Bill was. He took a deep breath and launched himself after his friend.

---

The phrase “I’ve got nothing to wear,” that Gabrielle complained about was patently untrue. She had a wardrobe bigger than most people’s bedrooms, chock-full of designer clothes.

“Gabrielle,” Aimée sighed. “You have fourteen swimsuits; surely it would not be difficult to pick just one?”

“But they all cover too much skin!”

“If I remember correctly,” Aimée said slowly, “you chose all of these.”

“Of course I did,” Gabrielle sighed. “But I wasn’t trying to help a man fall in love with me at the time. The last thing I want is to wear one of these childish things,” she paused and held up one example. “This one has a starfish on the bum!”

“Then you’ll have to wear this one,” Aimée said with a slight smile, holding out a bag.

Gabrielle dived for it and pulled out the swimsuit. While it was had more material than she would have liked, she was forced to admit that it was both gorgeous and practical, and that she wouldn’t have any problems wearing it in front of him.

“Thank you, Mama,” she said, embracing her mother enthusiastically, before diving into the bathroom to change.

“How do I look?”

“Beautiful,” Aimée said softly.

"You look great too, Mama," Gabrielle said, smiling fondly at her mother.

They might have fought a lot while Gabrielle had been growing up, and her mother had been extremely disappointed with her decision to Mate with Harry, but she had never doubted her mother's love. Even approaching seventy, Madame Delacour had a figure that most twenty year olds would have killed for and a face that treated the prospect of aging with the disdain it deserved.

Aimée stood and offered her hand to her daughter, which she took. She had been awed by her mother's beauty growing up, and for a second, the feeling came back to her. Even dressed in a swimsuit with a matching shirt over it, her mother radiated grace and elegance in a way that Gabrielle hoped one day to be able to imitate.

They walked together toward the doors leading outside when Aimée paused. "Wait here, Gabrielle. When I sit at the edge of the pond, make your entrance. Walk slowly, do not trip, and when you get to the edge of the pool, turn to the left and lightly dip the toes on your right foot in the water, and then sit down next to me."

"Mama?"

"Just do as you're told, Gabrielle."

"Yes, Mama."

---

"It's not fair," Bill complained with a large grin. "You're part fish!"

Harry made a show of checking himself, "I don't see any gills or webbed feet."

Bill stuck his tongue out at him and then started to swim to the other side to meet Aimée.

Harry swam after him, passing him easily. "Morning," he smiled, as he started to tread water a few meters in front of her.

"Good morning, Harry, William," she smiled at them both. "Did you both sleep well?"

"Well, I almost did," Harry grinned, winking at the matriarch. "But I kept hearing these strange noises from Bill's room."

"Will you excuse me for one moment?" Bill said to Aimée, before he turned, reached out, and dunked Harry firmly.

Harry managed to take a deep breath before he was forced underwater, and it only took a second for him to grab the hand that was holding him down, twist slightly, and return the favour, forcing Bill down.

"He's feeling boisterous this morning," Harry said as he let Bill up.

"So I can see," Aimée smiled. "Can I ask why you didn't use silencing charms?" she asked Bill.

Bill opened his mouth and then shut it again, going bright red.

Aimée laughed delightedly and sat down carefully on the edge of the pool, letting her legs dangle in the pool.

Behind her, Harry could see Gabrielle walk out of the house; she was carrying a towel over one arm and was dressed in a solid silver swimsuit. Her hair was loose and flowing over her shoulders, and she walked with a calmness and grace he had never seen in someone so young.

She smiled directly at him as she walked up next to her mother and then turned, bending slightly to test the water with her toe. He found his eyes locked on her legs, and while he tried to convince himself it was because he was seeing what sort of muscles she had, and how they would be for Quidditch, candour forced him to admit that Gabrielle was beautiful, with some of the most awe-inspiring legs he had ever seen.

He turned and met Aimée's eyes, and for the first time, he was reassured. Finally, someone was acting normally. The look he received from her was coldly calculating, as if she was examining his suitability to be looking at her daughter like that, and that her judgement was reserved.

It had been the first natural reaction that he had seen from anyone over Gabrielle, and he smiled directly at Aimée, acknowledging that he understood her message.

They talked for a few minutes, before Jean and Fleur joined the men in the pool, and it didn't take much cajoling for them to get Aimée and Gabrielle in as well.

A few hours later, after a gorgeous lunch under a covered table, Harry asked to speak to Jean privately for a few minutes.

They chatted amiably as they entered his private office, Harry sitting on the other side of the huge elegant desk that put Dumbledore's to shame.

"What can I do for you, Harry?" Jean asked.

Harry took a deep breath and avoided Jean's eyes for a second. He was playing a role now, and wanted to do it properly. "This is a little difficult," he said softly, looking back at Jean slowly.

"Please," Jean spread his arms. "I'm not going to bite."

"You might," Harry muttered deliberately. "I've had a lot of fun since I came to France."

"Good," Jean interrupted.

"And a lot of that," Harry continued, faking nervousness, "has been because of Gabrielle."

Jean nodded encouragingly.

"And while I know that I am a few years older than her," he said in a rush. "I would like your permission to ask her on a date."

Jean smiled slowly and tried to look stern, but it was obvious that he was pleased by the question. "The age difference is nothing," he said with a shrug of his shoulders. "And I believe the person you should be asking is Gabrielle herself."

"Bollocks," Harry sighed, dropping the act.

"Excuse me?" Jean said, looking surprised.

"I said 'Bollocks,' Jean. Want to cut the crap and tell me what is going on?"

"I don't understand..."

"Yes you do," Harry said, glaring at the man across the table. "Everybody, bar Aimée, has been, in one way or another, encouraging me into a relationship with Gabrielle. At first, I thought – and believed me I hoped I was wrong – that she was some sort of reward for me." He paused and nodded as Jean looked horrified at the idea. "I didn't think that was the case," he admitted. "And I'm glad I was wrong."

"I may not get out much, but I recognise when a woman is coming on to me, even if it is as low key as what Gabrielle has been doing. So I asked my friends, Ron and Hermione, about it, and they were very encouraging. In fact, they were about as subtle as a Death Eater making a point about Muggles. They have never, ever, approved of anyone I have wanted to date, especially not after I have only known her for a few days, and definitely not when there was an age gap. So I decided that I would ask you for your permission and see how you reacted, as I know you to be an honourable man. And like everyone else, you were immediately encouraging. Too much so; there is something going on here; I'm being manipulated, and that's not something I like."

Jean moved deliberately, reaching into his bottom drawer, and pulled out a small flask. He took a sip and closed the lid, before looking at Harry directly.

"I am stuck in a position I do not enjoy," Jean said openly. "And I do not know how to respond."

"The truth, Jean," Harry growled. "It is only the respect that I have for you that is stopping me from leaving right now."

Jean paled a little and raised his hands. "Please, Harry," he said. "There is a lot that you don't know, and a lot that I can not explain. I am bound by promises I made that are too important for me to break."

Harry climbed to his feet and shot Jean a disgusted look.

"All I can say is that you will have to talk to Gabrielle."

Harry raised one eyebrow and nodded, before turning and marching out the door.

---

Jean watched him go for a moment, and then placed a call into his Floo. "I need some Aurors," he said abruptly. "I don't know how he is going to respond to what is going to happen, and I want to be safe."

"He figured it out already?" The floating head asked.

"Yes," Jean said with a grudging respect. "He tricked me into revealing it."

"Impressive," the man noted. "The Aurors are in your dining room."

"Thanks," Jean said. He groaned as he realised that Hermione had probably tried to warn him, only he hadn't been thinking clearly enough about it.

He sighed and disappeared through a side door, taking a shortcut to the pool.

---

Gabrielle could feel the magical energy radiating from Harry long before he came into sight and she sighed, her stomach clenching into an unpleasant knot.

"Harry knows," she said simply.

"What," Fleur said. "How?"

"I do not know," Gabrielle sighed. "He is coming to talk to me. He is upset."

“Walk over to the orchard,” Aimée said quietly. “Do not go out of sight. Be very honest, Gabrielle, because if you are not utterly truthful, you will lose him.”

“Yes, Mama,” Gabrielle said nervously.

“You are a Delacour,” Aimée continued. “You are strong enough to do this. This is what you want; *he* is what you want and who you have chosen. Remember that, and do not let yourself down.”

Gabrielle squared her shoulders and nodded firmly. “Thank you, Mama.” She turned and walked away, heading toward the orchard, her mother’s pep-talk locked in her mind.

She reached the entrance and paused. It wouldn’t do for Harry to see her nervous, so she leaned against one of the apple trees and waited, absently smoothing down the robe she was wearing over her suit.

She didn’t have to wait for long. He seemed to explode from the house, the magical energy making the hairs stand up on the back of her neck. He was magnificent, still dressed in only his swimming shorts, as he marched toward her. His body was deeply tanned, with a just few of the scars from his fight with Voldemort showing. He wasn’t overly muscled, in the way of a man who spent too much time in the gym, but he was more muscled in the way of professional athlete who had to react with speed and grace to every situation.

He was beautiful, and despite everything, she knew that she had been incredibly lucky that he had turned out this way. She wouldn’t have cared if he had been ugly – his inner beauty would still have shone through, but his outer beauty was incredible.

His eyes were blazing with barely repressed fury as he approached her. She could see it as his lips moved, as he tried to calm himself, and she was grateful for that. Her own heart was beating fast, partly from fear, partly from the affect her of her chosen Mate feeling passionate. She knew that if she screwed this up, not only would she end up insane, but worse, she would lose him before she even had him.

He walked up to her and stopped. “Talk,” he ordered.

“It’s a long story,” she said softly. As gracefully as she could, she sat in front of him. “Please,” she begged.

He looked at her for a second and then sat in a motion that was almost violent in its simplicity.

“Dumbledore never told Fleur or Madame Maxine that I was going to be the bait during the second task,” she started and hid a smile as he instantly looked curious. It hadn’t been what he had expected, and she allowed herself a feeling of hope.

“For as long as anyone can remember, there has been enmity between the Merpeople and the Veela. The source of this enmity has been lost in time, but it is as alive today as it has been since it started. So when I was placed in their care, they were ecstatic, they were hoping to arrange for an accident so that I would die.”

Harry’s face turned into a scowl, and he nodded.

“Fleur was terrified of even going down into the water, but she was not going to let me down, and she didn’t feel like she could say anything. The enmity has been kept a secret for centuries. She was stopped easily enough, and the Merpeople knew that nothing could happen to her, so they let her go. They were ecstatic as they knew they would be able to arrange for my accident. And then you came and rescued me. You didn’t even know me, except as the sister of the arrogant Veela. You were so much younger than the other competitors, and yet you saved my life. Not because of the task, but because it was the right thing to do. You could have lost the task, you could have failed to save your friend, but you didn’t care. You knew what was right, and you did it. And I can remember standing there, shivering, watching you as you did what all heroes do – shrugged off the praise as if what you had done was natural – that anyone would have done the same, given the opportunity.

“And suddenly it came to me. Out of the blue, the idea entered my mind, and it made so much sense. Despite all of the warnings I had received, I made the decision. I Mated myself to you.”

Harry blinked, his face going blank. “What?” he asked, as if he had misheard her.

In another situation, she would have smiled at his dumbfounded expression but not in this one.

“A Veela can choose her Mate,” she explained. “It is different from marriage, or falling in love, or even making love. For a Veela, mating is the most profound thing in existence. It means putting your life in someone else’s hands, swearing loyalty and fidelity to them for eternity; it means joining your life and your magic to theirs.

“But...”

“But I was only eight years old?” she said softly, raising her hand to stop his question. “I know, and I had only had the ability for a couple of months. On my eighth birthday, Mama and Nana sat me down and explained very clearly exactly what Mating was, how to do it, and above everything else, why I should not do it unless I was very sure – and that doing it before I was eighteen was very stupid as it could cause problems. I have always been headstrong, and as I watched you, you seemed to be perfect. Sure, you were a little short for a prince, but you were still young. You were noble, good looking, and brave. I was convinced, so I released the ability that bound me to you, and then I pretty much passed out.

“Fleur recognised what happened and immediately called for Mama to come and take me home.” She smiled faintly. “*She* was not happy with me.”

She could see that he was still waiting for her to continue, that he was not going to ask questions yet.



It is and you are, because of the problems, and I knew that I was too young to do anything about it, anyway, and you had more important things to contend with at the time than the actions of a silly girl."

"What do you mean by problems?" he asked, his voice cold and distant.

She winced and took a deep breath. "If a Veela Mates before she is seventeen and is not accepted by her Mate before her seventeenth birthday, her powers will go out of control, and she will end up insane," she said calmly. "It is a prospect I have lived with since that fateful moment."

"And you didn't bring this problem straight to me because?"

"Because my father tried to find another solution first; the finest magical minds in the world were consulted, rare potions were tried, but nothing would work. It took several years of my parents' best efforts before they concluded that I was going to have to live with the consequences of my decision; mating is as much a part of me as my magic is. And when we knew that my only chance was with you, I did not want to just arrive in your life and destroy your freedom," she said honestly. "And I didn't want to have you like that. I have been in love with you since I was eight. Loving you has been a central facet of my growing up. Fleur had a lot of problems with growing up as a Veela, but I did not, as I had a focus for the changes. You were my focus. I learned everything I could about you, Harry, while I waited. Although I know that you would give up your life for someone else, I didn't want you to do that for me. I don't want you by default." She took another deep breath. "I wanted you to fall in love with me on your own accord; I didn't want you to be forced to be with me. I wanted to have a chance to show that I can make you happy, so that we could be together for both of us, and not just because of my Mating."

He nodded slowly, his eyes now hooded and hidden. "And so you asked Ron and Hermione for help? And your father, and Madame Maxine, which is why I was offered the post at Beauxbatons?"

"Not entirely," Gabrielle said, wincing. "The idea of you teaching was such a good one that everyone involved wanted to help out without knowing about me."

She could feel his anger grow again.

"What would have happened if I had found someone else? If I had fallen in love?" he demanded.

She closed her eyes, trying hard not to cry. This was the one question, above all others that she had prayed he wouldn't ask. Her mother's advice to be honest came into her mind again, and she took another deep breath.

"It wouldn't have happened," she said simply, opening her eyes and looking at him directly, "you couldn't."

"What do you mean?" he asked suspiciously.

"The Mating caused a connection between us. My magic was tied to yours; it meant that you never really felt truly comfortable around another woman."

"What?" he whispered, before his magic flared dramatically.

She could feel him searching himself, and a few seconds later, she felt a small tug on the magical bond between them.

"Is this why when I kissed Ginny, hell, when I kissed *anyone*, there was nothing there?" he whispered.

She nodded.

"All this time," he continued, his voice growing in intensity as he climbed to his feet, "I've been alone for the last eight years of my life because of a spell so small I missed it?"

She nodded again. "No!" she cried, as she felt his magic surge again. She moved, suddenly, on to her knees, looking up at him. "Please," she begged. "Please don't break it, please, anything but that."

"Why - not?" he asked in a cold and emotionless voice

"Because it is irreplaceable, and it will condemn me to insanity." She looked up at him, her hands together in prayer, keeping her Veela powers under a tight reign, not wanting him to see anything but her, Gabrielle, begging him for her future, the future she wanted with him. "Please, Harry; do not do this now, not like this, not in anger and frustration. Please do not act in haste. Think about it first, please, with a level-head, before you sever the connection. If, once you have thought about it, you decide to go through with it, I will not stop you, and I will accept my fate as just punishment for my foolish actions when I was young. But please, not like this, not in a fit of rage. If nothing else, I beg of you, grant me this one request."

She watched his eyes, oblivious to the swirling winds around her, to the men who came running out of the house and appeared to hit a barrier, oblivious to everything but him. For the first time she saw the devastation her Mating had caused him, it crashed down on her through his eyes, and it hurt much more than any physical blow would have. She had hurt the only man that mattered to her, the only man whose heart could destroy her.

He began to speak and then shook himself, his face changing, as he looked like he wanted to be anywhere but there, anywhere but near her, as if her very presence caused emotions in him that she was too scared to identify. Fire swirled around them as he closed his eyes and disappeared, the sound of the supposedly impenetrable wards groaning before they shattered, matching the roar of the fire that extended out for a thirty-metre radius, destroying everything and anything in its path; everything apart from her.

She dropped to her knees, crying, in the middle of the desolation.

Her mother was by her side before anyone else, pulling her into a comforting embrace. "I ruined his life," Gabrielle sobbed, burying her face into the crook of her mother's neck.

"No, my little angel," Aimée whispered softly. "You made a foolish mistake as a child, but you did not ruin his life. Do not worry, we will find a way to let you live, now that he has rejected you."

"Oh, no, Mama, no," Gabrielle said, as she leant back and looked at her mother. "He *is* furious. He is furious with me, with his friends, with everyone. But despite everything, he did not choose his freedom, Mama; Harry did not break the bond."

## Hope 4 - Ilfracombe

"Hermione, would you and Ron like to come through?" Jean asked the two faces he could see in the Floo.

They both nodded, and he stepped back. After Harry's rather dramatic exit, he'd had the Aurors rebuild the wards that had been shattered so effortlessly, and his gardener to do what he could with the now destroyed orchard. His wife and eldest daughter, meanwhile, had consoled Gabrielle, who seemed more upbeat than he would have expected despite what had happened.

He led the young couple into the sitting room and sank down next to Aimée. Gabrielle was next to Fleur, who was next to Bill.

Ron and Hermione sat down on the other couch.

"I'm afraid," Jean said in English, knowing that Ron didn't speak French, "that I misinterpreted your message last night. As such, I was..." he paused for a second. "Unprepared for a conversation I had this morning."

"What happened?" Hermione asked.

"Harry asked to speak to me alone, he appeared most nervous. He mentioned how much Gabrielle had helped him acclimatise to living in a new country. I believed that I knew where this was going and I was slightly impressed at the speed with which Gabrielle had obviously won him over. He asked me, like any good man should, for permission to date my daughter."

Hermione winced.

"Exactly," Jean nodded. "A rather clever trap had been set for me and I walked straight into it. As soon as I gave my full permission, Harry changed. Gone was the prospective suitor; in his place was a disappointed, lonely, world-weary man. His very look made me feel guilty."

"What did Harry do?" Ron asked.

"He expressed, in a rather crude manner, his disbelief at my clumsy handling of the situation and demanded to know the truth. As much as I wanted to tell him, my promise to my daughter was stronger and I did as she requested: I told him to speak to her."

Ron and Hermione swivelled to face Gabrielle. "And?" Ron asked.

"I did speak to him," Gabrielle said softly, "and I told him everything." She took a deep breath. "Including the bond."

"What bond?" Hermione asked, looking confused.

"When a Veela Mates, a small bond is formed between the Veela and her chosen mate," Aimée said smoothly. "It is for self-preservation and stops the Mate from ever connecting *emotionally* with another girl."

There was a small pause, as Ron and Hermione both looked at each other and appeared to mentally work their way through it.

"So," Hermione said softly. "On top of everything else, Harry now rightly blames you for his loneliness over the last few years?"

Gabrielle nodded.

"Why the hell didn't you tell us about this?" Ron demanded, causing Gabrielle to flinch slightly. Ron took a deep breath, obviously trying to calm himself down. "This whole mess is like a bloody never-ending cake – more layers than you know what to do with."

"I had hoped it would never come up," Gabrielle said softly.

Ron groaned softly and shook his head. "If there is one thing you need to know about Harry, it's that he *will* find out everything, and it will *always* be at the worst possible time. Sometimes I swear, he's under a curse."

"Ron's right," Hermione nodded. "What did Harry do?"

"He destroyed much of my orchard and then Apparated straight through what were supposed to be unbreakable wards," Jean replied. "And now we don't know where he is."

Ron looked at Hermione, who nodded. She pulled out her wand and whispered a spell as she threw it in the air. The wand hung in the air and spun for a moment, before stopping, pointing to the west. A small flag appeared with a number on it. "Where are we, Jean?"

"Near the bottom of Normandy."

Hermione nodded and thought for a second. “He’s safe,” she said.

Ron smiled and relaxed a little. “He’s got a spot he goes to when he’s upset about something and wants to think, it’s in Devon. He’ll be fine.”

“Should we go to him?” Gabrielle asked.

“No,” Hermione immediately replied. “We learnt this the hard way. Harry will come back when he wants to talk to someone; going to him now will force the issue and we do not want to do that.” She looked at her husband.

Ron looked back and sighed. “We’re already in for a Knut; we might as well be in for a Galleon.”

Hermione smiled at him and rested her hand on his knee. “Is there anything else you haven’t told us?” she asked.

Gabrielle shook her head.

“I’ve got a question,” Ron said. “From what I understand, eight years ago Gabrielle decided to Mate with Harry, and this caused something that made him uncomfortable around other girls, right?”

“Right,” Jean agreed.

“And with that,” Ron continued. “Gabrielle got some sort of... focus? For the changes a Veela experiences growing up?”

“Correct,” Gabrielle said.

“And if Gabrielle doesn’t get Harry, she goes insane, but if she does, she gets everything she ever wanted and dreamed of, right?”

Hermione nodded.

“So,” Ron finished, “not to labour a point, but what exactly does Harry get out of this? No offence, but it seems like Gabrielle gets the better part of the deal.”

Gabrielle opened her mouth, but closed it again at a look from her mother.

“I am pleased that at least someone is looking out for Harry’s interest,” Aimée said dryly. “Ronald, you appear to have a good relationship with Hermione, one based on love and trust, correct?”

“Absolutely,” Ron agreed.

“When a Veela Mates, it is like that, but much, much, more. It is everything – the central core of Veela existence. And when Harry accepts it, the bond will grow, and he will receive everything that Gabrielle feels. He will know, without any doubt whatsoever, that he is loved more than any other person alive.

“There is also, of course, the matter of sex,” she added, almost as an afterthought.

Jean hid a smile as first Gabrielle, and then, almost in unison, the others started to blush. For some reason, the young were always slightly disturbed by the idea of people of their parents’ generation talking about sex as if they had personal, recent knowledge of the topic. Of course, the fact that Aimée was a master of the dry technical voice somehow made it worse.

“Veela rarely mate, because of the imbalance of power in the relationship. A Veela has an intuitive understanding of what her Mate needs and more importantly desires and is biologically predisposed to provide it. There are no limits to what the Mate could desire; the mated Veela would respond with enthusiasm. Veela mated to particularly violent or brutal men can only defend themselves by breaking the bond, which of course sends them into madness. This has happened perhaps once or twice in the past five hundred years. It is why we encourage a long and deep contemplation before committing yourself to something that only death can release you from.”

She paused for a few seconds. “Does that answer your question, Ronald?”

“Right,” Ron squeaked, “moving on swiftly. What’s the next step?”

“Madame Maxime,” Hermione said, her own blush fading. “Jean, you need to tell her what has happened, because it is more than likely that Harry’s next move will be to find out if he actually has a job or not.”

Jean nodded. “I can do that,” he agreed.

“Apart from that,” Hermione said slowly. “The only thing we can do is wait.”

“Wait?” Gabrielle asked.

“Harry knows where we all are,” Hermione said gently. “He’s just been told that everything that he perceives wrong with his life can be traced back to you. He needs time to work through it. Ron and I will send him an owl reminding him that we are here to talk to in a few days’ time, but apart from that, we will give him the privacy and space that he needs.”

Gabrielle sighed softly. “This day has been truly awful.”

It could have been a lot worse,” Aimée said firmly. “Be grateful that you still have a chance.”

“Yes, Mama.”

Aimée smiled at her daughter, a little apologetically. “Come, Gabrielle, we shall go and help prepare tea for our guests.”

Gabrielle nodded and stood, as Aimée walked over and wrapped an arm around her comfortably.

“There’s nothing I can do?” Jean asked, as he watched his wife and younger daughter leave the room.

“Apart from telling Madame Maxime about what has happened, there’s nothing any of us can do,” Ron replied with a shrug of his shoulders. “So, Bill, how’s life?”

Bill looked startled for a second and then grinned. “Not bad. See you’ve grown up a bit.”

“A bit?” Ron asked with a grin. “Vraiment? Et comment va ton français en ce moment, Bill? J’ai entendu dire que tu ne l’as pas encore maîtrisé?”

Bill blinked and then groaned. “You’re still a git, though.”

Ron shrugged and grinned. “True. And proud of it.”

“Well, as you’re here, and there’s nothing else we can do, Fleur and I may as well show you around a bit.”

“Good idea,” Jean nodded. “I have to go and talk to Olympe.”

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Harry looked out at the waves crashing on the rocks below him. He always felt at home looking out at the ocean. Something so powerful and uncaring; it seemed like a good representation of his life.

He was sitting in his favourite spot, halfway up a cliff, in a place that you would either need a broom or a lot of climbing equipment to get to – unless you were very sure about your Apparating skills.

He was; so much so that he’d managed to arrive here while doing an international Apparate. Not an easy thing to do, and while he would never tell anyone, he was quite proud of it.

He wrapped the blanket he’d created around himself for protection from the bitter Atlantic winds and tried to decide what the hell he was going to do.

He’d sat here for most of the night, keeping himself warm through his magic, as he watched the light change around him.

He now knew exactly why he had never been able to feel anything serious about any woman, and it wasn’t as romantic as he had hoped. He had hoped that it was because he had never met the right girl, and that when he did, the dreadful emptiness inside him would finally be filled.

Well, in a way, it was exactly that.

Gabrielle ~~was~~ that woman. The bad thing was that a small spell had caused the feeling. He wasn’t even sure if it was a spell or a curse; because it certainly seemed to stop him having a relationship with anyone else.

He’d been ready to break the bond, consequences be damned, when she’d looked up at him, her hands in front of her, and begged.

He’d felt something tug at his heart and he had thrown up his mental shields so hard that it had given him a headache.

Only to come to a sudden realisation.

She wasn’t using her Veela powers. Not at all.

It was just her, Gabrielle, begging him not to act in haste. Her eyes were huge, like the sky on a warm cloudless day, and for a second, he felt like he was falling into them. They had asked him for a chance, nothing else, nothing more and nothing less.

And he found that he couldn’t say no. He couldn’t do it. He couldn’t condemn her to madness, no matter what she had done.

And while he tried to blame a lot of things on her, he couldn’t ignore the little voice inside him that pointed out, insistently, that yes, she had made a mistake. An eight year old had made a mistake and had lived with it ever since.

It was yet another thing that was so wonderful with this Wizarding world: that a species could grant an eight year old so much power, but not the wisdom to deal with it.

He sighed. The only thing he knew was that he didn’t know enough about Veela to tell what the truth was and what wasn’t. And while he did have several sources, including Hermione, he really didn’t feel like talking to them, or her, at the moment; which left only one place he could go. As much as he hated doing it, he needed the information; he was going to have to go to Hogwarts.

He sighed and Apparated to Hogsmeade. The wards around Hogwarts were a lot stronger than the ones around Jean’s home, and he didn’t really fancy fighting his way through them, unless it was going to be vitally important. And this wasn’t.

He waved his hand letting the blanket around him merge into a pair of jeans and a t-shirt, covering the swim shorts he was still wearing from the day before. Brown boots appeared on his feet as he took a deep breath and walked up toward the doors of Hogwarts.

He had hardly been back since he had defeated Voldemort – too many bad memories, and an interfering old man he really wanted to avoid like the plague.

The doors opened before him, and he walked through them calmly, ignoring the few professors who were standing around talking. The term wasn't due to start for a few more days, so there were no pupils around to gawk at him.

"So good to see you, Potter," the sneering face of Draco Malfoy said, as he stood in front of Harry. "I hear you're teaching the French how to lose gracefully."

Harry made a small motion, like that of a man brushing away a flea, and Draco went flying through the air, before crashing into a wall and falling, unconscious, onto the ground.

He half smiled; abusing Draco always cheered him up, and the ferret had still not learnt that the sort of crap he had put up with as a student wasn't going to work anymore.

Still, it had only been a few years, and Draco was a notoriously slow learner.

He walked into the library and straight over to the Creatures section, pulling out every book he could find on Veela, and sitting at one of the desks.

With a slight sigh, he started a countdown on thirty minutes and started to study.

The counter showed twenty eight minutes had passed when he looked up to see Albus Dumbledore smiling down at him.

"Welcome back to Hogwarts," Dumbledore said jovially.

Harry raised an eyebrow slowly. "Can I help you?"

"Surely that question should be one I should be asking you."

"In that case," Harry said, "no, you can't."

He looked down at his books and continued to read from where he left off.

He was aware that Dumbledore wasn't going anywhere but ignored him, hoping he'd go away anyway. It had taken him this long, but he was now finally finding out the information he had been searching for.

"I demand that he be arrested," Snape yelled as he stormed into the Library, "for assaulting a professor of Hogwarts."

"Harry?" Dumbledore asked.

Harry looked up irritably. "What?"

"Do you have anything to say?"

"About what?"

"The allegations Professor Snape has made?"

Harry looked up at the tall Potions professor. He shook his head slowly. "If I wished to commune with the damned, I'd take up necromancy."

Snape gaped at him.

He turned the page and continued to read.

"I can't have you assaulting my professors," Dumbledore said, interrupting him again.

"Then don't hire people who put Cruciatus on my friends."

"We've been through this," Dumbledore said wearily. "He was under the *Imperio* us."

"Oh?" Harry said, looking up. "That's all right, then. Snape put me under the *Imperio* us when I got here to teach the ferret a lesson."

"What?" Snape stuttered.

"I'm sorry," Harry said. "Would you like me to use smaller words for you? Senility does seem to affect the male population of Hogwarts early in life."

Snape seemed about to implode as he turned bright red, before reaching for his wand.

"Only pull your wand if you want a full fight," Harry said calmly, going back to his reading. "Because if you do, the fight will end up with one of us dead, and remember, I killed Voldemort."

Snape froze and looked at Dumbledore. "Headmaster!"

Dumbledore sighed. "I'm very disappointed in you, Harry."

Harry looked up again. "Is your approval supposed to matter to me?" he asked, genuinely interested in the answer.

Dumbledore didn't answer immediately, and Harry nodded to himself.

The next time he looked up, they had gone.

From what he could tell, so far, everything checked out. Veela could Mate, even at a young age, and while it was not common, it had happened before. The description of the insanity caused by the Mate dying had been rather shocking. The Wizarding world was nothing if not thorough in how it documented some things.

He closed the book with a thump and sat back in his chair, trying to decide what to do now.

The first option was to go to Gabrielle and do what he had to do.

The second was to do nothing, and let the madness take her – not something that he would be able to live with himself for doing.

The third was to see if he could fall in love with her.

The problem was, he didn't think he could do the third without knowing just how serious Gabrielle was about this. He had to know if she truly wanted, as she had said, to have him fall in love with her, or if her protestations had just been words to stop him from breaking the bond.

There was only one way he was going to be able to find out.

He put the books back on the shelves and walked out of Hogwarts, ignoring the people who tried to talk to him. As soon as he could, he Apparated away and did his best to forget about visiting his old school.

He arrived outside the Delacour residence and walked straight in. Now that he knew the bond existed, he could use it to find her. He walked up the stairs, only half-noticing as some of the servants were watching him before they turned to walk away.

He knocked on the door to what he presumed was her room and waited.

Gabrielle opened it, without any sign of surprise on her face. "Come in," she said softly, stepping away from the door.

He moved inside the room and stopped as he saw one of the posters that his Quidditch team had produced on her wall. He looked at her and she blushed.

He turned to face her and stopped. "Okay," he shrugged. "So let's do it."

"Do what?" Gabrielle asked, looking confused.

"Make you safe," Harry said with another shrug, "so that you don't go insane."

"I don't understand," Gabrielle replied.

"I don't exactly have a choice," Harry said. "I can't have you going insane on my conscience for the rest of my life, so let's do what we have to do and move on."

Gabrielle backed away from him. "No," she whispered, shaking her head. "No."

"No?" he asked, deliberately pushing her a little. "This is the right thing to do, isn't it? I'm here, willing, and we do what's necessary, and everything is done."

"No," she said again, this time a lot firmer. "Not like this."

"What?" he demanded. "I offer you what you want, and you say no?"

She nodded and lifted her chin up. "I will have your love, given freely, or nothing at all," she said proudly. "You deserve that."

"Screw that," Harry snorted. "Deserve has nothing to do with it. It's about doing the right thing."

"No, it's not," Gabrielle said. "I will not let you do this out of some sense of honour or nobility."

"Not let?" Harry asked slowly, deliberately.

"Exactly – if necessary I will break the bond myself," she said, looking at him straight in the eyes. "I will not have a caged tiger as my Mate."

"Some choice," Harry snarled. "Either I fall in love with you, or you damn me to eternal shame anyway."

Gabrielle reared back as if he had struck her, and her beautiful eyes filled with tears, tears she did not let drop down her cheek.

I'm sorry," she whispered, "so very sorry. But it wouldn't be eternal shame, Harry," she continued, almost enthusiastically. "When the bond is gone, you will be able to feel love with some worthy woman and I will fade in your memories like a summer dream. That is what happens for the Mate when the bond breaks: you will forget all about me. You will be free again."

"And what about you?" he asked softly.

"Me?" she laughed bitterly. "I will pay for my mistakes alone, as I should have from the start."

"Are you sure you won't do this?" he asked. "I did some research on Veela earlier. We could move onto your bed, and in a few hours, you will be complete again." He reached down and pulled off his t-shirt, stretching a little. He moved, leaning against the wall and crossing his arms. It was a pose from one of the photo-shoots he'd done, only then he'd been wearing a t-shirt.

He could see the naked want in her eyes, as her pupils dilated, and a slight flush appeared across her cheeks. He watched as she struggled with her answer. For the first time, he regretted putting her in this position, even if it was the only way he could see himself going forward with her.

If she said yes, he would do it, he decided. He would go ahead and sleep with her; it might not be love, but he did at least find her attractive, even if she was still a little young.

"No," she said, biting her lip. "No."

The tears started to fall down her face now, and she turned away, walking to the door.

"Then you leave me no choice," Harry said, a slight smile on his face.

She paused but didn't look at him.

"We'll have to try it the other way then."

"I'm sorry?" she asked.

"We've got, what, seven or eight months?"

"Before I go insane?" she asked and then nodded, her back still to him.

"Then we'll have to see if I can fall in love with you in that amount of time."

She turned slowly. "Are you playing with me?" she asked softly, her eyes now full of pain.

"Not anymore," he said. "I had to know if you were serious about wanting me or not. I'm not sorry for putting you through that, because now I know that you are. You're not exactly repulsive, Gabrielle, and I do like you. Don't think I'm over everything that has happened. I'm not, definitely not. All I'm saying is that, well, let's see what happens between us. We can continue as we have been since we met, and see what develops."

"Really?" she asked, her expression turning to one of hope.

He nodded. "I'm going to go and talk to Madame Maxime and spend some time at Beauxbatons."

"May I still come back to school tomorrow?"

He tilted his head and looked at her. "You can do as you like, Gabrielle. You're going to have to be yourself, because the only piece of advice I can give you is that I will not fall in love with an illusion."

"I have to ask," she whispered, "what about my age?"

Harry shook his head slowly. "If we can't overcome your age as an issue, then it won't happen. There are no prerequisites to this, Gabrielle. If I can fall in love with you, I will."

"Thank you," she said, slowly smiling at him.

Her smile seemed to grow, and again he felt a little touch on his heart. The same as when she had begged him. He admitted to himself that it might not be that hard, but that wasn't really the point. This wasn't ever going to be a normal relationship – not that he'd ever really had one of them in the first place – because of the circumstances. If he accepted this bond, it was the sort of commitment that made marriage look temporary and fleeting. Some of the books had mentioned how some Veela believed that the bond could go beyond death and into eternity.

He nodded at her. "I'll go and talk to your father and clear the air with him."

"Are you sure?" she asked.

He nodded. "I like Jean."

She took a few steps forward, hesitating for a second before she surged forward and hugged him tightly. "Thank you," she said once more, as she took a few steps back.

He nodded and walked out the door. "I'll see you soon," he said, a little uncomfortably, and then paused for a second, as an idea hit him. "Gabby."



She smiled brightly at him and nodded.

He turned and waked down the stairs, heading toward Jean's office.

"May I have a word, Harry?" Aimée Delacour asked, as she moved into the hallway in front of him.

He nodded and followed her into the room. It was set up a lot like Jean's office, but where his was obviously masculine this was just as obviously feminine. She led him over to a couple of chairs in front of a fireplace.

"Tea?"

"Milk, no sugar," he replied politely.

Aimée poured from an elegant white china tea set, handing him a cup, and sat down with him.

"Forgetting for a second that Gabrielle is my daughter, how are you feeling about this?"

"Numb," he said truthfully. "But better than I was this morning."

"Oh?"

Harry shifted uncomfortably in the chair. "I offered to, erm, consummate the bond with Gabrielle."

"You did?"

"As a test," he admitted. "I had to know."

"That she was telling the truth about wanting you freely?"

"Exactly."

"And I take it she said 'no'?"

Harry nodded.

Aimée smiled slightly. "My daughter is extremely strong-willed at times; stubborn, perhaps. So what are you going to do now?"

"See what happens," he replied.

Aimée took a sip of her tea and looked at him thoughtfully. "I do not like this situation, Harry. In any other circumstances, I would not let a man older than Gabrielle near her at this age. But these are not normal circumstances, and I find that the only good thing about this is that Gabrielle did at least make an excellent choice. I believed that it would have been right to tell you what was going on from the start, but my daughter persuaded her father that this was the best way forward. I'm still not convinced."

Harry nodded.

"And yet, I find myself curiously grateful for you, all the same. It has been most difficult for me, a human witch, to raise two Veela daughters. You see, when Fleur went to school, it was," she paused, as if searching for the right word, "messy. A Veela growing up can be a very difficult thing. There are dramatic mood swings, periods of melancholy followed by periods of giddiness. And that's without the problems that Veela power manifesting itself at the wrong times can cause. Fleur learnt to use her power to deal with the problems it caused, and while it was tumultuous at times, we got there in the end."

Aimée paused to sit from her own cup of tea.

"Gabrielle was very different. The nearest I can explain it is that Fleur was wild, reaching out to anyone, even accidentally. Gabrielle had you as an anchor in her heart. She was able to use that to retain almost complete control over herself, and it did make growing up a lot easier. It also meant that every time she did make use of that anchor, she fell further in love with you.

Harry nodded. "From what I have read today, that makes sense." He paused. "I'm not going to let Gabby go mad," he said slowly.

"You are not?"

"No," he said. "If I haven't fallen in love with her, I will go ahead and do it anyway, despite her wishes."

"She doesn't want that," Aimée pointed out softly.

"We don't always get what we want."

"True," Aimée agreed. "Tell me, Harry. What did Gabrielle do when you called her Gabby?"

"Smiled at me," Harry replied.

Aimée sighed softly. "The last time Jean tried to call Gabrielle 'Gabby' we had a Veela-sized tantrum that lasted for a week."

Harry smiled wryly. "I guess being the chosen Mate gives me some sort of leeway."

"Indeed."

"May I join you?" Jean asked from the doorway.

Aimée looked at Harry, who nodded.

Jean pulled up another chair and smiled as his wife poured him a cup of tea. He looked at Harry directly. "I'm sorry," he said with a Gallic shrug of his shoulders.

"Damn it, Jean," Harry sighed. "You should know me better than this."

"Time, Harry, can obscure things a lot, especially when it was built on an event we'd rather forget."

"Most of my life is like that," Harry replied with a touch of bitterness. "There has hardly been a year when I've not had to fight for my life, or that I've ended up in hospital. My life has been exciting, certainly, but there are times when I wish that it hadn't been so." He looked directly in Jean's eyes. "I wish that I could forget who I am, that I would be allowed to let the past obscure itself, that I would be free from the manipulation of people who are convinced they have my best interests at heart, and yet never seem to ask me what I want. And there are times when I am convinced that it is a forlorn hope, never to be realised."

Jean looked away from his gaze after a few seconds, and he looked down as Aimée placed her hand lightly on his arm.

He looked up at her and smiled faintly.

"Growing up is hard to do, is it not?"

"It is," Harry agreed with a nod. "And doing it around people who tend to forget that I am older makes it more difficult."

"You are talking about your friends?"

He nodded.

"I talked to Ronald and Hermione last night. From what I have heard, Harry, you are not the only one to grow up; I was most impressed with Ronald. He appears very loyal," Aimée said quietly.

Harry blinked in surprise. If he read Aimée's message properly, she was not impressed with Hermione as much. This pretty much meant that Hermione would have been driving this, and Ron was trying to rein her in. It was a job that he knew was as difficult as any and one that Ron had talked about a lot in private. How being married to a strong-minded girl was more difficult than it seemed. It was curiously reassuring to know that at least he had one friend who still believed in him.

"Thank you," he said to Aimée, before turning to face Jean. "Please don't try and manipulate me again. It's the one thing I won't stand for. If you have a problem, bring it to me directly; you'll find that even a bad reaction from me is better than how I respond when I know I've been shepherded."

Jean nodded, "As is evidenced by my orchard."

Harry winced. "I am a *little* sorry about that," he said.

"Considering what you could have done to Gabrielle, to my lands and to my daughter. I admire your control, even in the grip of such deep emotions."

"And on that note, I'll bid you both farewell," Harry said, feeling a little embarrassed. "I need to talk to Olympe and then spend some time alone, working."

Jean opened his mouth, but a stern look from Aimée stopped him.

"You are more than welcome back here, any time Harry."

"Thank you," Harry nodded and walked out of the house.

---

"What happened?" Fleur asked as she walked into the room.

"I have a chance," Gabrielle explained and collapsed bonelessly on to her bed. "He tortured me and then agreed to go ahead."

"Tortured you?" Fleur asked.

"He stood there, where you are now, with his shirt off, his arms crossed in a casual manner, and offered to bed me. It was the most erotic thing I have ever seen."

"And you didn't say yes?" Fleur asked in disbelief.

"I wanted to," Gabrielle admitted, "so much. Not because of the Mating, but because of how gorgeous he was and how much every part of me,

Veela *and* Human, wanted him. But I resisted.” She paused for a second. “It was the hardest thing I have ever done and I never want to have to say no to him again.”

“And?”

“He told me it had been a test. And now that I’d passed, we could go ahead. That maybe we’ll fall in love after all.”

“That doesn’t sound like Harry.”

Gabrielle turned to lie on her side. “How much time have you spent with Harry over the past three years?”

“What do you mean?”

“Over the last three years, how much time have you spent with him?”

“Not much,” Fleur said with a cute shrug.

“So you’re basing your reactions on how he was years ago?”

Fleur nodded slowly.

“Do you not think that playing professional Quidditch, travelling the world, and being a star, might have made him grow up a little?”

“I had not thought of that.”

“Nor had I,” Gabrielle sighed. “My research is practically useless. But you know I am glad, in a strange way.”

“How so?”

“It means that I have to get to know him, that I will be surprised and stunned by what he does and how he reacts, and it will mean that I am not following one of my scripts with him. I shall have to be just me, just Gabrielle, and hope that I can win him over.

“It seems a lot more... honest.”

“Scary though,” Fleur pointed out.

“This whole thing has been scary,” Gabrielle admitted. “But I have hope, and without that, I am nothing.” She paused for a few seconds and then said, “I liked it when he called me Gabby.”

Fleur stumbled back into a chair. “You did? But you hate that name!”

“Not when *he* says it,” she smiled. “Mama once told me that Dad likes to call her *Aim*, a name that no one else uses. She said it was because it gave him a sense of possession and uniqueness – that he was the only person who called her that. I think it might mean the same thing. For him, I will be *Gabby*, but for no one else, ever.”

Fleur laughed and shook her head. “All of this is causing me problems,” she admitted softly.

“With Bill?”

“Yes. He is wondering if I will Mate with him, and while he understands why I might not want to, I can see it in his eyes.”

“What are you going to do?”

“I do not know,” Fleur sighed. “I will not Mate to any man who is not my husband, and yet he seems in no hurry to make me his wife.”

“Have you considered asking him?”

“Absolutely not,” Fleur replied sternly. “This is my entire life, and if he can not ask such a simple question, then maybe he is not the right person for me.”

“Where is Bill?”

“Downstairs with Ron and Hermione.”

“Why don’t you go and join them, I shall work on some school stuff.”

“All work and no play makes Gabrielle a dull girl.”

“I could never look dull, my dear sister. And it allows me to relax, and after the last thirty-six hours, relaxing is something I need.”

---

Harry walked through the entrance of Beauxbatons and made his way toward Olympe’s office. It was a little surprising how much more comfortable he felt in this school, when compared to Hogwarts. There was a kind of serenity in the school that he really identified with.

He knocked and entered on command, taking a seat in front of the large desk.

Olympe looked at him directly. "I shall make something very clear, Harry. No one, not even Jean-Sebastian, could make me hire a professor I felt could not do the job. Now, while I was willing to bend the rules a little because of Gabrielle's unfortunate condition, I would have not allowed you to be a professor just because of it."

Harry nodded and changed the subject. "I have been meaning to ask you about just what Jean's relationship with Beauxbatons is?"

"The Delacour's are one of France's premier families. They are similar in power to how the Malfoy family were in England, before they lost their money and influence. They helped found Beauxbatons and have a hereditary seat, similar to that of a Governor. Jean himself is widely regarded as a future Minister for Magic, although some of the conservatives do not like his ancestry – prejudice runs deep in the Wizarding society here, just as in England. However, the defeat of Voldemort, and his involvement with that, has got him back on track."

Harry nodded slowly. "You know why I didn't walk away from this?" he asked.

Olympe shook her head.

"Because you asked for my help with the Cup of Throbust, you didn't try and trick me into it; you gave me the problem and let me make my own decision about it. I value that more than anything else."

The Headmistress smiled. "I must say that doing anything else simply didn't occur to me."

"In that case," Harry said, as he stood, "I'll take my leave. I want to spend the next few days memorising names for class."

"Do you know what you are going to teach?"

He nodded. "I'm going to start by un-teaching them everything they know, and teach them to have fun first, and play second. If you don't love flying, you'll never enjoy playing a sport."

"That sounds like an excellent plan. I had a meeting with the Heads of Year yesterday, and we are going to go ahead with the plan you and Gabrielle devised. The winning House will get a trophy."

"And tickets to the next international Quidditch match, and a chance to meet all the players."

Olympe raised her eyebrows.

Harry shrugged. "A lot of people owe me favours; I may as well call them in."

"That's very generous of you, Harry."

Harry smiled and nodded. "I'll see you later."

---

Harry sat on the floor in his room, folders spread out in front of him as he tried to test himself on the students' names.

In a strange way, it was almost like studying for a test back at Hogwarts, only this time he didn't have his two normal cohorts.

Partly because they were probably in bed by now, and partly because he was still pretty damn irritated at them. Of all people, they should have known just how much he hated being manipulated, and the fact that they were willing to do it still gnawed at him.

It didn't matter if what they had done was 'for the best' – a phrase that he hated with as much passion as he normally reserved for members of the Malfoy family. What did matter was that rather than bring him the problem, they tried to trick him into solving it.

The problem he had was that his previous method of dealing with this involved a hefty temper and some very strong words. While he was still contemplating doing exactly that, he wasn't sure if that was the most grown-up way of handling it.

What he wanted was the absolute promise that they would never do it again, regardless of the circumstances. And while shouting and raging at them might accomplish that, it wasn't a very adult way of getting what he wanted.

Despite this aberration, Ron and Hermione were very good friends and he could, and did, trust them, which made their actions this time even more galling.

And that had been his problem all afternoon. He'd been thinking in circles. Whenever he tried to take the adult route, he remembered just how bloody annoyed he was at their high-handed manipulation of him.

And he still didn't know exactly what the hell he was going to do about Gabrielle.

Yes, she was beautiful, but then he'd yet to meet a Veela who wasn't. But love? It wasn't as if he was even sure what love was. A few one night stands certainly weren't any indication of what love could, or could not, be.

He was talking about falling in love, and that was without going into the whole age thing, with someone who was only part human.

His research at Hogwarts had shown him a few interesting things, not least a man's description of what it was like being the focus of a Veela

Mating, and just how amazing he found it.

The idea of love like that was something Harry was very interested in, which, considering his background, wasn't a surprise. But he didn't want to rush in and make bad decisions because of that.

And he still didn't know what he was going to do about Ron and Hermione.

All he knew was that what ever he did, he would not bite off his nose to spite his face. He would not lose two friends over this.

---

Olympe Maxime looked out at the rows of students before her. The start of a new term always filled her with hope and joy.

"Welcome, my dear students, to another year at Beauxbatons." She paused as the students clapped decorously. "This year marks a new start at Beauxbatons, and shall, without doubt, be the most exciting yet."

She now had their full attention and continued. "We are instigating a new competition. All students will be separated into Houses, and over the course of the year, will be given merits and demerits based on behaviour, and academic and athletic prowess. At the end of the year, the winning house will be awarded the Beauxbatons Trophy," she waved her wand dramatically, and at the far end of the Hall, a spotlight illuminated a glass case. Inside it was a golden trophy that seemed to gleam in the light. "And," she continued, "a day out to watch the French National team play England at Quidditch, and to meet the teams beforehand."

The students started to whisper to each other, and she could feel the atmosphere turn to one of excitement. "On top of that, Beauxbatons is also entering into another tournament with Durmstrang and Hogwarts: A Quidditch tournament."

Gasps and nervous looks changed the atmosphere again. They knew, as well as she did, that they didn't even have a team, never mind one that could compete. The situation was now right for her to introduce the new professor. She'd had to talk very fast to persuade him to make an entrance like this, as his natural reticence caused him to shy away from making a scene. However, he had been won over by her very-true, claims that every new staff member had a similar introduction.

"Now," she continued, after letting the nervousness grow for a second. "I am aware that we do not have a Quidditch team. With Professor Vol having retired, we have arranged for a new professor, one who, I believe, you will find uniquely qualified to help us not only compete with the other schools, but win as well.

"May I present to you, Harry Potter!"

The door opened, and Harry, dressed in formal robes, his glasses at their most transparent, walked slowly into the hall and up to the professors' table. The students seemed to be stunned as they watched a person who was almost a living myth, walk through their school.

She watched as Gabrielle was the first student to move, standing and applauding. The others quickly followed, as they got caught up in the moment and started to cheer. This was what she wanted, this passion for the school, and maybe, the first signs of hope. Because it was accepted fact that Harry did not lose. He put everything into what he was doing to ensure that he won – and she could see the students think that if he was helping them, then maybe, just maybe, they would be able to win as well.

"Thank you, Madame Maxime," Harry said, his voice effortlessly cutting through the cheering, so that everyone stopped to listen to him. She noticed that his accent and chosen lexicon was a lot more sophisticated than the casual patois he normally indulged in.

"It is a pleasure to be here, and I am looking forward immensely to working with you all over the next school year. Now, Madame Maxime has given me the honour of separating you into your Houses."

The students went quiet again; every face in the hall was turned to Harry, listening raptly.

"Your House will not just be a name; it will be a symbol for your friendship and your competition. As such, we have chosen to name each House after a famous building in Paris, and each House will do a report on their building at the end of the year." He turned and raised his hands. Behind the professors' table, four long banners appeared. Red, Green, Blue, and Yellow, each marked with a magical representation of the building in question.

He turned and clapped his hands together. Four fires appeared and hovered in the air in the middle of the hall.

Olympe smiled softly, Harry might not like attention, but performing Quidditch had obviously helped him find his inner showman.

The fires, one in each colour, started to dance around the hall, and as they did, they separated in half, and then each smaller piece separated again, and again, until the air was full of small dancing flames.

He parted his arms, and the flames seemed to stop, before they swooped down, and in a seemingly random manor, hovered in front of the students.

"Look at your colour and then look around you. The people with the same colours are your new Housemates, your new friends and colleagues, the people who will help you and support you." He clapped his hands again, and the fires dropped into the laps of the students, who all seemed to jerk backward, until they saw that the fire had changed the trimmings of their robes to the correct colour, and then they started to cheer.

Olympe climbed to her feet and smiled at Harry. "Thank you, Professor Potter. Students, you will find out more details concerning the Houses tonight, but for now, let us eat!"

Gabrielle shook her head and relaxed on her bed, exhausted. She hadn't quite expected the announcements to cause so much work for her. As the Head Girl, she had been inundated with questions and requests for information from practically the entire student body.

And a lot of it had been things that the students couldn't really talk to the professors about. The fact that best friends were in different houses and that boys and girls who were dating were now in competition.

"Gabby?"

She found herself on her feet before the second syllable had ended. She walked into her living room and looked at the fire. "Harry?"

"Mind if I come through?"

"Please," she said. She hadn't really had any time alone with him since the weekend where everything had gone wrong.

He stepped through; he'd relaxed and was back in the jeans he seemed to prefer wearing.

"Would you like a cup of tea?"

"Sit down, I'll make it," he said. "You look beat."

She nodded and sank down onto one of her chairs, absently freeing her hair from the ponytail it had been confined in.

He returned and gave her one of the two mugs, sitting opposite her. "How are you holding up?"

She looked at him equally. "With the students? They are tiring."

He grinned at her. "Teenagers, tiring? Really? I used to hate it when they would do summer camps at the Cannons. Hundreds of teenagers convinced that they were just a chance short of being professional. How are they taking everything?"

She sipped the tea slowly, blowing a little on the hot liquid. "They are excited and looking forward to it. There is more energy in the school this year than I have seen before. Some of the senior students are already planning the report they are going to do on their Houses."

Harry nodded slowly. "We'll have to give them some strong guidelines soon; we'll want this to have magic as well as history."

"And of course, there is a lot of talk about the gorgeous young new professor." She made a small face of disgust. "So far as I can tell, you are the recipient of fourteen female crushes, with at least one girl from each year and three male crushes."

Harry blinked and then started to laugh. "Well, that was a little unexpected."

Gabrielle shrugged. "And not once did I curse any of them."

"I admire your restraint."

"And now, you are mocking me," Gabrielle said with a slight pout.

"A little," Harry agreed with a small smile. "If it gets too much, let me or one of the other professors know, Gabby. We don't want you getting burnt out."

She smiled reassuringly at him. "It is only the first day, and everything is new. It will calm down."

He nodded and finished off his tea. "If you do need to talk," he said as he stood. "You know where my room is." He appeared torn for a second and then he clicked his fingers. A small card appeared in his hand. "My Floo is protected." He placed it on the table and vanished into the fire.

She jumped to her feet and ran over to it. It was a key to his room. She did a little dance on the spot, twirling, her exhaustion forgotten. She had no idea why he had given her the key but she didn't really care. At this stage, she'd take any small sign from him.

She looked at her watch and decided that sleep was more important than a shower – especially as she'd want to look her best for his first lesson in the morning.

---

Gabrielle walked out with the other twelve students for the first flying lesson of the year. Madame Maxime had changed the schedule so that she was in Harry's first lesson, in case he needed any support. Privately, she doubted he would, but she was not the sort of person to shoot a gift horse in the mouth.

Thirteen brooms were on the ground, and they each lined up next to one of them, as they had for every lesson in the past. She had to remind herself that Harry was unlikely to be as bad as Professor Vol, but she could see that the other students didn't seem to think so.

She relaxed as she saw Harry flying towards them. He had the same expression of pure joy on his face that he had every time he flew.

He flew in front of them and then seemed to kick his broom so that it was facing straight up. He rested his hands across the top and sank down to the ground gently in what was an awesome display of broom control. She had to struggle not to gape at him like the other students were. She'd seen him fly many times, watching from the stands of his Quidditch matches, but she had never really realised that he was a professional, and as

such, could probably do things with a broom that was out of reach of normal people.

“Welcome,” he said with a smile. “Now, what is the purpose of flying?”

“The purpose of flying a broom is to get from point A to point B with as minimum fuss as possible,” the other students chanted in unison.

“Wrong,” Harry said cheerfully. “The purpose of flying is to have fun and to be safe while you are doing it. So, the very first thing we are going to do is see what each of you can do on a broom. What I want you all to do is to fly up to around fifty feet, do a figure of eight and land. Like this.”

He jumped in the air, mounting the broom as he had the other day; the casual elegance still entranced her, and he flew straight up before levelling off at the right height. He then seemed to fly at full speed around a figure of eight, before diving down back to them, pulling up at the last second.

“Right, Simone, you’re first. Don’t do anything you’re not comfortable with, and just relax; enjoy it and let’s see what you can do.”

Simone called for her broom and sat side-saddle on it.

“Wait,” Harry said. “Side-saddle?”

“It is the way we have been taught that girls fly,” Simone explained nervously.

“Have you tried flying – uh – normally?”

She shook her head.

“Do you want to?”

“May I? Really?”

“I know a lot of female professional Quidditch players, and all of them are just as good as the men. There is no reason at all why you shouldn’t.”

Simone shifted, throwing her leg over the broom. “This *is* more comfortable,” she said in surprise.

“I’m not surprised,” Harry nodded. “The charms on the broom are designed for this position. Now, ease yourself up gently and be careful, these brooms are a lot newer than the ones you had last year.”

Simone nodded bravely and raised herself up. Harry flew up next to her, and his voice faded into the distance.

“This is going to be cool,” André whistled under his breath. “Did any of you see his last match?”

“When he did his shoulder in?” Jerome asked. “Yeah, that was the coolest move in Quidditch ever. He showed Krum what it takes to be a real winner.”

Gabrielle smiled to herself. “Are you going for the Quidditch team?” she asked.

“Got to give it a try,” André replied. “Is it true that the professional clubs got involved to try and get a new generation of players coming through, after France didn’t even qualify for the finals of the World Cup?”

“Yes,” Gabrielle replied. “From what I understand, getting Professor Potter was just a piece of luck.”

“Didn’t your dad have something to do with that?”

She nodded. “They are friends from the war.”

André and Jerome stopped asking questions as Harry and Simone returned.

“André, you’re next,” Harry said. “Remember to take it easy.”

“How was it?” Jerome asked eagerly, as André and Harry flew off.

“Fun,” Simone said, her face looking a little flushed. “I finally understand why some people enjoy it.”

“Gabrielle, you’re up,” Harry called a minute or so later.

She called her broom up to her hand, mounted it, and flew up to the height with him.

“How am I doing?” he asked, as they flew toward the other end of the pitch.

“Good,” Gabrielle shouted into the wind. “They are having fun.”

“Fancy doing a loop?”

“Sure,” she replied.

“Okay, just keep your eyes on me, and do what I do.”

As if keeping her eyes on him was going to be a problem. Her eyes firmly set on his bum, she followed him, hardly noticing as she did a complete loop.

“Well done!”

She flushed a little and followed him down to the others.

“Jerome,” Harry called.

Jerome tried to jump on to his broom like Harry had but didn’t get it right, and ended up sitting on the ground.

André sniggered. “Nice one!”

“Don’t worry about it,” Harry said. “If you want to see me later, I’ll show you how to do it properly.” He looked around and then flew a bit closer, in a conspiratorial manner. “The first time I tried to do it, we were on concrete; I missed like you did and had to go and see the physician as I had bust my coccyx.”

Gabrielle laughed with the others, as much at the expression on Harry’s face as at the story itself.

Jerome climbed aboard his broom the traditional way, and the two flew off.

“Teacher’s pet,” André teased.

“Hmm?” Gabrielle asked, flicking her hair over her shoulder.

“You did a loop on your very first session.”

“Oh,” Gabrielle smiled. “I had some friends show me how to fly a bit over the summer.”

“So, are you going for the team as well?”

She nodded. “I want to be a seeker!”

André whistled slowly. “Good luck.”

---

“Good afternoon, Olympe,” Albus Dumbledore said through the Floo.

“Albus,” she acknowledged

“I thought it might be an idea to set down some dates for the Tournament.”

“Of course,” she replied, reaching for the school diary.

“Might I suggest a similar format to the tri-wizards competition? Hogwarts will host the other two teams for two weeks, everyone shall play each other, and the two teams with the most points shall proceed through to a final match.”

“When?”

“I was thinking late November, to avoid disrupting the exams of our senior students.”

Olympe looked down and didn’t comment on how that hardly gave them enough time to get a team together, never mind have a chance to win. He was obviously playing his games, as always.

“That will do fine, Albus,” she said formally. “We shall look forward to it.”

“As shall I, my dear, as shall I.”

She closed the Floo and grumbled under her breath. It seemed that the longer she knew Albus, the more irritating he got. She opened her Floo again and invited Harry to step through.

When he was sat opposite her, she passed on the dates.

“That’s not going to give us any real time at all, is it.”

“No,” she agreed. “I’m open to ideas.”

“Which is a good thing,” he said as his grin turned evil, “as I do have a plan.”

“Oh?” she asked eagerly.

“When I have a team ready, I’ll arrange for a few friends to come out and spend some time with us. Give us a few weeks and we’ll be ready.”

“Friends?”



“I’ll get Fred and George Weasley to help out with our Beaters, Katie Bell – she’s currently a Chaser with the Harpies – to train our Chasers. Then I’ll get Ollie to show our Keeper the ropes, and I’ll help the Seeker.

“Ollie? Do you mean Oliver Wood?”

“Exactly,” Harry said.

“He will help us?”

“He doesn’t know it yet, but he will. He owes me a few rather large favours involving a bet a year or so ago.”

“Excellent,” Olympe clapped enthusiastically. “Do you think we might win?”

“I honestly don’t know. I’m not too worried about Hogwarts; they will play like Draco Malfoy used to – relying on fouls and dirty tactics in place of skill.

“It’s Durmstrang that makes me wonder. They do have a really good academy – they turned out Viktor, after all, and they might be the team that wins.”

“My people might object to me saying this, but I’d rather Durmstrang win than Hogwarts.”

Harry smiled. “Me, too.”

---

“Harry!”

“Oliver?” Harry asked, as he looked at his fireplace in surprise. “How did you know I was here?”

“Oh, I asked Fred and George. Look, I wanted to ask you for a favour – I need to help you train those Frenchies.”

“What?” Harry asked in surprise. He had only finished with Olympe an hour ago, and he hadn’t even thought of approaching his friend yet.

“Yeah, look, I’ve heard about the tournament; the press is going nuts about your return to Hogwarts.”

“And?”

“And Marcus Flint has made some outrageous statements about how Hogwarts is going to win, and how he’s helping Draco Malfoy turn the Quidditch students into world beaters.”

“I would have thought you would have thought that was a good thing,” Harry pointed out curiously.

“Ach man, not at all! How can I be prideful if bloody Slytherins are dominating the school! They need to be taught a lesson, and if there is one thing you’re good at, it’s teaching the Slytherins that their place is crawling on the floor like the snakes they are. So, will you please let me help?”

Harry smiled. “Of course, Ollie. I’m also going to ask Katie and Fred and George to come over.”

“Wonderful!” Oliver said enthusiastically. “It will be like old times. Now, how did you learn to speak French?”

“Hermione.”

“Of course, right, I’ll Floo her next. Oh, and one more thing.”

“Yes?”

“Krum’s helping Durmstrang. This is going to be one hell of a tournament!”

## Hope 5 - Barcelona

It was a warm Saturday morning; the sun was shining, there was a gentle breeze, and it was almost serene.

Well, it would have been serene if there weren't over four hundred students, all with brooms, standing in small groups on the grass.

Harry shook his head as he looked over them, feeling a little overwhelmed. He'd announced tryouts for the house teams and had said that the team for the inter-school matches would be picked from the house teams.

He certainly hadn't expected nearly half of the school to turn up.

He walked out into the centre and was immediately joined by Gabrielle. He looked at her curiously.

"You need some help organising?" she half asked, half stated.

He nodded gratefully.

She pulled out her quill and a clipboard. "Then direct me," she said with a cute smile.

"You're a lifesaver, Gabby," he whispered and then turned to the horde before them.

As he studied the crowd, Gabrielle said softly, "I'd suggest calling the prefects forward, and then getting everyone to register their house and preferred position."

"Listen up," Harry said, aided by a Sonorous Charm. "I want the two senior prefects from each House over here first."

Eight students were soon lined up in front of him. "I didn't expect this many people," Harry explained to them. "So we're getting organised. Can you pair up, and I'll direct a group of students to you, one group for each position, where you'll write down their names, house and age."

Half an hour later, he had four lists of students' names and an eager audience. With his first week of teaching completed, he had found a wide variety of flying ability, from those who could barely sit straight, to students who would match the best Hogwarts would have to offer – the latter having learnt to fly on their own and not at the hands of his predecessor.

"Okay," Harry said to the prefects, who were now sitting in the stands. "When you're not trying out, I want you to sit with me. You're going to help me decide who is going to be on each House team."

They all nodded eagerly.

"Right," Harry announced to the crowd of students. "We're going to do this in order, so, can all the prospective Beaters join me in the air?" He grabbed his broom and jumped onto it, sliding the wood between his legs as he took off and rocketed straight up.

About sixty students joined him, and he quickly separated them into their houses first, and then into pairs next.

"The first game is simply target practice," he told them. He pulled out his wand and created thirty wooden targets at the far end of the pitch. He then summoned a large box from the ground. "These are training Bludgers," he explained. "They are charmed not to hit anyone, and to return to their starting position as soon as they are finished. All I want you to do is to work in your pairs and hit the targets. Extra points will be given for the strength of the hit as well as the accuracy."

With the word given and cheers from the watching students below, the Beaters started to hit the Bludgers with enthusiasm.

He circled down, watching closely, and hovered next to Gabrielle and the Prefects. "Concentrate on your House colours," he told them. "I want to get the numbers down to sixteen after this, so count out anyone who isn't up to scratch."

He flew back up and circled around the working pairs, making his own judgements as he went. He was deliberately setting this up like the practices he used to help with during the Quidditch Summer Camps; although back then, he'd concentrated exclusively on the wannabe Seekers.

"Stop!" he yelled after a further ten minutes. He summoned all the Bludgers back to him and dropped them to the ground. "Next," he continued, "we are going to test your flying ability." He raised his hands and a series of small plastic barriers rose into the sky. "What I want you to do is to fly through this course and then hit the Bludger at the end of this course at a single target. Like this."

He borrowed a bat from one of the students and flew through the course, ducking and rearing over a few of them. This sort of thing was bread and butter for him, and at the end he aimed carefully and smacked the Bludger. It promptly flew at high speed and missed the target by several metres. "And that," he shouted to his audience, "is exactly why I am a Seeker, and not a Beater. Claude, you're first."

He handed his bat back to the student and floated higher into the sky, so he could watch both their form on the broom and how well they managed to hit the stationary Bludger at the end.

Back at the Cannons, Beaters were forced to do this sort of exercise blindfolded.

After they had all been through the course, he flew back down and hovered opposite the candidates. “One last test and you’re done,” he told them with a smile. “You’ve all done really well so far.” He dived down to the ground, inverted, and picked up a bag without slowing and returned to them.

He opened the bag and passed two special Bludgers to two of the more accurate Beaters. “I want you to fire these at me,” he told them.

“Professor?”

”Just do it,” Harry smiled reassuringly, as he flew backward.

They nodded and threw the balls in the air, smacking them with their heavy bats. The balls flew directly at him, and he stood his ground, letting them hit him. It was like being hit by an enormous marshmallow.

“As you can see,” he said. “These are special practice Bludgers that don’t hurt anywhere near as much as the real thing. So, the final test is to avoid being hit, as I attach a “Chase-me” charm to the Bludgers. If you get hit, fly down and land. Ready?” He didn’t wait for an answer and he threw both balls at the students.

There was a mild degree of panic as the Beaters all tried to dodge at once, with several students actually crashing into each other, and the slower ones were soon caught and eliminated.

One of the Bludgers flew at Claude, who was one of the stand-out beaters so far. He smacked it away from him with his bat, and into a nearby group of students.

Harry nodded and smiled. He hadn’t told them they couldn’t use their bats and was pleased that the youngster hadn’t passively accepted being hit like some of the others.

As the last player was finally hit, he smiled and hovered down so that he was just above all the grounded students. “You all did exceptionally well. We’re going to have a ten minute break now, and then the Chasers and the Keepers will be up.”

House-elves started to pop in, led by Dobby, and they handed out drinks to everyone. Harry caught the bottle Dobby threw at him, nodded his thanks, and flew over to the prefects, casually jumping off his broom and landing in his seat.

“Thoughts?” he asked.

“We’ve got the names you wanted,” Gabrielle said for the others. “We weren’t really sure what we were looking for, so we awarded them points for each task.”

He took the list and looked down it; the names matched his mental notes – albeit it in a different order. He absent-mindedly borrowed Gabrielle’s quill and scratched out a few names and added a few of his own. They were the ones that hadn’t been the best flyers, or the best hitters, but had shown the best enthusiasm; he could teach them the other skills, but the enthusiasm had to come from their hearts.

“How many of you are going for Chasers or Keepers?” he asked the prefects. All of their hands went up.

“Right,” he nodded slowly. This was going to make his job a little more difficult. “Gabrielle, come with me,” he said. “We can’t give anyone an unfair advantage,” he said to the others, and he grabbed his broom, leaping from the seat and into the air.

He turned and flew backward, watching Gabby as she placed a foot on the edge of the stand, mounted her broom in a smooth motion, and followed him up.

“We’re going to have to do this in two groups,” he told her, as they hovered. “I take it that you know more about Quidditch than you’ve let on?”

She blushed slightly, just a faint colouring of her cheeks. “I’ve seen a few games,” she admitted.

“*Right*,” Harry said dryly. “We’ll do similar drills. To start with, we’ll have the Chasers in groups of three going against the Keepers. We’re looking at flying ability, throwing ability, and for the Keepers, positional sense and catching ability. Don’t worry about how many goals are scored or conceded; that’s not relevant at the moment.”

Gabrielle nodded.

“Chasers and Keepers in the air,” Harry shouted, and a minute later, a giant wave of people was hovering in front of him. “Chasers into groups of three. Keepers to the right.”

It took another few minutes to get everyone in place.

“To start with,” Harry said, “we’re going to have a little game. Each Keeper will protect one set of hoops, and a group of chasers will try to score against them.” He waved his wand, and groups of hoops appeared around the stadium. The Keepers flew toward them, taking one each.

“Harry,” Gabby said. “There are two more teams than Keepers.”

“Claude, Henri,” Harry shouted down. “You’ve been drafted as Keepers to help out.”

The two boys rose in the air and went to the empty hoops.

“Remind me to give them both a merit later,” Harry said quietly to Gabrielle. “You keep an eye on the groups to the left; I’ll do the right.” He paused and then yelled, “Start!”

He hovered up and watched closely, making sure he viewed each group of Chasers and Keepers, mentally noting down the names of the ones that showed the best promise.

After the goal attempts, he gave both groups a flying test and followed it with some speed races for each of the Chasers.

“Okay,” he shouted. “Chasers and Keepers down, Seekers into the air!”

The Seekers were the smallest group, something he was pleased about to no end. He was getting hungry, and it was fast approaching lunch time.

“This is the one I’m more familiar with,” he grinned to the students in front of him. “So we’re going to start with something nice and simple. A straight race to the end of the pitch and back.”

“Can we do a Potter-Turn?” one of the students shouted.

Harry groaned under his breath.

“What’s a Potter-Turn?” another asked.

“I’ll demonstrate,” Harry said, shaking his head. He took off, heading toward the far end of the pitch. As he got there, he dropped his foot, hooked it in the top of the loop, and leant forward. The result was that he shot out, upside down and in the opposite direction, as fast as he had entered.

“I wouldn’t recommend it, though,” he said honestly as he arrived back in front of the students. “If you don’t lean forward at just the right moment, you can lose a foot.”

There was the sound of audible gulping from the students. “So, just do what you are comfortable with. Ready? Go!”

He flew straight up and hid a smile. Gabby was in the lead, her long blonde hair streaming out behind her. As she reached the end, she executed a perfect Corkscrew Reverse and flew back, increasing her lead. The others did a variety of turns – no one trying the Potter-Turn – and followed her back.

“Excellent,” he applauded. “Now we’re going to do a bit of diving practice.” He lowered himself down, and turned a large area of grass into a thick pad, and then created a beam five feet off the ground above the pad. He flew back up and addressed the students again. “All you have to do is dive down at full speed, go under the beam, and return back here.”

“Michela, you’re first.”

The girl, who looked to be a first or second year, nodded, and dove down, fast. The watching students started to cheer. She tried to pull up but misjudged it slightly, and slammed into the pads. She bounced a little and came to a stop, looking bewildered.

Harry flew down and helped her up. “You okay?”

She nodded, her eyes wide.

“Don’t worry,” Harry said. “You showed a lot of bravery by going for it at full speed.”

She slowly smiled at him.

“Now, get back on your broom and fly up to the others.”

She nodded and climbed on a little shakily, and flew back up to the other Seekers.

“Anton, you’re up!”

When everyone had tried, Harry released the snitches and told the Seekers to bring them to him.

He climbed up and started to watch the students. Some were flying around randomly, keeping their heads moving, while others concentrated on specific areas. Michela, as if determined to make up for her earlier flying mistake, caught the first one – in a diving move that wouldn’t have been out of place in a Professional match if it had been at double speed – and flew up to him.

“Well done,” he said. “Take a seat in the stands.”

She beamed and nodded, dropping down.

Gabrielle caught the next one, and it only took another ten minutes for the rest to be captured and returned to him.

“Okay,” Harry shouted, “Everyone into the stands.”

He hovered in front of them, looking at all the eager faces and smiled slightly. It had been a lot more fun than he had expected.

"You all did really well this morning, but unfortunately, there are far too many of you to pick for the teams. So while you eat lunch, I'm going to work out who goes through to this afternoon's session. Without exception, you all tried your best and impressed me to no end. So if you don't get through this time, practice, and try again next year. Now, eat!"

There was a small cheer from the students, as they flew down to the ground and to the large tables the house-elves had been setting out.

"How are they doing so far?" Madam Maxime asked as she joined Harry in the stands.

"Very well," Harry responded. "There's plenty of talent here. A lot of it is underdeveloped, but it's there. We just have to bring it out."

"I must say that I am impressed with the work you have put in this morning. I didn't expect it to be quite so popular."

"Me neither," Harry agreed. "Gabrielle has been invaluable."

"Which is one of the reasons she is Head Girl," Olympe said. "Her organisational skills are exemplary."

"And she can fly too," Harry said with a smile. "I want her as Seeker for the school team, but only if she continues excelling. I have to be fair about it."

"I wouldn't expect anything less from you, Harry."

"Fred, George, Ollie, and Katie have all agreed to help," Harry said, as he finished sorting his notes on the Seekers. "They're currently undergoing intensive French lessons with Hermione."

"Excellent," Olympe smiled. "I must admit to feeling a tinge of anticipation over this whole thing."

"If it wasn't at Hogwarts, I would be as well," Harry grumbled. "But as that's not changeable, we'll just have to make sure we do better than expected."

"I'm sure we will, Harry. I have great faith in you."

"Okay, I need to talk with Gabby about the Chasers and Keepers."

"Gabby?"

Harry flashed a quick smile. "Only away from the students."

She nodded slowly and then smiled. "What is the plan for the afternoon?"

"More of the same, really; only in smaller groups: I'll start getting them to do some proper training drills, and from there, I should be able to narrow it down to fourteen people per house."

"Backups?"

"Quidditch injuries do happen."

"I noticed you were very careful this morning to ensure that no one got hurt."

"It's one of the things the Cannons were very firm about," Harry explained. "Injury on the pitch is part of the game; injury at practice is definitely not."

"Well, I'll leave you to it," Olympe said cheerfully. "If you need any help, just send one of the students to get me."

"I will," Harry promised.

As she left, Gabrielle flew up to him in the stands and passed him a plate full of food. "Thanks," he said. "Teacher's pet," he half-joked.

"You heard that?" she sniffed. "There are a few rumours, but then, I am always the target of rumours, so it is not important. They do not know that I am Mated to you, so they are jealous of the time I spend with you. My friends would never call me teacher's pet, so I do not worry about it," she paused, and then smiled slightly. "Even if it is true," she muttered under her breath.

Harry raised an eyebrow.

"I managed to pick a Mate who became world-famous for two different things," she explained, ignoring her own statement. "When we are finally together, I shall be the target for all sorts of salacious rumours and innuendo, so I feel that I should get used to the idea."

"Confident, aren't we?" Harry said with a slight smile.

"But of course," she said, smiling back. "I am, after all, irresistible."

"You are?"

"I certainly hope so," she sighed softly. "Here is the list of Chasers and Keepers."

He nodded, accepting the abrupt change of subject. He looked down at it and smiled. “Fantastic,” he muttered. “We have enough people here from each house.”

“Did you not plan it that way?”

“I tried to,” he admitted. “But going by reports isn’t the easiest way to pick potential. And while I got quite a few people wrong, there was enough leeway to allow for the mistakes.”

Gabrielle nodded and then opened her mouth and shut it again.

He paused, a piece of cheese half-way to his mouth. “What?”

She shrugged a little and looked away.

“Gabby?”

“I do not want to interfere,” she said quickly. “But, well, I wanted to discuss Ron and Hermione.”

“What about them?” Harry asked flatly.

“It is my fault, not theirs, that they did what they did,” she finished in a rush.

Harry blinked and finished the piece of cheese he was holding. “No, it’s not,” he replied, his voice still cold. “They had a choice. That choice was to advise you to bring the problem straight to me or to help you. They are my two closest friends, and they both know how much I hate being manipulated. They chose to ignore our friendship and everything else we have gone through to get me into a situation.”

“They just wanted to help me and get you out of the rut you were in,” she continued bravely.

“My rut wasn’t that serious,” Harry pointed out. “And while it might have got me out of it, the high-handed decision of what was good for me, without even the courtesy of involving me in the decision gives me pain.”

“If it helps,” Gabrielle said softly. “Ron didn’t like the idea. And he pointed out that you would react like this.”

Harry half-smiled and turned his head. “What did Ron say?”

Gabrielle turned a slight shade of red. “He suggested that he introduce us, that I ‘whack on the Veela power’ and we have a good time – overnight.”

Harry laughed softly. “He said that in front of Jean?”

Gabrielle nodded. “Papa was secretly amused by the bluntness. But you see, Harry, it was my fault for putting them in that situation. Hermione jumped to the final solution immediately and just wanted it to be good for you – she does love you very much.”

“Gabby,” Harry sighed. “I appreciate your loyalty to her and your bravery in telling me this, but this isn’t the first time Hermione has tried to run my life, and she needs to learn that I am not a toy; I am not someone she can just play with. I am supposedly one of her best friends, and I am my own person.”

“What are you going to do?” she asked softly.

“I’ve not decided yet. I’ll probably talk to them this evening.” He paused for a second and then continued as a thought hit him. “Is Mating why your Veela powers are so different from Fleur’s?”

“What do you mean?”

“When you tried to Enthrall me the first night, it felt very different from when Fleur tried.”

“Ahh, yes, that is why. With me, anything dealing with you is fraught with emotions; with Fleur, it was merely magic. She only had a slight desire to do it, whereas I wanted to do it more than anything. It is natural to me.”

“Wait,” Harry said, taking another bite. “If it’s natural, how are you going to handle the fact that you can’t?”

“It *is* natural, but it is a wonderful feeling. Most Veela have to be careful with their powers. If a man turns into a gibbering wreck when she turns her powers on, she can never truly relax. Especially not in bed.”

“Oh?”

Gabrielle looked down a little, biting her lip. “Imagine you are in bed, and your partner does something, and you are Enthralled. A man with a weak mind would stop instantly, and just lay there.”

“Ahh,” Harry nodded. “But I have to have my Occlumency shields up to stop your powers when they are fully on. I don’t tend to keep them up all the time.”

Gabrielle smiled, still looking down. “Harry,” she whispered. “You would never let anyone control your mind; you are too strong, too independent. It is amazing to me, but I find myself in a strange position for a Veela. The roles are almost reversed; I cannot persuade you as another Veela might

persuade their Mate. I have to come at you as an equal, and yet, with my nature and the power of the Mating, you could ask anything of me, and I would say yes before you even finished asking.”

“That sounds almost like slavery,” Harry frowned.

“The most profound form of slavery in existence,” Gabrielle nodded. “That is what Mating is, in a way; it is giving everything to one person. It is the ultimate in trust and love.”

“How could you do that?” he asked softly. “Even at eight, surely you understood the problems it would cause. How could you give yourself over so completely to someone you didn’t even know?”

“I just did,” she said helplessly. “And yet, it was still right. I don’t know why I did it – I just know that I suddenly saw that you were unique, that even though you were young, you would always stand up for what you believed in, that you would always fight for those that couldn’t, and that you would always win. I was in awe of you as I watched you, and then it just came to me, like a whisper over the wind.

“I knew that it wouldn’t be easy, but once it was inside my mind, it wouldn’t go away, and even then, at that young age, I knew without doubt that I was never going to find anyone else as strong, as noble, as trustworthy.

“And all these years later, I have a chance at the dream.”

“A chance at the dream?”

“At everything,” she continued, almost as if she hadn’t heard him. “A chance that I will be able to be myself, that I will be able to let myself go in passion, or anger, or laughter, and not have to worry about reducing you to a wreck. You can have no idea how much that means to me, how much it would mean to any Veela.”

Harry was silent for a few moments, really unsure on how to respond to that. The idea of having someone so completely under his control didn’t quite add up. If that was the case, she would have slept with him when he’d offered in her room. But, what she had said matched what he had read, only with a much more personal twist. He was beginning to think that she was not a standard Veela herself. She seemed a little too independent and intent on getting what she wanted to be that submissive.

“Aimée said that she is human, so you are only part-Veela?”

“Technically, we are part-Veela. Our grandmother and grandfather had one child, Papa. He married Mama, and they had two girl children. The Veela Genes are sex linked, so we received pretty much everything a Veela can, although we are not true Veela. Papa is a carrier of those genes, but cannot access the power.”

“I had thought that Aimée was a Veela.”

“Mama is amazing, is she not?” Gabrielle smiled. “She gives that impression, as she is a very strong woman and wanted to protect us, growing up. She knows more about Veela than most real Veela, and she is always there for us.”

Harry nodded slowly and looked at his watch. “I need to get back to work,” he said.

“But of course,” she smiled.

“You did well this morning.”

“Thank you.”

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Harry collapsed into his chair and sighed in relief. It had been one of the longest days he’d had since the war. But he now had four teams of fourteen students. And from that, he had a further fourteen favourites for the school team.

And it was only now sinking in just how much work he, and they, were going to have to put in to get them up to having a chance. He’d decided that he was going to be extremely positive in public, even with Olympe, so that the whole school would have hope, but in private, he had some very large doubts.

Any fourth year Hogwarts student would be able to out-fly 95% of the Beauxbatons students. And turning the fourteen, none of whom had ever played a competitive game before, into a team was going to be difficult.

But, his entire plan revolved around getting the others to be good enough and working Gabrielle as hard as possible to make her into a very good Seeker. She had the raw talent, but that wasn’t the only reason. He liked working with her, and to realise her talent, they were going to have to spend a lot of time together.

She was making the age thing seem largely irrelevant, and he was grateful for that. There was no way at all that he could accuse himself of ever chasing after a young girl, or even as being interested, as she was quite definitely doing the chasing. The adults who knew about it all understood what was going on, and that it wasn’t an issue for them.

It might be a large case of self-justification, he admitted, but it was working. He was in no hurry to do anything more with the situation, presently; they had plenty of time, and it was nice getting to know her in a way that he hadn’t really known any female, even Hermione. She was incredibly open with him and would tell him anything he wanted to know, even if it was embarrassing.

She seemed to have decided that honesty, at least from this point forward was the best policy, and he approved of it.

"Harry?" Ron called from the Floo. "Can I come through?"

Harry waved his hand absently, cancelling the protection spell on it.

Ron walked in, whistled under his breath, pulled out a chair and sat in front of him.

"Hey," he said cheerfully.

Harry glared at him balefully.

"You know, if you were a Weasley, this would be so much easier," Ron teased.

"Oh?"

"Sure; you'd hit me, I'd hit you back, we'd roll on the floor for a bit, and be over it."

Harry looked at Ron, and then at himself, and then back at Ron. He raised his right arm slightly and flexed his bicep.

"Of course," Ron continued. "None of my brothers are professional athletes or trained fighters."

"Damn it, Ron," Harry growled.

"Why don't I make us a cup of tea?"

"There's beer in my fridge," he grunted.

"Even better," Ron grinned. "Hermione's had a hard day at the office and is in bed, so I figured I'd take the time for a private word – and let you get most of your frustrations out on me."

Harry took the bottle and knocked back half of it in one go. "You're not the one I want to go after," he pointed out.

"Which is exactly why I'm here. She screwed up; she knows that."

"It's my life, Ron."

"I know," he agreed, holding his hand up. "And yes, you're right to be upset with her, with us actually, because I did agree to help in the end."

"You just went along with her because you knew she would have done it with or without your agreement," Harry sighed. "And you wanted to make sure you confronted me first when it went wrong."

"Well, maybe a little," Ron grinned cheerfully.

"Working at the Ministry and being married to Hermione has been bad for you."

"Oh, you mean 'bad' in the way that I'm now being sneaky and managing people?" he asked.

"Something like that, yeah." Harry knocked back the rest of the bottle and went and got a couple more.

"Well, you try dealing with Jean on a political level. That guy is so damn sharp, I count my fingers after we shake hands – and I have to deal with him a lot now. Somehow the rumour got around that Jean likes me, and my bosses jumped at the idea of having someone favourable to deal with him."

Harry smiled faintly and drunk deeply from the bottle. "I'm still pissed off at you," he said. "And Hermione too."

"I know," Ron agreed quietly. "And you're right to be. So let's get a lot of the truly nasty stuff out of your system."

"You know what I'm really angry about?" he asked, suddenly standing and starting to pace.

"No?" Ron gulped, suddenly looking nervous.

"That you and Hermione don't seem to realise that I'm not fifteen anymore. I'm a big boy, Ron. I've seen more countries than most people ever do. I've played in and won the World Cup of Quidditch, I've got more money than I can spend in several hundred lifetimes, and all of it is invested to earn more than inflation. I pay close attention to my financial portfolio, I negotiate my own contract with the Cannons, and by the way, with my image rights, I am the highest paid person in the league. They might have screwed me with my first contract, but I made sure that they didn't do it again, and I've benefited over the long run. But the point is," Harry said, looming over Ron and glaring at him, "is that I am now an adult, who can deal with things. I might sulk for a bit, even for a week, but I am capable of getting myself out of a bad mood and doing something."

"I was grateful for what you did, as it for the most part made my life easier, but finding that you did it with an ulterior motive really took most of the gloss off it."

"We never thought you weren't an adult," Ron said softly, meeting his eyes. "We just wanted to give you some sort of chance of normality for a change. Every girl you meet either wants Harry Potter, Quidditch God; Harry Potter, Sex God or Harry Potter, Richest Person in World. No one even comes close to seeing just Harry, the guy we all love."



“And Gabrielle’s idea was different. Sure, we were putting you in a position. But this was a girl who loved you for yourself, Harry, and didn’t really care about your fame, money, or power.”

“So you decided who I would fall in love with, without bothering to consult me? That was so *nice* of you.”

Ron opened his mouth and then shut it, and turned the familiar Weasley red. “You know, when you put it like that, it sounds *really* bad.”

“Do you have a better way to put it?”

“Not really,” Ron sighed. He took a long drink from his bottle. “More?”

Harry walked into the kitchen, pulled out two more bottles, and put six more in the fridge. He tossed another to Ron and opened his third.

“Cheers,” Ron said, saluting, and draining most of the bottle in one go. “So, what are you going to do about it?”

“I don’t know,” Harry groaned as he sat down. “You two were bloody arrogant, displayed the sort of integrity and friendship that I expect from Dumbledore, and yet, you are still my friends, and I’ve not got enough of them to throw any away – nor would I want to.”

“And punching is out, right?”

“Violence is never the answer.”

“No, violence is the question, ‘yes’ is the answer. Unless, of course, the question is ‘What should we do with Malfoy?’, then violence is a very good answer,” Ron noted thoughtfully.

“That makes no sense.”

“You try making sense after downing three beers on an empty stomach,” Ron pointed out.

“You’re not bloody going to make me cook for you, are you?”

“I’ve tried your cooking,” Ron pointed out, “and it’s not pretty. But we haven’t finished the conversation yet. Is an apology going to help, and a promise to never do it again?”

Harry nodded, finished his beer, and went for another one.

“I *am* sorry, mate,” Ron said seriously, as he finished his beer and cracked open his fourth. “Our hearts were in the right place, but what we did was pretty damn awful. And I do promise to never do it again.”

“Ron,” Harry said seriously. “That really hurt, you know? That my two best friends would manipulate me and throw me into this sort of situation.”

“I know,” Ron sighed. “We fucked up big time.”

“Yes,” Harry agreed. “You did.”

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Gabrielle finished drying her hair and smiled at the mirror. She absently wondered what it would be like if they were enchanted the same way she had read Hogwarts mirrors were, when she heard her Floo activate and two thumps.

She rushed into her small living room to find Harry and Ron on the floor, grinning up at her.

“Can I help you?” she asked slowly in English for Ron’s sake.

“Hi,” Harry said brightly. “We’re drunk.”

“You are?”

“Yes,” Ron said, nodding his head eagerly.

“And you thought you’d come and tell me this because...?”

“Why did we?” Harry asked Ron.

“Because it was a good idea,” Ron pointed out seriously.

“Oh yeah,” Harry agreed. “Because it was a good idea,” he said solemnly.

“And why was it a good idea?” Gabrielle asked, hiding her amusement.

“Because,” Harry started and stopped. “Because...”

“Discussion,” Ron prompted, as he tried to stand and fell back to the floor.

Oh, right," Harry said brightly. "We wanted to tell you that we had a talk, and I'm no longer going to shove Ron's bits into a meat grinder."

"Which is a good thing," Ron said. "Were you really going to do that?"

"It was one of my options," Harry said cheerfully. "But then I remembered that you're my best friend, and I love you."

"I love you, too," Ron replied, hugging Harry.

"Well, thank you for that information," Gabrielle said dryly.

"Oh, don't be so serious, Gabby," Harry said, looking up at her with puppy-dog eyes.

"Gabby?" Ron asked, "I thought her name was Gabrielle."

"It is," Harry agreed. "But she's *my* Gabby."

Gabrielle felt her heart race at the unexpectedly possessive declaration, but put a lot of it down to the inebriated state of her Mate. "So you two talked over beer, and now you're friends again?"

"Isn't she clever?" Harry said.

"Almost as smart as Hermio... Hermioh..."

"Her-My-Oh-Knee?"

"That's the one!" Ron said brightly. "Didn't we come here for another reason?"

"We did?" Harry asked. "I thought we'd tell her we're friends again, and then something would happen."

"How did you get so drunk so quickly?" Gabrielle interjected, before the conversation could degenerate any further.

"How did we?" Ron asked.

"I've been working all day, with just some bread and cheese for lunch," Harry said. "I'm allowed to be a lightweight."

"Oh, Harry," Gabrielle sighed. "You started drinking on an empty stomach?"

"Oh-oh," Ron said. "That's the same tone Hermeo, Heyme... my wife uses at me!"

"Really?"

Ron nodded. "She doesn't like it when I'm slightly pished."

"Pished?"

"I'm not allowed to swear," he said conspiratorially to Gabrielle.

"Right," she nodded and backed away slightly. "Why don't I get Hermione to take you home, Ron, and then I can look after Harry."

"See," Harry said. "I told you she's smart."

"Really hot, too," Ron agreed.

"Yeah, I know," Harry nodded and put his head down on the rug.

Ron yawned and rested his head down as well.

Gabrielle shook her head again and walked over to the fire, calling for Hermione. It took several minutes, before a very sleepy-looking Hermione answered.

"Gabrielle?"

"Do you want to come and collect your husband? He's currently passed out on my floor."

"What's happened?" Hermione asked.

"I suspect he decided to have a talk with Harry alone and that they did it over several beers and an empty stomach."

"Oh, Merlin," Hermione said, starting to smile. "Did they say anything?"

"Well, Ron thinks I'm 'hot', and Harry agrees," Gabrielle said.

"Step back, I'll come through."

She moved a few paces back and took a seat on the chair. Ron and Harry were now snoring together. Hermione appeared a second later, in a

dresssing gown, and sighed as she looked down at them.

"I'd be mad at him," Hermione said, "but I think he wanted to try and protect me."

"Harry's very annoyed at you," Gabrielle said softly.

"I know," Hermione sighed. "I'll see if I can talk to him tomorrow, when they're both sober. Do you need any help?"

"Not at all. I can get him back to his room."

"You can?"

She nodded silently.

"So it's going well, then?"

"I'm not sure," Gabrielle replied, not really wanting to tell her anything at this stage. "It's most confusing."

"That sums up Harry," Hermione nodded and pulled out her wand. She floated Ron into the fireplace and with a thank you smile, stepped in and vanished them both together.

"Come on, Harry," Gabrielle said, kneeling next to him. Harry opened his eyes and looked up at her.

"I'm not quite as drunk as I might have made out," he said.

She nodded. "I didn't think you would be."

"I am *pretty* drunk though," he admitted. "I should have eaten more."

"Why are you drunk?"

"It helped to clear the air with Ron. And that was enough of a reason."

"So you're happy with him again?"

He nodded. "Have you got any food?"

"I'll get Dobby to bring us some up."

"Good idea," he sighed, as he sat down at the table. "It's bizarre man-stuff," he explained. "By getting drunk together, it's showing some weird sort of trust."

"And you brought him to me because?"

He smiled slightly. "It seemed like a good idea at the time."

She laughed softly and shook her head. "Wait here."

"I'm not exactly in the condition to go anywhere," he replied.

She walked into her kitchen and called for Dobby. It didn't take much explanation of Harry's state, before he returned with a large jug of water and two bowls filled with what looked like some sort of beef dish.

"Thanks," she said and took the tray back to Harry, who had his head down.

"This is why I don't drink," he sighed.

"You've done it before?"

"Yeah, first time the Cannons won the league. Ollie and I went celebrating and we ended up sleeping on the roof of a bus shelter in the middle of Hertfordshire. We woke up feeling so bad that it took us four tries to Apparate home. My hangover made me swear to never get drunk again."

"And yet you did it."

"Didn't you know that Gryffindors are fiendishly brave?"

She laughed softly. "Drink some water, Harry, it will re-hydrate you. Alcohol is a diuretic that, well, helps drain the chemicals out of your body. A hangover is normally caused by a lack of water."

Harry drank deeply from the glass and then smiled slightly at her, before picking up a fork and starting to eat.

"What is this?" she asked, poking it carefully.

"Beef stew," Harry replied.

And it's edible, right?"

"If Dobby made it, yes."

"I've never seen it before."

"Don't worry," Harry smiled. "It won't kill you, I promise."

She took a bite daintily. "It's not bad," she said diplomatically, deciding to take Harry to a proper restaurant – and send Dobby on a cooking course as soon as possible. This dish was one of the blandest things she'd ever tasted; but it was filling, and he seemed to be enjoying it. It was probably due to his irregular meals as a child, and the awful stuff he was fed, that he hadn't really had the need to develop a sophisticated palate.

Exploring the boundaries of food would be a lot of fun with him, and she hoped that he'd be able to grow to like some of her favourites. He hadn't had any problems with the school food so far, and that was slightly more than adequate.

"I wasn't going to speak to him tonight; I was too tired," Harry said eventually. "But when he asked to come through the Floo, I felt it was better to get it out of the way. It's pretty amazing how much he has grown up."

"Really?" she asked, not having really known him when he was younger.

"Yeah," he agreed. "Working at the Ministry has been good for him. He tends to engage his brain before speaking now, and he really loves Hermione."

She nodded, taking another bite of the stew – which was growing on her a little.

"He wanted to make sure I wasn't going to go over the top, and he offered to let me hit him."

She laughed softly. "I don't think that he would need to let you if you wanted to."

He nodded in agreement. "Nice idea, though."

He finished the stew and took another long drink of water, and smiled at her. "Thanks."

"Always," she replied simply. "It was interesting."

"I'll bet," he laughed softly. He stood and stumbled. "Help?" he asked, looking at her through his lashes.

She stood and wrapped an arm around him, moving toward the door.

"No, Floo," he said.

"I can't get in," she reminded him.

"Time I changed that," he sighed. "Come on, Gabby."

She smiled and nodded, walking with him into the fireplace. "Potter Room," Harry called. "Accept Gabrielle Delacour permanently."

The Floo rushed, and she felt herself flung out of the fire and grabbed hold of him. They ended up on the floor with her lying on his chest.

"Sorry," he mumbled. "Forgot the charm to keep me upright. Too much magical power makes me fly through it too fast."

"That makes sense," she said, trying to decide whether she wanted to move or not, and the way his arm wrapped around her waist made it very difficult to think of a single reason why she should.

He shifted and sat up, and with an internal sigh, she moved off him.

He dropped down onto a chair. "Thanks," he said softly.

"Any time," she replied and stepped back into the Floo, vanishing.

Once inside her room, she stripped, pulled on an oversized shirt and climbed into bed.

She punched her pillow a few times; she really didn't like this taking-things-slow business. That lying on the floor situation could have been the perfect time for some kisses. And he bloody well had no clue how affected by him she was, how right it felt to be with him, in his arms, taking care of him.

It was a blessing and a curse. A curse because she might not get him, that it might go wrong, that she didn't have him already. But a blessing in that at least she got a chance, a large chance actually, to win him over.

---

"Harry?"

Harry opened his eyes and shut them again quickly. "I wasn't dreaming then," he rasped. "I really did get drunk last night and went to visit you?"

"Yes," she agreed. "I've brought you another drink and some breakfast that Dobby assures me is the best hangover cure."

He opened his eyes again, cracking them against the harsh light that seemed to burn his optical nerves to a crisp.

He sat up and felt Gabby place a tray across his lap. He bravely opened his eyes and watched as she took a seat at the foot of his bed.

"Shouldn't you be at breakfast?" he asked, as he poured himself some orange juice.

"I told Madame Maxime I'd be having breakfast with you," she said cheerfully. "And I did not mention that you would be hung over."

"Thanks," he smiled and looked down. "Dobby said I should eat this?" he asked doubtfully.

"He did," Gabrielle said, taking a small plate with two croissants on it for herself. She sat cross-legged and took a bite.

Harry shook his head slowly and cut up one of the sausages from the full English breakfast.

"We don't have a chance at winning the Quidditch tournament, do we?"

"What do you mean?"

"I saw how we were yesterday and with the few months we have available, we're not going to be anywhere near as good as the other teams that have been playing for years."

Harry looked up and breathed deeply. "Not a word of this to anyone else, Gabby. It's important that they think we have a chance, even if we don't."

"The whole school is behind this, Harry; I don't want us to lose."

"That's a good thing," he smiled slightly, digging in. After getting over his early revulsion, he was feeling better now that he had some food inside him. "Because it's going to come down to you."

"Me?" Gabrielle asked, looking surprised.

"A great team with a great Seeker is practically unbeatable. A bad team with a brilliant or lucky Seeker can still win."

"I'm not a great Seeker, though," she said.

He smiled slightly. "By the time I've finished with you, you will be," he said confidently.

"Oh?" she asked, her eyes now wide.

"Well, I figured that it would be a good way to spend a lot of time together, flying, and out of everyone's temperament and character profile, you fit the Seeker mould better than anyone else."

She smiled slightly and avoided his eyes. "In what way?"

He waited until she looked directly at him. "You set your eyes on the target, and don't budge until you have it, no matter how long you have to wait."

She blushed and looked away again. "I've never thought of you as a Snitch," she whispered.

"But it's true all the same. This way, we'll be able to spend a lot of time together, without people gossiping about you."

"That's not going to leave me a lot of time for studying," she said slowly. "So, we're going to have to do a deal."

"Oh?" he asked, secretly amused at her way of viewing the situation.

"Yes. If I agree to do this, you agree that I can do my senior project on you."

"On me?" he asked, surprised.

"Specifically, on your relationship with magic. It's different from anyone I've ever seen or ever known, and I will not miss out on the chance to graduate a year early."

"Why do you want to leave a year early?"

"Because I am not going to spend a whole year apart from you. You're going to be back playing professional Quidditch next year, and I am not going to still be at school pining from a distance."

He laughed under his breath and finished off his breakfast. Part of him wanted to say 'no' to her immediately; just on the general principle of keeping his privacy, but another, larger, part recognised that her request was fair. He was going to take up a lot of her time, and she should be able to get something out of it.

"Have you thought about playing professionally?" he asked, curious.

"Oh no," she smiled. "I'm going to be the best I can be to prove to myself, and to you, that I can do it, but I have no wish to spend my life playing the

sport. Aside from being with you, I am not sure what I want to do with my life, but I'm in no hurry to find out."

"Okay," he said softly. "With the caveat of a few limitations, such as not discussing my nullifying field, you can do your project on me."

His reward for agreeing was one of the biggest smiles he'd seen from her.

---

"Don't think I'll do this every time you get drunk," Hermione said, as she placed a steaming potion on her husband's lap.

"Is it going to kill me?" Ron asked, with a small amount of hope in his voice.

"It's a hangover cure."

"Wow," he said and drank it down quickly. "That tastes foul!"

"So it should," Hermione agreed. "If it tasted good, there would be no reason for you to remain sober."

"Right," Ron said dryly.

"So, what happened last night?"

"I had a chat with Harry, made sure he got most of his anger out of the way, and we made friends again."

"I told you not to protect me."

"And I ignored you," Ron stated.

"What am I going to do with you?"

"Wear that nurse outfit?" Ron said with a grin.

"If you're lucky," she replied with a slight smile. "But seriously, what happened?"

"Harry is very annoyed with you, but before we go into that, do you know who the highest paid Quidditch player in the country is?"

"What? No, who?"

"Harry."

"Really?"

"Yeah," Ron continued. "And do you know who negotiates Harry's contract?"

"Err, no."

"He does them himself, including something called image rights. This, I believe, means that he gets a cut of every Harry Potter poster, toy, game and everything else with his name or face on it."

"You're trying to make a point here, Ron. What is it?"

"That Harry has grown up, Hermione. He's no longer an insecure eighteen year old. He's a man, who earns a fortune, owns a fortune, and has travelled most of the world. That he doesn't really need anyone to look after him."

"But he was depressed and living in the dark!"

"So what?" Ron asked. "Does that make it right for us to unilaterally decide who he falls in love with?"

"But..."

"Yeah, that was how I felt last night when Harry said that to me. He also compared our behaviour to Dumbledore's, and you know in his mind, that is the worst insult imaginable."

Hermione sighed softly. "I need to go and speak to him," she said.

"You do," Ron agreed, "this afternoon."

She leaned forward and gently kissed him. "Thank you, and if I'm still in one piece when I get back, you might just find that I remember where that outfit is."

Ron smiled.

---

After sharing breakfast with Gabby, Harry spent the morning sitting on the floor, trying to work out a decent training regime for each house team. But he was getting bored of that and bored of thinking about his imminent official return to Hogwarts, where he probably wouldn't be able to treat

Malfoy as he deserved.

He jumped to his feet and headed down to the Seventh Year common room. With the kids separated by years, it made it easier to be able to speak to all the senior students at one time.

He walked right in – as a professor, he was more than encouraged to check in on them during the day.

“Any one interested in helping me with a magical project?” he asked, his voice rising above the chatter.

“Doing what?” Claude shouted back.

He grinned impishly. “As you all know, we’re returning to my Alma Mater in a few weeks time, and last time, Beauxbatons’ entrance was great. This time, I want to top it! But, what I need is a proposal I can take to Madame Maxime.”

“You want us to help come up with a cool entrance?” Claude asked, walking over.

Harry nodded.

“Simone,” Claude said, “run and fetch Gabrielle, and then pick up the smart sixth years. You know who they are.”

The girl nodded and ran out of the door as all of the remaining students pulled up chairs. “Gabrielle’s probably the best magical theorist in the school,” Claude explained, “and as Head Girl, can help you persuade Madame Maxime to let us do this. As to the sixth years, it’s always good to get some intelligent help.”

Harry grabbed a seat of his own, sitting with his legs crossed.

“What’s going on?” Gabrielle asked, as she dashed into the room, her blonde hair flowing behind her. “Simone said something about needing help?”

Claude groaned loudly. “Simone’s a little excitable,” he explained to Harry. “Professor Potter has asked for some help putting together a proposal to change our arrival at Hogwarts into something a little more dramatic.”

Gabrielle smiled. “Excellent idea. Simone is getting the sixth years?”

“She is indeed,” Claude said cheerfully. “This is for the pride of France,” he said to Harry. “And as such, we’ve suspended all the normal year rivalries and we’re going to work together to help restore some pride.”

Harry smiled and nodded.

“While you’re all here,” Gabrielle said, turning to face the students. “Can we get one rumour dealt with quickly?”

“What’s that?” Claude asked.

“That I’ve Enthralled Professor Potter, in order to get better grades and spend more time with him,” she said, putting her hands on her hips. “I’m fed up of hearing it.”

Harry could see some faces blush.

Gabby turned to face him, and her hair started to move in a breeze that hadn’t existed a second before, and he sighed softly, allowing his shields to rise, as he sat dispassionately, watching her. He smiled slightly as he saw some of the students’ expressions go blank as they were caught in the edges of her power. Her eyes seemed to grow as she turned up the power, and he actually felt a little warm and discovered that the link was sending him small messages. It was a new sensation and something quite unique.

Gabrielle turned off the Veela power and turned back to face the others. “As you can see,” she said dryly. “I couldn’t Enthal him if even if I wanted to. And I have no need to, anyway. I get my grades honestly.”

“How did you do that?” Claude asked Harry with a look of awe on his face.

“I don’t let anyone into my mind,” he said softly. “Not since Voldemort possessed me.”

There was a visible shiver at the name of the ex-Dark Lord, and some of the faces that had earlier been blushing, turned a brighter red in embarrassment.

“I’ve got them,” Simone said, bursting back into the common room with excitement. She was trailed by another group of students.

“Okay,” Claude said, standing up. “Everyone get comfy. You’ve just missed proof that Professor Potter is immune to Veela power, so anyone else spreading rumours to that effect will look pretty stupid.

“But, we’re all here because, as you know, we’re going to Hogwarts soon, and last time we went, we turned up in a carriage pulled by flying horses. That is way too last decade, so we need to come up with an idea that is a lot cooler and will allow us to show the English that we’ve improved as well.”

“What are our limitations?” one of the sixth year girls asked.

"Only your imagination," Harry said smoothly. "The idea is to come up with something exciting, and I'll take it to Madame Maxime, and if we get the go ahead, I'll work with you all to get it done." He stood and smiled at the group.

"When you've come up with an idea, come and see me, and we'll talk about it."

He walked out of the room, and wasn't surprised when Madame Maxime walked next to him. "Do all headmistresses know what is going on, all the time?" he asked.

"Of course," she smiled. "Well, in my case, I just happened to be in the room when Simone burst in like there was a fire. Tell me, Harry, did you not like my carriage?"

"I thought it would be a nice project for them to work on," Harry replied with a shrug, avoiding a direct response. "And to be honest, I would like to return in style, and as there is going to be the whole school going this time, I thought we'd need something bigger."

"Thinking up something to put Albus in his place is never going to get on my bad side," Olympe said cheerfully. "Now, how are you feeling?"

"What do you mean?"

"I've spent enough time in England to know a hangover cure when I see one, and the school Floo logs show that Mr Weasley visited last night."

Harry blushed and looked down. "We talked over a few beers and then told Gabby about it."

Olympe laughed softly, and then her face turned serious. "This situation is hard for me," she admitted. "My natural instinct is to have a serious talk with you about being in a student's room, but then, this is not natural, is it?"

"Not really," Harry sighed. "I do tend to forget most times that she is a lot younger than me."

"I wouldn't say a *lot* younger," Olympe said gently. "And the thing about rules, Harry is that there are always exceptions. I know that you are probably thinking a lot about how this has affected you, but it has affected her as well."

"Oh, I know," Harry agreed, opening the door to his room and ushering the Headmistress in. "I was thinking about that the other day, and how grateful I am that the mistakes I made at eight did not have such consequences."

"So you do not blame Gabrielle?"

"Tea?" Harry offered, walking into his kitchen.

"Plain, no sugar."

He put the kettle on and walked back to the doorway. "No," he sighed. "Well, a little bit. I'm trying not to hold it against her, and I've talked about it with her a few times."

Olympe nodded slowly. "You are taking this very differently to how I was advised."

Harry snorted. "Your advice was out of date."

"Yes, I see that, and I must say, Harry, that I am very pleased about it. And, to be completely honest, I'm grateful that I didn't have to go through another Fleur. I might have retired."

Harry laughed as he went back into the kitchen and prepared two cups of tea. "Here," he said as he took a seat opposite her. "I've got the teams down now, and some idea of how I am going to train them."

"Tell me," Olympe said, as she took a sip. "Exactly how did you get Gabrielle to agree to spend so much of her time on a sport, when academics are her true love?"

"It gives her a chance to spend time with me?"

"Harry," Olympe chided, sounding very amused.

"I agreed to let her do her senior project on my relationship with magic."

Olympe placed down her tea and clapped her hands together. "Perfect," she said with a smile. "That is the Gabrielle I know."

"Indeed," Harry said. "For someone who is supposedly subservient, she is not afraid of showing her will."

"Would you respect her if she wouldn't -- or couldn't?"

He opened his mouth and then shut it again. He had no answer to that.

---

"Can I at least take him a bottle of wine?" Hermione asked.

"He's not going to want to drink today," Ron pointed out reasonably. "And you're procrastinating."



"I know," she sighed. "I'm just nervous."

"This *is* your best friend, remember?"

"A best friend who thinks that I'm no better than Dumbledore," Hermione pointed out.

"Just go, apologise, make friends again, and bring him home for dinner; I'll cook something nice for the three of us."

"You're bullying me," Hermione said.

"I know," Ron replied, pushing her into the fire and sending her to Harry's place before she could react.

She arrived and blinked in surprise, and for the first time, it really hit home that Harry had changed and grown up. He was doing paperwork at his desk, his movements firm and decisive as he scratched the quill on the paperwork.

"I'll be with you in a second, Hermione," he said, his voice cool.

She looked around and nervously sat on one of the chairs, the one without a drink next to it, not wanting to take his place. She didn't like feeling like this, and knowing that she had caused it herself was not exactly helpful. It was okay when you were a man, she thought grumpily; you just had a few beers, shouted at each other, did some macho posturing on, and ended up drunk on some girl's floor.

"Do you want a drink?" Harry asked.

"Tea, please."

She followed his movements by sound, suddenly realising that she felt like she was back at school, having to explain why she had broken the rules – only this time, she didn't have a good excuse.

He placed a cup on the table next to her, he knew how she liked it, and sat down in the chair opposite.

He seemed in no hurry to say anything, and she found it just a little intimidating. She took a deep breath. "I'm sorry," she said, exhaling.

He looked at her. "Why, Hermione? You, more than anyone know exactly how much I hate having decisions taken out of my hands and made for me." The disappointment he felt in her could be seen clearly in his face and heard in his voice.

She sighed softly, wringing her hands. "Because it all seemed so perfect that I didn't even think of it like that," she admitted. "When Jean told us about Gabrielle, everything seemed to fall into place like it was predestined. I just jumped to the end, past the middle stages, to where you were happy."

"So you just decided there and then *who* I would fall in love with – for the rest of my life?"

"It didn't sound any better when Ron said it," she murmured, looking down at her hands. "Yes," she said honestly, looking back up at him. "I felt that the situation, and everything involved, would be perfect to make you happy. Oh, I put some safeguards in place, I spent some time with Gabrielle to make sure she was honest about everything, and I did some Veela research, and as everything checked out, I was comfortable."

Harry seemed to slump down, and she felt a fresh wave of guilt shoot through her. Her excuses seemed weak, even to her own ears.

"Why didn't you just talk to me?"

"I thought I knew better than you," she admitted, in a small voice.

He looked up at her, a surprised look on his face. He moved and knelt in front of her, looking directly into her eyes. "You hurt me, Hermione," he whispered. "More than you can know – it hurt that my best friend thought she could run my life, like everyone else has tried to do over the past twelve years. I am an adult, Hermione; I have my own life, my own motivations, and if I want to do something stupid and destructive, that is my damned right."

"I'm sorry," she said, feeling tears suddenly start to run down her cheeks. She met his eyes, as openly as she could. "Please, forgive me. I promise I'll never do it again."

"I won't forgive you," he whispered, and she tensed, feeling like one more word would shatter her world into a million pieces, and end her life as she knew it.

"Forgiveness is permission to do it again, and you do not have that. I am willing to move past this, to forget about it, but if you do it again, we will not have a relationship. You damaged my trust in you, Hermione, and any more damage will break it completely and I will never trust you again. But I am willing to put it aside.

She nodded, a wild feeling of hope soaring through her. "You mean that?"

He nodded and opened his arms.

She dived into them, sobbing, as she hugged him and buried her face in his neck. She felt his arms around her and relaxed, letting the cold knot that she had lived with for the past week vanish. "Thank you," she mumbled. "I swear I'll never do it again."

"Don't," he said, and she looked into his eyes again and saw the hurt she had caused once more.

"I swear," she whispered. She held him for another minute, and then looked up slowly. "You really are growing up, aren't you? Both you and Ron?"

"I'm trying," he said with a small half-smile. "And that git seems to have managed it as well."

She laughed softly and brushed her eyes against his shirt. "I almost preferred it when you were young; temper was much easier to handle than logic."

"Oh?"

She nodded fervently, "but words are a lot more effective."

He laughed softly and released her.

"Will you come over for dinner tonight?" she asked. "Ron's promised something special."

"He's pretty special," Harry said. "He managed to bring me back from some of the more exotic things I was thinking about doing to you."

She nodded in agreement, her husband was pretty special. And as much as she might tease, she knew exactly where the nurse outfit was, and after they had eaten, and Harry had gone home, she would show Ron just how grateful she was for his quiet and thoughtful actions.

---

"Madame Maxime," Gabrielle called, as she knocked on the door to the Headmistress' office.

"Enter, Gabrielle."

"I have the week's Merits and Demerits," she said, as she placed the folder on front of her. It was her job to collate them every Friday.

"Thank you," Olympe said gently. "Take a seat."

Gabrielle perched on the edge of the seat, her fingers itching to pull out her clipboard.

"Tell me, how is your campaign with Harry going?"

"Slowly," she sighed, relaxing as she realised this wasn't about school work. "But I do have a plan to hopefully help."

"Oh?"

"Yes, I would like your permission to leave school tomorrow night."

"Oh?"

"I would like to take Harry to Barcelona for the evening. It will be a place where we may be ourselves, without worrying about others, and I don't think that Harry really realised that teaching was such hard work."

"He has looked a little drained," Olympe acknowledged.

"He is working too hard, trying to make a team for each House, and working with all the students after school. But, his friends are coming for their first visit on Sunday, and that will give him a boost."

"I know," Olympe nodded. "How is your Spanish?"

"Almost as good as my English," Gabrielle replied. "It was nice to learn another language for fun."

"Quite," Olympe agreed dryly.

"So I may take him?"

The Headmistress nodded.

"Excellent," she smiled. "In which case, with your permission, I shall go and ask Harry out on our first official date."

Olympe laughed softly. "How very modern of you."

"But, of course," Gabrielle grinned. "I am doing the chasing, and while I have to be careful chasing my tiger, it is a curious mixture of apprehension, excitement, and hope. It has made life interesting."

After saying goodbye, she struggled to keep her pace down to a normal walk, as she moved to her room.

She moved to the Floo and called Harry.

"Gabby?" Harry asked with a smile, as he appeared in the fire.

Do you have any plans for tomorrow evening?" she asked.

"Nope."

"Then I would like to ask you out, on a date, to Barcelona for the evening."

Harry's eyebrows rose. "A date?"

She nodded, suddenly feeling tense.

"It would be a pleasure," he said.

She couldn't hide the massive smile that bubbled from deep inside her. "At seven," she said.

He nodded, and she cancelled the Floo and looked at her watch. She now had exactly twenty-two and a half hours to get ready. She was going to need some help.

"Fleur," she called eagerly through the fire. It took a minute before her sister appeared. "I need your help," she said. "I've got my first date with Harry tomorrow, and I need to look perfect."

"Then get some sleep," Fleur said dryly. "And I'll come and see you in the morning. Without sleep, no amount of Veela power will be able to help you."

"But I am excited," Gabrielle sighed.

"I know," Fleur said softly. "Have a cup of that disgusting tea you like so much and relax. Tomorrow, I will come, and I will bring Mama as well."

Gabrielle nodded and did as she was advised. She slipped into bed and soon fell asleep, her mind engaged with what she could wear to blow him away.

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Gabrielle woke as a cool hand lightly brushed her hair back from her face.

"Mama," she said as she smiled, and reached up to hug her mother, hard.

"I am here," Aimée said with a small smile, "as requested. What sort of look do you want for tonight with Harry?"

"I think it is time that Harry realises that I am definitely not as young as my age might suggest," she replied. "And I really think it is time that he realises that I am Veela. He has seen me sleepy, he has seen me casual, he has seen me formal, and he has even seen me in a swim suit. It is now time for him to see that I can be daring and adventurous as well."

Aimée winced slightly. "So, you want me to help you look sexy?"

Gabrielle nodded. "We are going to Comerç and then to Mitsa for dancing."

Aimée sighed softly, "It is hard, Gabrielle, to remember that you are not me, that you are different."

"Mama," Gabrielle whispered. "If you remember, you told me yourself that Veela with Mates mature faster, so do not think of me as sixteen. Think of me as a twenty year old woman, courting her future husband."

"You are too clever for your own good," Aimée whispered.

"But you *will* help, will you not?"

"I will. We will have to go shopping, though."

"Okay," Gabrielle said eagerly.

"*Now*, you like to shop," Aimée sighed theatrically. "I remember having to drag you to the shops when you were younger."

"I grew up. I have motivation now," Gabrielle said with a smile.

"Get dressed, dear, and I shall make you and Fleur some breakfast."

"Yes, Mama."

---

Harry threw down the final piece of paperwork onto his desk and sighed. The idea of being a flying instructor at a school had seemed like it would be a lot of fun. And it was. It was all the red-tape he had to fill, in between flying time, that was not fun. If it moved, it seemed like it had to be evaluated and graded.

When you added to that his obsession with making sure that the kids would not be humiliated, even if they didn't win, it explained why he was tired and slightly grumpy.

He'd yet to actually make one of the meals with the other professors; because the only time he could do extra work with the kids was when they weren't in lessons, which pretty much amounted to every mealtime available.

He moved to his bathroom, stripping carelessly. That was another thing; he was a more than a little nervous. He was going on a date with one of his students, only he didn't care that she was younger and that she was a student. He was going out with someone who made him smile, was always willing to help, and was pretty good-looking as well.

He stood under the hot water for a few minutes, before turning it up to scalding hot, in an attempt to wake himself up a bit. Fully clean, he moved out of the shower and shaved quickly, before walking, naked, into his bedroom to decide what to wear.

Gabby hadn't actually told him where they were going yet, so he didn't know how dressy to actually be. He decided to be safe and simple, and pulled on an elegant black shirt, leaving it open at the collar, some underwear, black trousers, shoes, and socks.

He looked into the mirror and smiled slightly. It was a lot easier to get dressed without a mirror making sarcastically helpful comments.

He looked at his watch, ready in plenty of time. With nothing else to do, he picked up the suggestions the students had made for their arrival at Hogwarts and started to read through them.

---

"Well, how do I look?" Gabrielle asked.

"I think I am jealous," Fleur said with a toss of her hair. "I did not look *that* good when I was your age."

Gabrielle smiled brightly. "Mama?"

"You look like you are too old," Aimée sighed. "Please, for the sake of my marriage, do not let your father see you like this for a few years. You know he still thinks of you as his little Gabrielle."

"I promise," Gabrielle agreed. "Will Harry like it?"

"If he does not, then he will never fall in love with you," Aimée said softly. "Now, you are going to be on guard tonight, are you not?"

"What do you mean?"

"You are dressed to attract attention, and it won't just come from Harry. You remember your defence classes?"

"I do, Mama, but Harry will not let anything happen to me."

"Which is the only reason I am allowing you out in public looking like that," Aimée said, only teasing a little bit. "But it is still better to be prepared."

"I will not freeze again," she said firmly.

"Good. How are you getting there tonight?"

"We shall take the Floo to our house, and then Harry can Apparate us there. It would not do for me to be seen with him, by the other students, dressed like this."

Aimée nodded. "It's time for you to go, Gabrielle. Good luck, my dear."

"Yeah," Fleur added. "Good luck, angel."

Gabrielle smiled and threw some powder into the fire and vanished with a whisper.

Aimée looked at her oldest daughter for a second and then nodded and threw some powder into the fire. "Jean," she called.

"Aimée?"

"Can you spare some Aurors tonight?"

"Why?"

"Gabrielle is taking Harry out on their first date to Barcelona. I'd rather that they had a quiet evening."

"Harry can take care of that," Jean pointed out.

"I helped Gabrielle and Fleur choose her outfit, without realising exactly what it would look like," she confessed. "It *will* attract attention."

"I don't want to know," Jean sighed. "I really don't! I'll speak to some friends in Spain and send over a few of my own people to run crowd control."

---

Harry looked up as the Floo burst into life, and Gabrielle stepped through. She took a step to the side, and leant backward, her hands going up behind her head, in a pose of devastatingly artful innocence.

Harry slowly ran his eyes over her, and the only thought that came to his mind was that good-looking, as he had called her earlier, was possibly the biggest understatement he had ever made.

His eyes flicked up and met hers – in her eyes there was a clear invitation to look all he wanted, and so he did.

Her legs were encased in semi-translucent white material, which gave her skin an almost unearthly glow; her feet were in heeled shoes with three simple straps holding them in place. He was pretty sure that the white material was stockings, as her legs seemed to disappear into a skirt that reached mid thigh, but the skirt seemed to be made of a gauzy material, like patterned lace – lace that gave a hint of bare skin at the top of her legs, but didn't actually show it. The higher he looked, the tighter the pattern was, effectively covering what was underneath, while managing to hint at everything.

The skirt was held up by an inch wide silver belt that seemed to glisten and sparkle in the light available.

Above that was an awe-inspiring expanse of clear, smooth skin that showed off her stomach, before a crop top, of the same material as her skirt, covered her breasts in a way that tantalised and teased, rather than outright revealed. The top was held up by two white straps that hung to her bare shoulders, giving a contrast to her golden sun tan.

Her hair was up, in a style he hadn't seen before, with just a few strands free to frame her face as he looked at her. Despite her suggestive pose and position, she had a slightly vulnerable look in her eyes, as if his approval meant everything to her.

"Wow," he whispered softly, suddenly very aware that maybe this whole thing wasn't as bad as he had thought. "*You* are beautiful."

She smiled at him, and for the third time, he felt his heart respond to her. "Shall we go?" she asked, lowering her hands and holding one out to him.

He nodded and took a step forward, taking her hand. She moved slightly, as if it was natural, and he found his arm around her waist, his hand on warm, smooth skin.

They stepped into the Floo together and vanished. He was careful to keep his spells up, as there was no way he wanted her outfit disrupted by travelling in the Floo with him.

"Why are we here?" he asked, as he looked around the Delacour residence.

"We need to Apparate, and I didn't want anyone at school to see us together," she said softly.

He nodded. "Good idea."

"Come," she continued. "Then you shall Apparate us to Barcelona."

He nodded again and walked with her into the warm night air. He didn't see the need to say anything at the moment, so he didn't and was pleased that she didn't feel the need to fill the silence with something.

"We're past the wards," he said, as he felt the Magical pressure drop around him.

"Take where we are going from my mind," she said, lightly grabbing his hand, and moving it to her forehead. The movement wasn't necessary, but it added an intimacy to the moment.

He reached out softly into her mind and gasped as he felt a bright light engulf him. It was warm and pure, and somehow all-encompassing.

"You must know," she whispered softly, "That what I feel for you is real; it is merely enhanced by the Mating."

He nodded softly and took the location from her, withdrawing from her mind with a slight tinge of regret.

He moved closer to her, and she raised her arms, around his neck, holding herself close to him. He slid his hands against her back and Disapparated.

They arrived in a small side-street, and she stepped away from him without protest and took his hand.

He'd already had a few things turned around mentally this evening, and having this mix of innocence, impishness, and downright sexiness was playing havoc with his thought processes.

She seemed to take pity on him as she led him into a busy street. They crossed, avoiding the traffic, and entered a modern looking restaurant. She spoke to the maître'd who greeted them in Spanish and a minute later they were seated beneath a huge arched window, a bottle of wine before them and their order placed.

"How many languages *do* you speak?" he asked, curious.

"Five," she replied. "I also speak Italian and German. Languages are always fun to learn. Papa insisted we learnt to speak English as children; the others I did at school." She paused and then leaned forward a little, which forced his eyes to focus on the shadow caused by her top moving, "I can speak them, but my writing is nowhere near as good."

He laughed softly. "I am impressed," he said, tearing his eyes away and back up to her face. He poured the wine, not bothering to taste it as Jean had taught him; it didn't seem right, not tonight.

"Ask me a question," she said, looking at him with a gentle smile.

"What do you mean?"

"There must be something about me that you want to know; ask me, and I shall tell you."

He cocked his head to one side and thought for a second. "I think I have guessed, but I want to hear you tell me anyway."

"Tell you what?"

"Exactly why did you come up with this whole scheme?"

Her eyes darkened a little, and she sighed almost under her breath, "That will teach me; you do not ask easy questions."

She took a sip of the wine and didn't say anything as the waiter appeared with their first course.

"Guilt, fear," she whispered eventually, "and maybe hope; hope that you would never need to know the downside."

"Go on," he said softly.

"I told you in the Orchard that I wanted you to fall in love with me, and that is the truth. But it is more than that. I wanted everything from you and I didn't want you to feel like you were being forced. I want you, but I do not want you broken. There is a fire inside you, Harry, and it warms me when I am near you, but forcing you to help me would cool it, and I would have to live forever with the guilt that a mistake I made extinguished that fire."

"I could not do that, to me or to you." She was looking at him directly, her eyes open and wide, with not trace of deceit or dishonesty. "Having put us both in this situation, I wanted to go down the best possible route, so I persuaded Papa that it was the best way forward – Mama did not agree – and he asked Ron and Hermione."

"But, like everyone else, I did not take into account how you have changed over the recent years. Getting accurate information about you was difficult; even your friends hadn't quite realised just how much you have changed from the young man who defeated Voldemort."

"I guess that is partly my fault," he said softly. "When I was home, I was able to relax and joke around; I didn't have to act, and I never got around to telling them how I was changing, but then, I didn't really notice it as much either - it just was."

She nodded softly. "I knew, growing up, that Papa would not be able to cure me, because I did not want to be cured. I knew what I was doing was risky, and I understood more as I continued to grow, but it allowed me this hope, this feeling, deep inside, that if I were to gamble everything, I *could* win everything. And if I lose, then at least I tried."

"If you can make one heap of all your winnings, and risk it all on one turn of pitch-and-toss," Harry quoted under his breath.

"And lose, and start again at your beginnings, and never breathe a word about your loss," Gabrielle continued.

"My favourite poem," Harry said and went silent, studying her face. She met his eyes equally, without hesitation, allowing him to see her as she was, without fear or hesitation.

And he nodded slowly, accepting her explanations, and decided then to not be bothered by what happened anymore. It was a strange dichotomy that he hated being manipulated, yet that manipulation had led him here, to a beautiful girl who made no secret of loving him for himself, and not any of the public faces he had shown over the last few years. He knew that it would not matter if he wasn't famous; she didn't care about that. All she wanted was him.

The waiter cleared their appetizer and brought the main course for them.

He ran his eyes over her face, and the look that came as much from Veela genes as it did from nature. When he had first seen Veela, he remembered thinking that they were the most beautiful women he had ever seen, and Gabrielle was the most beautiful Veela he had ever seen – and over the past few years, he had seen a quite a few of them at Quidditch matches.

She smiled at him, and for a moment, she seemed ethereal, like a mental image of something that he had always dreamed of but never found. He reached out slowly and took her hand, as if to stop her from vanishing.

"Never," she whispered.

He looked at her quizzically.

She smiled, a hint of mystery in her eyes, "I can tell, just a little, what you are thinking."

He nodded slowly; the bond would allow her to do that.

They were quiet for the rest of the meal, spending more time looking into each other's eyes than actually talking. When they had finished, she took the bill before he could, and handed over a credit card. She signed, and he stood, rounding the table and offering his hand, to assist her in rising.

She took it, and they walked out into the night. "Tell me," she said. "Can you dance?"

He smiled at her, "A little."

She smiled back and reached up; freeing her hair, slipping the clips that had held it up into his pockets, and shook her head a little.

When they were out of sight, Harry Apparated them to the next destination Gabby gave him. They joined a long queue outside a night club. She shivered and moved closer to him. He wrapped his arms around her and whispered under his breath, casting a warming charm on her, deciding that she deserved a little something back for wearing that outfit for him.

They were only in the queue for a few minutes, before they were escorted to the front by one of the bouncers and allowed entry, bypassing the rest of the queue.

At Gabrielle's surprised look, he grinned and whispered, "Night clubs love gorgeous girls in skimpy outfits."

She laughed and took his hand, pulling him into the loud nightclub. "Do you want a drink?"

He shook his head; he didn't really want any more alcohol tonight. "Let's dance," he suggested.

She nodded, and he took the lead, pushing through the heaving crowds with ease, creating a path for her, straight into the middle.

She laughed, throwing her head back, and paused, as the song ended, and she waited for the next one to begin.

The music began, and she raised her hands, high in the air, her eyes locked on his, and started to move to the music. She danced with a natural rhythm and abandonment that caused people to move away from her, so that they could watch her, but she didn't seem to notice. She never once looked away from him, except when she twirled, and then she met his eyes again as soon as she could.

The dance was passionate, and yet deeply intimate, as if the rest of the people there were mere illusions, as the girl with the Veela powers used everything she had to show her Mate how much she wanted him, how much she desired him, how much she loved him.

He watched her, spellbound in a way that she could never manage through mere magic, ignoring everyone and everything else, giving her the attention she craved and desired, acknowledging his part in this. She seemed free, happy; as if she would dance for him forever, if he would but ask.

But they weren't alone, and he could see men, dark skinned, dark-eyed men, watching her body as much as he was, and he moved, sliding over to her gracefully.

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This was freedom, this was excitement, and this almost felt like what she had been created for. It was down to her, Gabrielle Delacour, who had found a way through his defences.

She had never felt like this before; sure, she had danced with her sister, with her family, at school parties, but never alone, never in clothing that hinted at so much of what she looked like, and never in a nightclub.

But his eyes – they were the most open she had ever seen them as she moved. They caressed her, they warmed her, and they allowed her to believe that it would work, that she would win.

The night had been perfect so far, even when she had felt a bit chilled from a breeze, he had held her and warmed her up. She'd had no idea what to expect in the nightclub, but he seemed confident, and she realised that he would have been in one many times.

She'd offered him a drink, more out of habit than any desire to be intoxicated; his look was more than enough for that, and had then followed him to the dance floor. He walked through a crowd of people, and they moved out of his way, like it was natural for them. And once out in the middle of the dance floor, she had moved past him and paused, not knowing if he could dance, and not caring, until the music started.

She could feel it deep inside her, something primal was reacting to the situation, to the way her Mate was looking at her, like he wanted to devour her, and she moved, listening to her instincts, and not the more formal moves she had been planning. She locked her eyes to his, drinking in his every response as she danced for him.

And as long as he watched her, she wouldn't stop; there was something primal happening, something that cut through all the formalities, and just allowed them to be alone, Harry and his Gabrielle.

And then, after what seemed like a lifetime in his gaze, he moved, sliding over to her, and he started to dance.

He matched her, his eyes on hers, as he moved as well, responding to her, and showing her that he had power as well, that he could find a way through *her* defences.

She responded to the challenge, her moves faster, more exotic, revealing the tops of her stockings – the first time she had ever worn them – as she fought to regain the upper hand.

It was what Fleur had told her, but she hadn't believed, this unbelievable mixture of sights and sounds, of smell and taste, of touch. His hands lightly touching her, as she touched him as well, as they moved together.

The dance was unique, intoxicating, like nothing she had ever experienced, and she looked up at the mirrored ceiling, and almost didn't recognise herself as she danced for him and for him alone, in the middle of the crowded night club.

She looked like a girl in love, a girl who had found everything she had ever dreamed of, a girl who was letting herself go into her emotions, regardless of how she might normally act.

The music stopped, and she did as well, her hands behind her hair, staring at him. He didn't look away, and she felt the fire inside her burn brighter. For the first time she could feel other men's eyes on her, and she wished that they weren't there – that she and Harry were alone, that she could do this for him without any barriers.

The music started again, and she danced, this time it was slower. She closed the gap between them, making small movements in time with the music. She was safe with him, he would never let anyone else near her, never let anyone else touch her. His touches reminded her of this every time, branding her as his as his hands brushed across her back, her stomach, her hips, claiming her as she wanted to be claimed.

She danced in his arms, the contest forgotten, and pressed herself against him, floating as they danced around the floor, not noticing as people moved out of their way. She just knew that she felt weightless, and that she never wanted to leave the sanctity of his arms.

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Eric Caton watched the couple as they danced and swallowed. What he thought was going to be an awful assignment had changed dramatically. He hadn't noticed that the Boss' youngest daughter had grown up, and now that he had, he was almost insanely jealous of Harry Potter.

That any man should have a woman who would dance like that, with that degree of abandonment, was not fair. The way she moved, the way her skirt would twirl as she twisted, was almost lyrical in its seduction. Her hair, long and blonde, made her look like some creature from above, come down from heaven to give mortals a taste of what they could expect when they died, because no human could look like that, could move like that, could have a *body* like that.

And then he had moved as well.

Harry Potter, famous as a warrior, as a fighter, as a person who never gave up, and Eric felt inadequate. Harry's moves were subtler, but they radiated power and authority; authority that no one at his age should be able to command.

He was making a statement – that any man who wanted the angel he moved with would have to get through him first, and no one seemed to want to take up the challenge. The men who had been advancing on the blonde had faded away in humility, and yet Harry had never really even noticed them.

Politically, he could see why Jean-Sebastian would allow Gabrielle to date Harry; it was a match that would elevate Jean into the top position in the country – even though he also knew that Jean would quit politics before using his daughter like that. He hadn't understood why he had been sent on this mission, when everyone knew that Harry Potter could handle himself in a fight – but then it had been explained that, rather than have Harry be upset at his evening being ruined and *accidentally* destroying half of Barcelona, it would better for Eric and his team to operate in the background, removing problems before they got to him.

It was that phrasing, 'accidentally' destroying half of one of the biggest cities in the world that had dragged home the fact that the stories were true. That Potter had been able to Apparate through some of the best wards in France and destroyed a large portion of an orchard in a burst of temper – and yet had maintained enough control not to hurt the angel he was dancing with.

He scanned the crowd again, and when he looked back, they were gone. He blinked, and one of his men whispered that they had headed toward the bathroom – the communication spells they had joined them for the evening.

"Why are you following us?"

The question was in French, and came from behind his right ear. He turned, already aware of what he would find. He looked up into the eyes of Harry Potter and had thoughts about his life ending.

"Aimée and Jean-Sebastian asked us to keep an eye on things this evening to make sure you had a good time," he blurted, the thought of lying not even occurring to him.

"Why?" he asked.

"Because they know that you can handle yourself, but they didn't want it to get to that stage," he stuttered. "With Gabrielle looking like an angel, they knew that she would attract attention and they felt it was better if you didn't have to deal with it personally."

Harry looked deep into his eyes. "There are six of you from the French Ministry, right? And five from the Spanish Aurors?"

Eric nodded, slightly awed that Harry had seen them all.

"The man in the white jacket to my left is dealing drugs. The woman in the red dress next to him is carrying a gun. And there are two pieces of slime at the bar in jeans and yellow t-shirts who are spiking drinks with Rohypnol."

"With what?"

"It's a drug used for rape," Harry explained. "Deal with them."

He nodded and when he looked up, Harry had gone. He took a deep breath and whispered, "You hear that?"

He received an instant affirmative from everyone and said, "Aarón?"

The heavily accented voice of his Spanish colleagues replied a second later. "Drugs and guns are not allowed in the nightclub. My Muggle



colleagues will be happy if we do as requested.”

Eric nodded. Harry and Gabrielle were back on the dance floor, moving around it as if they owned it, and in a way, they did.

“We’ll back you up, Aarón.”

Aarón issued his directions in a harsh whisper, in Spanish, before repeating himself in French.

As directed, Eric followed Aarón over to the drug dealer. As soon as they got there, the girl started to move, her hand going to her purse, but she froze. He turned and met Harry’s eyes, shivering slightly.

So much power, so much ability, and so much nobility; perhaps Jean was right; perhaps Harry was the world’s last Chevalier.

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Gabrielle was tired, almost exhausted, but happier than at any time over the past eight years.

“Let’s get out of here,” Harry whispered, and she nodded.

His arm was around her as they walked out of the hot nightclub and into the cold air. She shivered and again, he cast a charm to keep her warm. As soon as they were out of sight, he held her close and Apparated them to her family house.

She smiled, and he picked her up, one of his arms under her knees, one under her shoulders. She moved an arm around his neck and snuggled into him. She didn’t want to talk now – she didn’t need to talk. They had said everything in their dance earlier. Their relationship had moved on. She wasn’t quite sure where to, but she was certain it had. And she was much more optimistic about it all.

She thought about kissing him, but decided not to – unless he kissed her, of course – somehow it didn’t seem right for her to initiate it. Tonight had been about other things, about promises and examples; another day would be about kisses and intimate touches.

And so, she allowed herself to fall asleep in his arms as he carried her home.

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It felt right, holding her in his arms so tight, smelling the faint perfume she wore, and keeping her warm.

It had been a night like none he had ever experienced. The primal dancing, the amusement of realising that his little demonstration of how he responded when enraged had Jean trying to make sure he didn’t accidentally destroy anything else. And Gabrielle: an older, more mature, Gabrielle, who bewitched him with her innocent sensuality, who enthralled him with her movement and complete openness.

The same Gabrielle who was now asleep in his arms, the Gabrielle he was willing to protect with his life. The Gabrielle who he was now pretty sure he was going to fall in love with if he hadn’t started already.

But he didn’t want to hurry things along; it didn’t feel right. They had time, lots of time, and doing it properly was important to him now. Her explanation earlier had allowed him to bury his resentment, and had allowed him to face up to the fact that the situation, caused by a mistake of a child, hadn’t turned out that bad after all.

This thing between them was fun; it was almost courtship of a sort, but after tonight, things would be different. No longer was he going to accept being passively chased – there was no fun in that. No, after tonight and when they were alone, he would do a bit of chasing of his own, when they were away from the other students, of course.

He carried her up to her room at home, deciding not to wake her by taking her through the Floo to school, and placed her on her bed. He removed her shoes, softly caressing her ankles, causing a smile to appear on her face.

He looked down at her for a few moments, and reached out, stroking the hair from her face, before tenderly covering her with her blankets. He walked across the room, put out her light, stopping at the door to turn and look at the sleeping woman once more. She was simply beautiful and radiated, even asleep, an innocence that made him want to protect her from everyone else. He smiled, and whispered softly, “Goodnight, my Gabrielle,” before leaving the room, closing the door quietly behind him.

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Beta’s note: Never have I enjoyed editing a story more than this one. The next chapter will blow you away.

- Kokopelli

## Hope 6 - Tintagel

"Gabrielle?" Aimée called gently.

"Mama?" Gabrielle asked sleepily. "Five more minutes, please. I am having the most amazing dream."

Aimée laughed softly. "My dear, you are no longer twelve years old, and I believe that last night might have been better than a dream."

Gabrielle opened her eyes and blinked. "What am I doing here?" she asked.

"That is a question I was going to ask you," Aimée said.

"The last thing I remember was Harry carrying me back toward the house," she said, "and I fell asleep."

"Was the evening that disappointing?" Aimée teased gently.

"Oh no, Mama, it was amazing," she was feeling more awake now, and she sat up, shifting back against the headboard. "He was *amazing*."

"What happened?"

"Well, I finally found out what it is like to be myself," she said slowly, as she tried to work her way through her memories from the night before. "The bond started working for the first time, and everything just clicked. I could feel what he wanted and I could respond to it."

She paused for a second and then continued. "It started at the restaurant; I told him to ask me a question, so he did. He asked why I tried to hide the Mating from him and not just bring him the problem. So I explained, again, and I think he accepted it this time. He accepted that I didn't want to manipulate him; I just wanted to try and give him a choice without worrying about me or that everything was on his shoulders."

"That is good," Aimée said.

"It is, Mama," Gabrielle agreed. "And then we went to the nightclub." She laughed softly. "I thought that I would be in charge, but I was not, not by a long way. We queued up, and he cast a wandless charm to keep me warm, but I don't think he understood what it felt like."

"Which was?"

"Like his magic was touching me all over. It was amazing. And then inside the night club, people moved out of his way, Mama. You know how Papa can walk through the Ministry and people move out of his way, because they know who he is?"

Aimée nodded.

"Harry can do that with complete strangers and the strangers didn't even notice they were doing it! He projected this aura around him that was intoxicating, much more so than any mere alcohol. And then on the dance floor, he looked at me, Mama, the way Papa has eyes for you."

"And?"

"And I let go. I stopped thinking; I just danced to the music. It wasn't any of the moves I had planned or was thinking about; I just reacted to the beat, and it worked, Mama, he looked like I was the only person alive, and for the first time, what Fleur said made sense. I am Veela, and I reacted as Veela. My Mate was there, watching me, and he was enjoying what I was doing."

"But then things changed, Mama, I could feel other men looking at me, and Harry could, too."

"What did he do?"

"He started to dance; it was different than mine, more powerful, more controlled, but it was so graceful. He really can dance, and he matched his moves to me. I felt myself being affected by it, and I fought back, I wanted to stay in control. We moved together, his hands touching me as we danced, claiming me, and then the music changed. It was slower, and I moved into his arms, and I felt weightless."

"You are weightless," Aimée sighed. "I do wish you'd eat more."

"I am the perfect weight for my height," Gabrielle pointed out with a slight smile. This argument was an old one between them. "But I floated with him and he held me so tightly and yet so softly at the same time."

"So you danced and then came home?"

"Oh no," Gabrielle laughed. "Papa sent Aurors to look after us."

Aimée raised her eyebrows.

"They were trying to blend in, but as we danced, Harry pointed out all of them to me. I was going to the bathroom so that he could sneak up on one, but I turned around and followed Harry to see what he was going to do. I'll have to tell Daddy that Mr Canton looked scared when Harry talked to him."

"It wasn't your father's fault, dear," Aimée confessed. "I asked him to send them."

"Why?"

"Because I was a little concerned your outfit would attract attention and Harry would be upset."

"You thought he'd blow something up?" Gabrielle asked, and as her mother nodded, she threw her head back and laughed.

"He did destroy two acres of our garden," Aimée pointed out.

"He was very upset at the time; upset in the way of someone who has just had part of his life torn apart," Gabrielle said, her good mood fading. "He is always in control, he knows how powerful he is, and even when upset, he keeps a firm control over what he does."

"That said," Aimée interrupted, "we still felt it was a good idea."

"Well, Harry pointed them to where some Muggles were doing nasty things like drug dealing and using date-rape drugs, and he told the French and Spanish Aurors to deal with them. And when they did go to arrest them, Harry had to cast a wandless charm on one of the criminals to stop her from reaching for her gun."

Aimée smiled faintly. "An exciting evening then."

Gabrielle nodded. "And we danced most of the evening; it was like the two of us were the only people in the world. And at the end, he carried me home and put me to bed, like a true gentleman. But that wasn't important; what was important was that we connected last night. He got to see me, and I got to see him."

"So you are optimistic now?"

"Very much so, Mama, very much so."

"In which case, I would suggest that you hurry and change, as you will not want to miss the school breakfast this morning."

Gabrielle looked at the clock on the wall and nodded. "Thank you, Mama."

"I'll talk to you later, my dear," Aimée said as she walked out of the room.

Gabrielle threw back the covers and half-smiled as she looked down at herself. She was still fully dressed and she would not have expected anything else from her Mate. He defined honourable and would not take advantage of any situation.

She stripped quickly and placed the clothes on the back of the chair for one of the staff to clean and then dived into the shower. Normally she wouldn't wash her hair two days in a row, but the nightclub had been thick with that disgusting tobacco the Muggles liked to smoke, and she didn't want to go to breakfast smelling like she had spent the entire night dancing in a nightclub with the sexy flying Professor.

With her hair washed in record time, she spent twenty minutes drying it with her wand, before getting dressed and returning to her room at Beauxbatons.

She didn't pause as she walked straight to the main hall. With any luck, the students would just think she overslept slightly.

She walked in and smiled to herself. The noise level didn't dim, and no one was staring at her, well, not anymore than she was normally stared at. It was times like this that she wished she could just go up to Harry and kiss him, so that everyone would know that she belonged to him and only him.

"Heavy night?" Claude asked, as she sat with the senior students.

She nodded. "Madame Maxime asked me to look through the rules for the final House project."

"What are the rules?" Simone asked.

"You know I am not going to tell you," Gabrielle said with a smile as she took a croissant.

"Spoil sport," Claude grinned.

She shrugged gracefully and took a bite and then felt something magical impinge on her consciousness. It was a strange feeling, like a warning. She chewed slowly as she examined it dispassionately and realised that it was a foreign feeling. It wasn't her magic – it was Harry's.

So she wasn't surprised when the doors swung open with a bang and four people walked in. Well, two of the people walked in – the other two bounded in as if they had been shot from a canon.

Nice digs you got here,” one of them said loudly in the worst French accent she had ever heard.

“Ollie,” Harry replied in English, getting to his feet and walking toward him. “French is one of the most romantic languages in the world, yet you sound like you’re butchering a pig when you speak it.”

“Och mon,” Ollie replied with a grin. “Hermione tried, honest; I just cannae get the accent right.”

“And you don’t need to talk like a Scottish peasant either,” Harry said dryly.

“Gabrielle?” Simone asked in French. “What are they saying?”

Quietly, Gabrielle started to translate the speech for them.

“If you insist,” Oliver smiled and then grabbed Harry in a huge hug. “It’s good to see you again, mate; the Cannons just aren’t the same without you.”

“Thanks,” Harry grinned. “Katie,” he smiled a welcome at the girl and hugged her.

“I can’t tell you how much trouble your request caused,” she said in English. “The Harpies were not pleased that I agreed to help.”

“Sorry,” Harry half-apologised.

“Nah, don’t be, I wouldn’t miss this for the world. I told them if they didn’t like it, I already had two friends on the Cannons who could probably get me a job.”

“Damn right!” Harry and Oliver said at the same time and then grinned at each other.

“Anyway, they caved like a Malfoy, and here I am.”

“And we,” Fred said, “are so, so disappointed that you turned to us last!”

“But you must remember, my dear Fred, that ~~we~~ are not world famous Quidditch stars,” George pointed out.

“True,” Fred agreed sadly, before he brightened. “But, I’ll bet we pay Harry more than the Cannons!”

“Close,” Harry smiled.

“Just how much is your contract?” George asked in complete disbelief.

Harry coughed and looked at the other two Quidditch players.

“We won’t tell, will we, Katie?” Oliver said innocently.

“No,” Katie agreed. “Fess up, Potter.”

“I might have negotiated image rights at forty-five percent gross.”

“Harry,” Oliver said, slinging his arm around him. “My contract is up for renewal next year; will you please, PLEASE negotiate for me?”

Harry laughed. “Look, let me introduce you to the staff and students here. We’ll go out to the pitch and have a talk after that.”

“Sounds like a plan, oh Professorial one,” George said.

Harry turned to face the entire student body and faculty. “Ladies and Gentleman,” he said, slipping easily into French. “In order to help us *win* the interschool tournament, I’ve enlisted a few very special friends. So, without further ado, let me introduce them to you. First, a team mate of mine from the Chudley Cannons, and before that, Puddlemere United. The England Keeper, Oliver Wood!”

There was a moment of silence before the students and especially the ones who wanted to be Keepers, leapt to their feet and started to cheer.

“The lovely brunette witch to his left is a future England chaser and star of the Holyhead Harpies, Katie Bell.” There was another cheer, this one louder, as Katie took a bow.

“And finally, legends in their own minds, two close friends of mine, and two extra-ordinary Beaters, who turned down the chance to go pro to enter the world of business, proprietors of the wildly successful Weasley Wizard Wheezes, Fred and George Weasley.”

As if they had been waiting for their cue, Fred and George each pulled something out of their pockets and threw them on the ground. The items exploded with a loud bang and then formed into a giant advertisement for their products that floated merrily up to the ceiling, before exploding in a dazzling display of fireworks. Most of the students applauded loudly.

“Show-offs,” Harry muttered to them in English.

The twins bowed in unison, grins on their faces.

“Okay,” Harry continued in French. “I want all the House Quidditch teams to report to the pitch in an hour’s time. Enjoy your breakfast.”

Gabrielle watched as they filed out, nodding as Harry shot her a quick look, which she interpreted as a request to join them.

"Oliver Wood, Katie Bell, and the infamous Weasley Twins," Claude almost shouted in his excitement as the doors closed behind them. "Each of them are almost as good as Professor Potter. This means we're going to have a chance at beating Hogwarts and Durmstrang!"

Gabrielle smiled to herself as the students responded with the loudest cheer yet. They might not have the skill yet, but these students wanted to win so badly she could almost taste it.

"Okay," she said loudly, "everyone finish your breakfast. I'm sure that Professor Potter won't mind if anyone who is interested watches from the stands."

There was a lot of nodding heads as the students settled down.

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Harry led his friends into his office inside the "shed" that housed the changing rooms and the brooms.

"Wow," Oliver whistled under his breath. "This is nicer than our changing rooms at the Cannons!"

"Yeah," Harry agreed. "All the French teams chipped in to make sure we had some good facilities to work from."

"So," Fred asked, grabbing a seat and settling down. "What calibre of play are we looking at here?"

Harry sighed and pulled his chair from behind his desk so he was sitting with them. "Not good," he confessed. "None of them have ever played a Quidditch match before. And I don't think any of them would be selected for a Hogwarts team."

"Ouch," Katie sighed, before she paused for a second and then smiled widely. "So, it's in the bag then?"

"What do you mean?" Harry asked.

"Come off it," she grinned cheerfully. "The only time you lose is when you are unconscious. So, what's the plan?"

"Katie's right, oh esteemed leader," George agreed. "You *don't* lose. What's the plan?"

"That's complicated," Harry said with another sigh. "I need your promise that what I say will never leave this room."

"On my magic, I so swear," Fred and George said together, and the room filled with a bright blue light that quickly faded.

"You two gave a magical promise," Oliver blurted out, a shocked expression on his face, "just like that?"

"Sure," Fred said easily. "This is Harry, and if there we've learnt anything over the years of extremely profitable partnership and friendship, it's that he doesn't ask things like this lightly *and* there is going to be a *killer* story behind it."

"And we don't like not knowing, so when it's a choice between knowing and keeping a secret and not knowing and knowing that we know we don't know, then we'd rather know and not have to worry about not knowing what we know is going to be worth knowing," George continued.

"Well said," Fred smirked.

"Thank you."

"On my magic, I so swear," Katie said. "I want to know as well," she grinned as she finished the spell. "It's so good to be back with you guys!"

"I'm not gonna be left out," Oliver grumbled. "Although I suspect Harry would have just accepted a promise," he pointed out.

Harry nodded in agreement.

"But, I guess if we're in this together, against our old school, I'll be in as well. On my magic, I so swear."

Harry sighed as they all turned and looked at him. "I guess this all starts eight years ago."

"Can I get some popcorn?" Fred asked. "Stories are always best with popcorn."

"Not now," George said, lightly cuffing his twin on the back of his head. "Listen to Uncle Harry as he tells us a story."

"Right," Fred agreed. "Continue, Uncle Harry."

Harry rolled his eyes. "You all remember the second task of the Triwizard Tournament?"

"You had to rescue little Ronnikins from the dreaded Merpeople," George said.

"And you saved the sister of that hot Veela," Oliver added, a little redundantly. After all, Harry had yet to see a Veela who wasn't hot.

"It's the sister that we're talking about," Harry said. "Basically, when I saved Gabrielle Delacour eight years ago, she Mated herself to me."

"Fred," George said slowly. "Was it me, or could you actually hear the capital *M* in Mated?"

“It wasn’t just you, brother mine,” Fred replied. “So, Harry, what’s with the capital M?”

“We’ve got a Veela playing on the Harpies,” Katie said quietly. “She says that Mating is emotional and physical slavery. The Veela literally hands over everything that matters about herself to someone else. It’s the most unique form of trust in existence.”

Oliver whistled slowly. “But she was all of what, eight?”

Harry nodded. “Which is the earliest age at which they can Mate. The Mating created a bond between us that meant I was never able to connect emotionally with another female.”

“Wait,” Oliver said. “You’ve had a more than a few girlfriends, and what about your Nullifying Field?”

“Nullifying Field?” Katie asked, causing Oliver to groan and blush.

“Sorry, Harry.”

“Try to find me magically,” Harry told Katie.

She pulled out her wand and cast a spell. “You’re not here,” she said, sounding confused.

“I keep a low-level Nullifying Spell around me at all times, with a few other things. What it means is that no magical traps will go off when I touch them and spells like that don’t work on me. Most of them anyway; Hermione knows one that will get around it.”

“Wow.”

“Yeah, well, this spell was in place long before I’d created the nullifier, and by that time, my magic seemed to think that it was a part of me, and didn’t bother to tell me that it existed.

“Now, the problem with this Mating is that if I don’t accept Gabrielle as my Mate by her seventeenth birthday, she will go insane and die.”

“I’ve got a feeling of impending doom,” Fred announced. “This is going to get worse, isn’t it?”

“Of course,” George said with some out of place cheerfulness. “Go on, Harry.”

“After trying to undo it for eight years, rather than tell me about it, Jean-Sebastian, Gabrielle’s father, asked Ron and Hermione this summer for advice and assistance on the best way to get me and Gabrielle together. After some discussion, Hermione and Ron agreed to help convince me to teach at Beauxbatons so that Gabrielle could try to get me to fall in love with her.”

“There’s the doom,” Fred said darkly. “If I might translate, Hermione and Ron decided to screw about with your life to save this Veela-chick?”

Harry nodded. “Unfortunately, they seem to have forgotten that I’m a big boy now, and I know when I’m being manipulated. When I mentioned to them that I liked Gabrielle, who’s still six years younger than me, they were rather encouraging.”

George snorted. “I’ll bet they were.”

“So, I went to Gabrielle’s parents’ house and played dumb for a bit – I acted like I was falling for Gabrielle and when Jean encouraged it, I challenged him. He told me to speak to Gabrielle, so I did.

“She told me everything, including how everyone had worked together to convince me to come here.”

Oliver whistled under his breath. “What did you do?”

“Torched a part of their orchard, about two acres I guess, Apparated through their wards, and went to my spot in Ilfracombe. I was a little annoyed.”

Katie snorted under her breath.

“From there, I checked out her story, and it was pretty much true. I’ve had words with Ron and Hermione, expressing my displeasure quite strenuously, and last night, had my first date with Gabrielle, which went pretty well.

“Now, the reason I’m telling you this, is because over the next few weeks and months, Gabrielle and I will be sorting out our relationship, and I want you all of you to know the truth, and not start thinking that I’m going after a student, especially not the one who’s most likely to be the Seeker.”

“That’s monstrous,” Katie said, shaking her head.

“I didn’t think I’d acted *that* badly,” Harry protested.

“Shut up, Harry,” Katie said without rancour. “*You’ve* acted like a bloody saint. I do have a few questions though. Like, seeing as her parents have known about this for years, what the bloody hell were they doing during that time? Why wait until the last minute to contact you?”

“They were trying to find a cure for her,” Harry answered. “And, well, sixteen is right on the edge of my moral compass, anyway. Any younger, and I couldn’t have done what is needed. It would have been too close to child abuse for my tastes.”

“Right,” Katie nodded slowly. “I guess that makes sense. I can’t believe you didn’t tell them all where to get off, break the bond, and move on.”

“That would have sent her into madness.”

“So what?” Katie asked coldly. “Melissa, my Veela friend, said she’d never considered Mating, not with all the problems it can cause; and she would certainly not just whack it onto some boy she passes on a street. That’s suicidal to start with and destroys the boy’s life.”

“I wouldn’t say my life was destroyed,” Harry said mildly. “But yes, it did make me very lonely for quite a few years.”

“Eight,” Oliver snorted. “Close to a third of your life. Or if we discount the time you spent at the Dursleys, then over half of your magical life.”

“She made a mistake at eight,” Harry protested. “She was a wet, scared kid, who’d just been rescued by someone she thought of as a hero – and despite all the warnings she’d received, she said it just came to her, and she just did it.”

“Why was she scared? Ron said he was just asleep,” Fred demanded.

“I’ve not asked her that,” Harry admitted. “But the Veela and the Merpeople have hated each other for years. The Merpeople were planning on killing Gabrielle; they were going to arrange an accident as soon as Fleur failed the second task.”

“That made some sort of sense,” Fred said slowly. “Not much, but some.”

“But how can you ever know if you will truly love her?” Katie asked. “Because, from where I’m sitting, it seems like you don’t have a choice in this at all. You either Mate with her, or she goes insane – and you’ve got this bond... how will you know if it’s love or just the bond?”

Harry blinked in surprise; he hadn’t really considered that. “I don’t know,” he confessed. “What I do know, is that I’m really comfortable with her. She makes me feel good, and well, she’s good-looking.”

“Really?”

“Yes, and she’s approaching the door right now.”

“How do you know that?” George asked.

“I can tell, roughly, where she is, thanks to this bond.”

“Right,” Katie said.

“Harry,” Gabrielle called in English, as she put her head around the door, a nervous expression on her face.

“Come in, Gabby,” Harry said softly. “I’ve pretty much told them everything.”

“Throwing me to the lions?” she asked, the joke falling a little flat.

“As Harry’s far too nice for his own good,” George said, as he moved backward to allow her some space to pull up a chair.

“And as our darling brother seems to have sold him up the river,” Fred continued, “we, as Harry’s friends, have a few questions to ask you.”

“Wait,” Harry started.

“Harry, shut it,” Oliver said, glowering at him. “Remember Nancy?”

Harry blushed. She had been one of the girls that had slept with him and then sold the story to the papers. Oliver had tried to warn him off her but he had ignored the advice.

“Nancy?” Katie asked.

“A gold-digging bitch,” Oliver grunted, “I’ll tell you about her later.”

“Harry,” Gabrielle reassured him, “it’s okay, really; I’m happy to answer any questions your friends might have.”

Harry nodded and went silent. He wasn’t sure how he was supposed to respond here. He hadn’t expected his friends to rally to his cause in this way, especially as he wasn’t as close to them as he was with Ron and Hermione.

She took a seat near to him, and looked at the others with a composed expression. He found himself feeling a quiet pride for the way she faced four hostile faces.

“Just so you know,” Fred said. “We’ve all promised not to tell anyone anything about what we discuss here today.”

“Right,” George agreed. “And Harry’s story, as all his stories do, lacked detail.”

“Exactly. So, can you explain what happened at Hogwarts before you did that Mating mojo?”

She paused for a second, gathering her thoughts. “I was allowed to go on the trip to support Fleur. While it was supposed to be the Goblet that decided, everyone knew it was going to be her. All of Beauxbatons only added one name to the pot – hers.”

Fred and George groaned.

“Why didn’t we think of just bribing someone to put our name down?” Fred asked

“We were broke, remember?”

“Oh yeah; carry on, Gabby.”

“Gabrielle,” she replied, shooting a quick glance at Harry.

“Sorry?”

“My *name* is Gabrielle.”

“But…”

“*Harry* is my Mate, and as such, has certain *privileges* that others do not.”

“Right,” George said. “Erm, sorry. So, *Gabrielle*, please continue.”

Harry smiled to himself and relaxed. She could certainly handle herself, and he would have got around to asking this himself, eventually.

“I was very excited, of course. It was my first trip away from my parents, and I slept in the same room as Fleur. The first task was very exciting – I remember sitting next to Madame Maxime and holding her hand. Tell me, Harry,” she said, turning to look at him. “I have always wondered this. You had mastered the Summoning Spell for the first task, correct?”

He nodded.

“Why did you not just Summon the egg?”

There was a complete silence in the room, as everyone swivelled to look at Harry.

“It never occurred to us,” he said weakly, an embarrassed half-smile on his face. “We just, well…”

Gabrielle smiled and moved on. He had the feeling that she did it to pull the attention away from him when he was a little uncomfortable. “And then, for the second task, Dumbledore,” she said, almost snarling with disdain.

“Wait,” Katie said. “Dumbledore, not Professor Dumbledore?”

“That man should not be a professor,” Gabrielle growled, her eyes flashing. “He invited me to his office where Ron, Hermione and Cho were already waiting. He offered me a lemon drop and asked if I wanted to help Fleur in the next task.

“I love my sister, so of course, I said ‘yes’. I wanted to help her win. He told me that he would cast a spell to make me sleep, and when I awoke, I would have helped her. He did say that I would be underwater, but he did not mention the Merpeople.”

The others were now nodding along with her story, their faces easing a little from the outright hostility they had shown earlier.

“And Dumbledore cast a spell on me so that I would fall asleep. However, I am Veela, so sleep spells do not last very long on me. And when I woke up, I was terrified. The Merpeople are our equivalent to the bogeymen and I had been handed over to them by Dumbledore. I faked that I was still asleep as they talked about how Fleur was doing and how they were preventing her from reaching me. They were very excited when she failed the task. They planned to kill me. They had it all arranged to the last detail; they were going to cancel the charm that allowed me to breath underwater, allowing me to drown. They would claim it was an accident.

“I didn’t know what to do; if I moved, they would kill me, but if I didn’t move I was going to die as well. I was petrified; it was like living in a never-ending nightmare.”

Harry moved forward slightly and leaned over, placing a hand on her shoulder. The pattern was disturbingly familiar. Dumbledore had told her enough to be reassured, but not enough to have enabled her to make an informed decision.

She flashed him a small smile and then looked back at the others.

“I remember praying for someone, anyone, to save me, but I knew it wasn’t going to happen. I was *going* to die that day.

“Harry arrived and I couldn’t understand what he was waiting for. Krum rescued Hermione, and Diggory rescued Chang; and then a miracle happened. The youngest contestant, someone who didn’t know me, did something unbelievable. He rescued me. He took Ron and me, and brought us both to the surface, fighting the Merpeople who were really upset at his disruption of their plans, as he went.

“I couldn’t believe it; it was like a nightmare had turned in to my greatest dream. I was safe, I was alive and I had met the finest prince in all the lands. And so, when the idea came to me to Mate to him, I did it, not thinking of the problems it might cause me, or the pain it might cause him. I just wanted to do something to say thank you to the boy who had just saved my life. For the boy who was doing what all heroes do and saying that it didn’t matter, that what he did was nothing.

“And so, I gave myself over to him in every way I could.”

“Like a Wizard’s Debt?” Oliver asked.



She nodded. “Only much more so. I didn’t appreciate at the time the bad things it would do to Harry. It was just that Mama and Nana had told me about how much of a good thing Mating was for the man, how I shouldn’t do it unless I was very, very sure, and how I would be risking everything. But Harry had already saved my life, I owed him everything anyway, and I had fallen in love with him that day.”

“Okay,” Katie said, nodding. She was now looking a little uncomfortable. “I think I understand,” she said. “And Harry said that as you grew up, you didn’t want to win him by default, so you went a round-about way of doing it?”

She nodded.

“One more question,” Katie asked. “What if you had died?”

“Harry would have never known I existed, and the bond would have quietly disappeared. At one stage, I did think about doing it that way, but I never entertained that notion for very long,” Gabrielle raised her head proudly. “I am convinced that I can make Harry happier than any other woman alive. I love him for who he is, not for what he has done or the things he might possess. I have my own money, so I will never need his. I am reasonably good-looking, completely loyal, and intelligent enough to keep him interested; and I am Veela, with all that entails.”

There was a small silence before Katie said, “I’m sorry for doubting you.”

“What for?” Gabrielle asked, confused.

“Well, I did kinda think that you were just another person out for Harry’s money and fame. And well, as Quidditch players, we get a lot of that.”

“Yeah,” Oliver agreed.

“I wish you had told us about the problem,” Fred sighed. “You are kinda family after all, but I can understand why you didn’t.”

George nodded in agreement. “And, you know, this whole thing gives me chills.”

“What does?” Harry asked.

“All the stuff we pulled at eight, the pranks, the jokes, and the illegal magic. What if we had made a mistake and done something that seriously impacted someone else’s life? Would we have at least tried to put things right?”

“Luckily, brother mine, all we did was turn Percy’s hair black – not kill him.”

“True.”

“So, is that everything?” Oliver asked.

“Pretty much,” Harry smiled.

“Apart from one thing,” George said with a big sigh. “Your vocabulary.”

“What about it?” Harry asked.

“It’s atrocious,” Fred pointed out. “You have Gabrielle orbiting around you and all you can say is that she is good-looking?”

“Did you take understatement lessons at Hogwarts we didn’t know about?” George continued. “Good-looking? I’ve got a pet frog that is good-looking, but I wouldn’t compare her to Gabrielle.”

Harry laughed softly. “Okay,” he said, holding up his hands. “Last night, we went to a night club, and Gabby was dressed up, and well, she looked so ethereally beautiful that she didn’t belong on this planet, and when she danced, you could hear an audible gulp from every male in the room – or I would have, if I hadn’t been stunned at just how bloody amazing she looked.”

Gabrielle was blushing now.

“That’s more like it,” Fred grinned. “So, let’s change the subject. As fascinating as all this is, there’s not a lot we can do to help you two with the Mating thing right now.”

George stood and moved to the right, while Fred moved to the left behind him, as they changed seats.

“Quidditch,” George said. “That’s what we’re really here for, right? What’s the plan?”

“Today, we need to pick the best two players for each position, the ones with the most talent. I’ll be working with them through the week, and when you can join us, do so, and we’ll take the best and do what we can to train them.”

“And the final team doesn’t have a chance, right?” Oliver asked.

“A slim one,” Harry said, “it depends on how much I can train Gabrielle.”

“I will do my best,” Gabrielle said quietly.

They nodded.

“One more thing,” Harry said. “Everyone needs to be really encouraging, no talk of defeat, or anything else negative. We want these kids to have the hope that they can win, because if they do, they might be able to pull it off, but if they expect to lose, they will.”

“Makes sense,” Oliver said. “You know, I’ve always wanted to be a coach.”

“Just remember to talk slowly, Ollie” Harry groaned, not liking the look in Oliver’s eyes. It was fanatical and bought back many unpleasant memories.

“If you would like,” Gabrielle said, “I can work with you on your accents later.”

“I think,” Katie said, “that would be a very good idea. It will be nice to get to know you.”

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Harry was relaxing in his room, looking at the fourteen names they had chosen, when there was a knock on his door.

He opened it to find Professor Bayard standing there.

“Harry,” he said cheerfully. “Would this be a good time to have a talk with you?”

“Sure,” Harry smiled. “Come in, Professor Bayard.”

“Oh, please call me Greg.”

“Drink?”

“I’ve got a bottle of wine,” Greg said, holding out the bottle.

“So, you want something?” Harry asked, chuckling.

Greg laughed softly and nodded. “I believe Olympe mentioned that I’d love to have your assistance in class one day.”

Harry nodded and walked into his kitchen, returning with two glasses. He took the wine, magically easing the cork out and into the bin, pouring the wine into the glasses.

“I have never seen anyone use magic so casually,” Greg said softly, shaking his head.

Harry smiled faintly. “Not much I can do about it,” he explained. “It’s there – I just use it.”

“The difference, Harry, is how you use it. Most of us have magic there, and when we use it, we approach it very formally.”

Harry raised his hands helplessly. “I’ve told Gabrielle that she can do her senior project on my relationship to magic. Perhaps you should ask her later about it.”

“I will. I’m sure it will be most fascinating. She is an excellent student, although she tells me she did freeze when you two were attacked in Paris?”

“A little, but even then, she did the right thing – she allowed me to deal with it.”

“Which does lead me into my request quite nicely. I was wondering if you would mind coming to my senior class on Wednesday, allowing the students to attack you?”

Harry laughed and raised his eyebrows.

“I don’t expect them to get near to you,” Greg explained. “That is not the point, but it would be an excellent training aid, without having to worry about accidentally hurting someone. I have checked your schedule, and you have a free period during that class.”

“Okay,” Harry said. “I’ll do it.”

“Excellent,” Greg replied, toasting Harry.

Harry returned the salute, tasting the wine. It was nowhere near as good as the wine Jean had supplied, not that he had expected it to be. He drank it anyway, to be polite.

“So, how have your first few weeks as a teacher been?”

“Tiring,” Harry said with a slight smile. “I didn’t expect it to be such hard work.”

“Non-teachers never do,” Greg said. “It is our eternal complaint.”

---

Harry hovered, watching Claude and Anton as Fred and George worked with them, putting them through their paces. The twins were surprisingly good teachers, patient, and using a lot of humour to get their point across. They weren’t afraid to use themselves as examples of how to properly be Beaters.

They were emphasising the benefits of team work, demonstrating how they had been so good together.

Oliver was with the Keepers, running drills with them. Katie couldn't make it tonight, so the Chasers had an evening off.

The back-up Seeker simply didn't have the talent needed and knew it, so he was willing to take a back seat and just do what he could to improve, while Harry concentrated on Gabrielle.

He flew over to her. "Climb on," he said, indicating in front of him.

"Up here?" she asked.

He just nodded and waited, not moving any closer to her.

She swung her leg over her broom and braced against it, before jumping onto his broom.

"Good," Harry praised as she landed, a little roughly in front of him. "What we need to do," he whispered, "is get rid of your fear."

"What fear?" she asked.

He leant forward and kicked the broom into high speed, flying straight down as fast as he could. He could hear her scream over the rushing wind as the ground got closer at an alarming rate.

At the very last second, he pulled up, brushing their feet against the ground before they were away again into the sky.

Gabrielle turned to look at him; her face was white and her eyes wide. "That fear?" she croaked.

He nodded at her.

She gulped and then straightened her back. "Again?" she asked.

Harry smiled softly. "Again, Gabby," he whispered. "Take the broom; take us both down and then pull up."

"What if I miss?"

"Then we spend some time together in the Hospital wing."

"It would kill me to hurt you."

"Then don't. Just dive."

She nodded and reluctantly pushed the broom down; diving toward the ground at about three quarters of the speed Harry had done it at. She pulled up a few metres earlier and manoeuvred them back up into the sky.

"Good first try," Harry praised. "Now, how do you feel?"

"A little excited," she confessed. "And scared that I might hurt you."

"Do you know who I am?" Harry asked softly.

"What do you mean?"

"I'm Harry Potter," he pointed out.

"I know," she replied, looking confused.

"No, you think of me as Harry, your Mate, and everything else, but you have to remember that I'm also *Harry Potter*."

"What does that mean?"

"That I'm practically unkillable," he said with a grin. "Now do it again, just faster."

"All right," Gabrielle said and dived down, pushing herself and the broom much harder.

She pulled up, a lot lower this time, but misjudged it slightly. The nose of the broom dug into the ground and flipped them both in the air.

He'd been expecting this, and it was exactly because of this that he was making her do it with him on the back of the broom. He tumbled, giving them both a bit of a boost into the air and pulled her against him, allowing his magic to orient them, so that they landed on their backs.

"What happened?" she asked. Her eyes were even wider than before.

"I'm not going to let anything happen to you, Gabby," he whispered. "Now, next time we do this, let go of your fear, let go of your worries, and just go for it."

"Why didn't you tell me that before?" she asked.

“Because you wouldn’t have believed me,” he said.

“Oi, Harry,” Fred yelled – his accented French was at least understandable. “You all right?”

“Of course,” he yelled back. “Proving a point.”

“That you’re insane?”

“Takes one to know one.”

Gabrielle giggled.

“That’s what I like to see,” Oliver roared in English from the other end of the pitch. “We’ll make a professional out of her yet. Don’t forget to teach her how to fly the opposition into the stands!”

Harry responded with a single gesture that perhaps wasn’t the politest reply one could make, but which got his point across perfectly.

“Ready to go back up?” he asked.

She nodded. “And I’ll do it right this time.”

“Yes, you will.” He smiled.

---

“You look tired,” Fleur said as she came through the Floo.

“I ache in places I didn’t know could ache,” she complained softly. “And I have a lot more respect for Harry than I ever did before.”

“In what way?”

“The amount of theory that goes into playing Quidditch professionally is astronomical. I thought they just went out there and played. Harry explained just three moves to me today and I can hardly keep them straight. Do you know that he is supposed to help the Chasers, distract their Beaters and try to un-sight the Keeper?”

“What does un-sight mean?”

“Block their view of the play. And he has to keep an eye on the other Seeker, and the Snitch.” She collapsed down onto a chair. “I didn’t think it would be this hard. I just thought it would be flying around, you know, and then chasing the Snitch. And I’ve only been doing it for four days!”

“He is pushing you hard?”

Gabrielle looked at her sister. “Our team is atrocious,” she sighed. “Most of the players are three to four years behind their equivalents at Hogwarts. Everyone is undergoing intensive training at the moment and I have to be the best, because a Seeker can make or break a match.”

Fleur nodded. “What about your school work?”

“I don’t even want to think about that,” she sighed. “I just want to collapse.”

The Floo roared, and Harry walked in.

“Hi, Fleur,” he said with a smile.

“Harry,” Fleur greeted him with a smile. “I hear you have done the impossible and turned Gabrielle away from her books.”

Harry laughed softly. “If that were true, the other teachers would be lining up to kill me, so I’m here to do something about it.”

“Oh?” Fleur asked.

“I took a course in physiotherapy last year,” he explained, “to get over a niggling ankle injury. I figured if I knew what was causing it, I could do something about it. Anyway, I’m guessing that Gabrielle is starting to get sore?”

She nodded, too tired to talk.

“So I figured I’d give her a massage.”

Gabrielle blinked and looked up in pure hope. “Really?” she asked.

He nodded, a slight smile on his face.

“I am certain that this is my cue to leave,” Fleur said with a cute laugh. “I am only a sister and can not compete with the offer of a massage from a Mate.”

“Bye, Fleur,” Gabrielle said, just wanting to feel better. She didn’t even notice as her sister left.

In to the bedroom,” Harry said. “You need to lie down.”

“Carry me?” she asked hopefully.

He laughed under his breath and picked her up, throwing her over his shoulder in a fireman’s carry.

“This wasn’t what I had hoped for,” she pointed out.

“You were being lazy.” She could hear the smirk in his voice.

He placed her down on her bed. “Take your shirt off and lie down.”

She wanted to get excited by his words; she wanted to take them differently, but she was far too sore from her training to do more than just give the thought passing consideration. She pulled off her t-shirt, and collapsed face down on the bed, not even bothering with the sports bra she was wearing.

She felt the bed move as Harry straddled her, pouring something cold between her shoulders. She felt a flicker of his magic and knew that her bra had disappeared; then his hands touched her and she groaned in pleasure.

She didn’t move and closed her eyes, as he worked her shoulders and then her back. It didn’t take long before she was asleep.

---

Harry walked with Professor Bayard into the Defence Against the Dark Arts class feeling a little nervous. He didn’t like showing how good a fighter he was; it was the one skill he wished, at times, he didn’t have, as he was much prouder of his Quidditch skills.

“As promised,” Greg said to the class. “I have secured Professor Potter’s assistance in this class.”

“One practise dummy, reporting for duty,” Harry said with a slight smile.

The class laughed.

“We are going to practise our duelling,” Greg continued. “So, let’s move the desks back and get to work.”

“What do you want me to do, exactly?” Harry asked, as the students prepared the room and sat around the outskirts.

“Don’t fight back, but block and dodge everything you can.”

Harry nodded.

“Simone,” Greg called. “You’re first.”

The dark-haired girl nodded and bounced to her feet eagerly. “*Riddikulus!*” she chanted, pointing her wand at Harry.

“I’m not a Boggart,” Harry smiled, turning his body the exact degree needed to let the spell flash past him.

“How did you do that?” Simone gasped and cast a banishing charm at him.

He twisted again and the spell came within a hair’s breadth of hitting him, as it flew past.

“Claude,” he called. “Could you just cast a spell at me quickly?”

“Which spell?” Claude asked.

“*Diffindo* will do,” Harry replied casually.

Claude shrugged and cast the cutting spell at Harry, who dodged again.

“Professor Bayard, do you mind if I...?” he asked, trailing off.

“Go ahead,” Greg said.

“Okay,” Harry moved over to the two students. “You seem to have a small technique problem. You’re pointing your wand and then casting the spell. That gives your opponent a few seconds to work out where the spell is going to go, so he can get out of the way.” He pulled his wand out and created a series of targets on the wall. “What I want you to do is to hold your wand up, like this.” He held his wand in front of him, pointing to the ceiling. “And then cast like this.”

“*Diffindo!*” he shouted, and at the last second, with a violent slash, he brought the wand down so that it was pointing at the target.

The target split in two, and he turned back to the students. “You try it,” he encouraged. “Point at the last second.”

Simone and Claude nodded and cast the spell.

“Better,” Harry praised. “When you are duelling, the best way to win is to avoid being hit. And if your opponent can see where you are going to cast your spell, they already have an advantage over you. Simone, fire at me again.”

He moved in front of the targets and waited.

“*Diffindo!*” Simone called, pointing at his stomach at the last second. Unable to dodge in time, he let the spell crash into his shield. The shield flared for a second, and then vanished.

“Good!” Harry said. “That flare shows that you hit. Claude, you try.”

When he had finished and all the students had hit him and left the room, he sat down at the desk. “That’s tiring,” he said with a slight smile. “Sorry for stealing your class.”

“Harry,” Greg said, handing him a glass of water. “I am a good professor, I can teach, but I am not a fighter. I have studied my craft and fought in formalised duels, but I have never been taught as you did today. I teach my children to win meaningless competitions; you desire to teach them how to win if they are ever facing a real danger.”

Harry nodded. “We had a lot of really bad Defence teachers at Hogwarts, so we had to make our own club.”

“The Defence Association,” Greg said with a nod.

“If you want to learn something, contact Neville Longbottom. He’s a private Defence instructor these days.”

“Really?” Greg asked. “I shall.”

Harry nodded and smiled. “I’ve got to get to the pitch. I’ll see you later.”

“Try and join us for dinner one day,” Greg called after him as he hurried along.

---

It was seven in the evening, which made it six in England, and like clockwork, Fred, George, Oliver, and Katie Portkeyed in. They all looked as tired as he did. They’d been doing this for four weeks straight, working their normal jobs and then working late into the evening either working with the kids or working with Harry on tactics and strategies.

“I thought that tonight,” Harry said quietly. “We’d do something different.”

“Like what?” Oliver snapped and then held up his hand in apology.

“Give them a practice game. Us against them.”

Katie smiled slowly. “I like it,” she said. “It will be fun to fly, just like the old days.”

“Just take it easy on them,” Harry smiled. “Even if we are outnumbered, we are professionals.”

“Some of you are,” Fred pointed out with a smile. “But enough about Quidditch; how is your relationship with Gabrielle progressing? I demand gossip.”

“You’re like an old woman,” Oliver snorted.

“So I shouldn’t respond?” Harry asked.

“I didn’t say that,” Oliver grinned. “I was merely stating a fact.”

“Right,” Harry said dryly. “There’s nothing really to report. I think that we both thought that working together as Seekers would be romantic. It isn’t. The closest we’ve got to romance is the massages I’ve been giving her, and before you get your minds into the gutter, they are same as the physio ones Ollie and I get at the Cannons, and they are about as sexy as Umbridge in a bikini.”

Everyone, except for Ollie, shuddered playfully.

“So, what are you going to do about it?”

Harry groaned and looked at the calendar on the wall. “I’ve got no idea,” he grumbled. “She’s working as hard as I am, keeping her grades up and learning to play Quidditch, and the pressure is starting to show on her as well, but we only have another five weeks before we go to Hogwarts.”

“You need to take a day off,” George said. “We’ve all taken days off, but you do this every night and all weekend. You’re going to burn out. I know you think you’re immortal...”

“And probably are,” Fred grinned.

“Quite,” George agreed. “But even you get tired. So, take Gabrielle away for a day, call it Seeker practice somewhere different, and spend some more time getting to know her.”

“They’re right,” Oliver agreed. “And while you’re there, kiss the girl.”

Harry raised his eyebrows inquiringly.

Oliver shrugged. "She's a fox, she's more mature than I am, and she's a very patient teacher."

"I agree," Katie said. "Especially about her being more mature than Ollie. If you're serious about falling for her, at some stage you are going to have to kiss. If you do it now and find that nothing happens, well, then you have the time to find a way to break the bond and allow her to live – which is what you want, right?"

He nodded.

"Then go."

"I will," Harry smiled. "Tomorrow."

"Take her to that beach you like and your cliff," Fred suggested. "Chicks dig that sort of thing."

"Ignoring your extremely sexist language for a second, just where did you learn that?" Katie asked suspiciously.

"Witch Weekly Magazine," he grinned. "They sent us a copy for placing a large advertisement in there."

---

"Gabby?" Harry called into the Floo.

"Yes, Harry?" she asked, looking up from her desk, where her quill was flying.

"What are you doing tomorrow?"

She looked at the pile of paperwork in front of her, sighed, and then looked back at him with one eyebrow arched.

"If you have to work, how do you feel about working on your senior project?"

She paused and turned to face him, a semi-hopeful expression on her face.

"We both need a day off, so I'm going to take you somewhere and we'll spend the day talking about things other than Quidditch."

"That sounds nice," she smiled. "Should I wear anything special?"

"Clothes, dress a little warm; it might get a bit cold."

She nodded.

"I'll pick you up at nine." He paused at the fireplace. "You did really well today."

"Thank you," she said and smiled as he vanished. She placed her quill down. He really had no idea what he did to her. Her concentration was going to be shot now, as she would much rather think about what they were going to do tomorrow, than worry about the effects of the French Revolution on the treatment of the Giants.

She walked over to her closet and started to examine the clothing she had at school. She was tempted to call for Fleur's help, but she wanted to try and do this on her own.

Jeans were pretty much a given; not only were they warm, but they made her legs and bum look good. It was what to wear with them. She flicked through her shirts before moving over to the jumpers.

She held up a white jumper and shook her head at her reflection; it would make her look too pale in the late autumn sunlight. She needed something darker than that. A black jumper was dismissed as quickly, but a blue-grey turtle-neck was perfect. It made her eyes look greyer than blue and more mysterious. A pair of grey trainers would finish the outfit perfectly.

She decided to leave her hair free, because if they were going to be outside, it always looked good in the wind – that was why the Veela power created one.

She looked at her bed and sighed. As much as she wanted sleep, the essay she needed to do was more important. She was not going to miss graduating early in exchange for a few extra hours of sleep.

---

At nine o'clock, she was ready. She had been ready for forty minutes but would never confess that to anyone. Her outfit had been changed and then changed back several times, and she admitted to herself that she was slightly nervous. This was the first time he had made a move to do something with her and she wanted it to go perfectly – or as perfect as anything could go with him.

She gave herself one last look in the mirror and smiled at the image. It was one of the things for which she was grateful to her Veela heritage; she *always* looked good, and the tight grey jumper certainly emphasised that.

"Ready?" he called into the fire.

"But of course," she smiled and walked over to the fireplace, stepping through to his room.

"I thought we'd go to your parents' house and then Apparate, as we did before."

"Okay," she smiled.

He placed an arm around her, and she fought the urge to plaster herself to him. She hardly noticed the spinning while she travelled in the Floo network, taking the time to get used to having him hold her again.

She didn't think that her parents would be up yet, so she wouldn't feel guilty about not stopping to say hello.

As soon as they were outside her house and outside of the wards he pulled her into a hug and Disapparated.

They appeared on a stone path. In front of her were the remains of what must have been a medieval building. "Where are we?"

"Tintagel."

"Really?" she asked, excitedly.

He nodded. "What do you know about it?"

"It's the legendary home of King Arthur on the west facing coast of Cornwall. Built in the 13th century."

He smiled and looped his arm around her. "I thought we'd walk down to the beach and have a look around."

She smiled happily and took the opportunity to cuddle into him. This was perfect, a place she had never seen, rich with history and educational prospects, and most important, a chance to be alone with him, with no one else to worry about.

"Did you know that Muggles still aren't sure if King Arthur even existed?" he asked. "They think it might have been Geoffrey of Monmouth who made up the basic story, and others added to it."

"Only we know different, thanks to Merlin, the greatest wizard in history."

"Why do you say that?" Gabrielle asked softly.

"Say what?"

"That Merlin was the greatest wizard?"

"Because he took the country out of the magical Dark Ages, and he helped the Muggles as well. For over eighty years, with first Uther Pendragon, and then Arthur, he instilled a period of stability that if the Muggle records hadn't been destroyed, would be regarded today as utopian. He was the king's advisor; everyone knew he was a wizard, but in a time when the rest of the world was burning wizards, he was accepted as the advisor of Kings. While he was building up the Muggle world, he was at the same time creating what has become the modern Ministry of Magic."

"The descriptions he left about Camelot are beautiful, a society based on freedom, hope, and honesty."

"At least until the Muggles ruined it with their affairs, cheating and infighting," Gabrielle finished.

"Oh no," he said as he smiled at her, "the affair part isn't true. Gwenhwyfar did not have an affair with Lancelot; she loved her husband, and when Lancelot tried, he was shot down. Lancelot wasn't exactly as pure as the legends stated either, despite being the son of a French baron. He was a lying cheat who wasted his own money and then worked as a mercenary, ending up at Camelot, where he was invited to join the Round Table simply because he was good in a fight."

"And the whole idea of the Holy Grail, and Galahad? I suppose Merlin couldn't say that he'd sent some of the best Knights away because the foreign Muggles were planning on invading what we now know as Hogsmeade, and he asked them to protect it for as long as was necessary."

"Merlin poured his heart and soul into Camelot; he prayed that it would last forever, but he didn't realise that he was the key to its success. So when he died, at the age of two hundred and thirteen, it was just Arthur and Gwenhwyfar left. They ruled in peace for a time, before Lancelot, seeing his chance, raised an army and stormed Camelot."

"The battle was fierce; one side fighting for everything they had stood for, the other fighting for the legendary riches of King Arthur's court."

"Arthur won the day, but he was mortally wounded in a duel with Lancelot. Lancelot was killed, Arthur died shortly afterward."

"Gwenhwyfar took his body to Nimue, the Lady in the Lake, who accepted Arthur and took him to Avalon, where he still lies today, preserved for eternity, the only Muggle allowed entrance."

"Gwenhwyfar left Camelot, and joined a nunnery, where she lived for another six months, before dying of pneumonia."

"Without its charismatic leaders, Camelot soon broke apart, and a few years later, King Pellinore ordered all records of Camelot, Arthur, Merlin and everyone else destroyed, so that people would stop talking about the golden days."

"And in doing so, he made sure that Arthur would be immortal."

Gabrielle turned to look at him in something close to awe. She thought that she knew her Mate, and yet every time they were alone, he still surprised her. "How do you know all this?" she asked.



“Merlin’s diaries,” he said softly. “I read them on tour last year. They were fascinating; some of the spells he described were awe-inspiring in their majesty. He had a real flair for magic and for making the complicated appear simple.”

He moved against a wall and stopped. The view in front of them was of the endless ocean. She hopped onto the wall and sat, cross-legged, so she could look at him. “I always pictured you as being like Arthur, from the legends.”

“Me?” Harry asked.

“You,” she agreed with a smile. “Arthur was taken from his parents and raised in obscurity, with no idea who he was. He served as a scullery-boy, while his step-brother lived a life of luxury.

“And then one day, everything changed. Far from being normal, he was told that he was the king that everyone in the world was relying on to unite them and to bring them back into one group.

“He had an old, wise wizard who he trusted implicitly, and despite his age, he was a hero. He did what he had to do because there was no one better; although he would never accept that.

“He was brave and wise; deadly on the field of battle, but just when everyone thought they knew him; he’d say something or do something that would change everything.”

Harry blushed a little. “I’m not like that,” he protested weakly.

“Oh, but you are, Harry,” she said, reaching out and taking his hand, pulling it into her lap so that she could run her fingers over his.

“Each of you were children of destiny; one to unite a nation, the other to free a nation from the tyranny of evil.

“Uther Pendragon gave his child to Merlin. Your parents were killed and Dumbledore took control of your life. Merlin placed Arthur in a place where he was treated as a commoner. Dumbledore placed you with your Aunt for the same effect. But that is where things change, and we have proof that Dumbledore was neither as wise nor as good as Merlin.

“Merlin kept a close eye on Arthur; he wanted him to learn humility, but to also have a good life. Dumbledore dumped you like a piece of trash and ignored you until you were useful to him again.

“Merlin created the sword in the stone to give Arthur the confidence boost he needed; Dumbledore didn’t interfere as you and your friends saved the Philosopher’s Stone. Whenever Arthur needed him, Merlin was there with advice, and once Arthur knew his destiny, Merlin kept no secrets from him. Dumbledore kept things from you as you grew, causing you to make more mistakes, rather than less.

“But when the time came and everything rested on the children of destiny, they both stood firm, they refused to be beaten, and did what they had to do. They found the strength inside them, so that when they were alone and everything looked its darkest, they could still succeed.

“Arthur won because of Merlin. You won despite Dumbledore. That is why I think that in years to come, if the truth is ever told, you will be a bigger legend than Arthur, and why I think you will end up on the roster of great wizards right next to Merlin.”

He tried to pull his hand away, but she tightened her grip, forcing him to meet her eyes. She tried to put all of her unwavering faith in him within her look, so that he would know that she meant every word of it.

“I’m not a hero,” he said angrily, his eyes flashing, breaking away from hers.

Suddenly she understood. Her talk of heroes made him think that she was just another person in love with his fame.

“Harry,” she called, “look at me.”

He met her eyes with a marked reluctance. “I don’t love you because of the fame that your heroism might bring. When I first met you I loved you; you were already my hero; it is so deep inside you that it defines you. Heroism is a part of you, Harry, and a part of you that you can never lose. But it is not the only part of you, nor is it the only reason I love you. It was the first reason, but it will never be the last.

“I love you because when you smile at me, it makes my blood race. I love you because you take me to a castle from history and tell me stories of people long lost that makes me want to learn more about them with you. I love you because you have the ability to focus on what you are doing and I want you to focus like that on me. I love you because you’re nice, because you’re grumpy, because you can be pigheaded and stubborn.

“I am a spoilt little rich girl and I like it that way. But when I’m with you, without even trying, you make me feel like the luckiest girl in existence. I love you because you never condemned me for a mistake I made when I was eight years old, and you are giving me a chance to win your love.

“You could quit Quidditch today, and I wouldn’t care. I’d beg you not to, because you love it, but I would beg for you, not for me. You could give all your money away and be poor and I would still love you. Because you can not give away the parts of you that I love most. You can not give away your nobility, your sense of honour, or your courage.

“I love you, Harry, and if you allow me, I shall spend the rest of our lives proving just how much you mean to me.”

He’d stopped trying to pull his hand away near the start of her speech, and now he was looking at her, vulnerable and a little lost, and she felt her heart break a little bit more. Inside him was still the small boy starved of love and affection. Her hatred of Dumbledore grew – something she hadn’t previously believed possible. For what he had done to Harry far outweighed the way he had handed her unthinkingly over to the Merpeople.

And how the Dursleys could treat a boy like Harry as they did still gave her nightmares.

She pulled him closer; he moved unresistingly, and she slid to the side, kneeling on the hard stone and placing her head on his shoulder, and her arms around his torso, hugging him silently.

After a minute, he seemed to relax, his hands moved around her, and he pushed his face into her neck and exhaled.

He sighed deeply before leaning back and smiling at her. “Thanks. Shall we continue?”

She nodded and placed her hand on the wall to help herself down. She held out her hand and smiled as he took it.

They walked in a companionable silence down a steep path to a rocky beach. She looked around eagerly, spending as much time looking at the Muggles as she did at the scenery.

At the bottom, on a rocky beach, he guided her toward what looked like a large hole hewn out of the cliff. “The Muggles call this Merlin’s Cave,” he said. “Alfred ‘Lord’ Tennyson described it, in one of the first modern tales of King Arthur, as the place that Merlin found Arthur and took him to safety.”

They walked into the dim cavern, pausing for a second to let their eyes adjust to the low level of light. The cave was full of Muggles looking around and walking, but Harry ignored them, leading her to the back.

He moved so that he was leaning against a wall and pulled her close against him. She had no idea what he was doing and cared equally as little. If he wanted to just stand in a cave and hold her close, she was more than happy to do that – it seemed like a really good idea to her.

He whispered something she couldn’t quite catch under his breath and she stifled a scream as they both fell through the wall he had been leaning against.

“This is amazing,” she whispered in awe as she looked around. They were in a new cave that seemed to be hewn out of natural quartz. A small hole in the ceiling provided the light that the cave reflected a million times, so that it was almost too bright.

In the centre of a cave was a funeral bier. On it laid a man in the traditional repose – completely encased in crystal. The man was perfectly preserved; he looked very old, with a small grey beard. His eyes were closed, and his face gave the impression of someone who had enjoyed life but had been touched by tragedy.

“Welcome to the final resting place of Merlin,” Harry whispered respectfully. “After he died, Arthur brought him down here and had another wizard create this eternal funeral bier. They wanted to do something so that future generations would be able to see the man who created utopia.

“He’s slept here for nearly a thousand years undisturbed.”

“How did you find him?” she asked quietly.

“I visited last summer like a Muggle tourist, and while I was here, I could feel something wrong with the place, like it should have been bigger than it was, and there was a source of magic that was niggling at the back of my neck. I came back one night and cast a few spells and found this place. And over here,” he moved to one corner, “is the original copy of Merlin’s Diary, the unedited version.”

“Harry,” she gasped, “why have you not told anyone about this place?”

He sighed softly. “Why? Because it deserves to remain unspoiled. I think of people like Fudge, or Dumbledore, or Scrimgeour using it for political capital, or worse, a million Wizards gawking at him and talking about facts they know nothing about, and it horrifies me. He deserves more than that; he deserves to rest in peace.”

“Then why have you shown me this place?” she asked softly, reaching out to touch him.

“Because I want you to get to know me properly,” he said as he took her hand. “You’ve said you’re in love with me, but that can’t be true, because you only know a part of me. You know the side I show my friends, the side I show the public, but that isn’t me. I’ve shown you because I’ve always been alone, Gabby, and I don’t want to be alone anymore.

“I’m a man who is sometimes more comfortable with dead people than live ones, who likes history as much as he likes sports and who hides his true face from the world for his own sanity.”

She shook her head slowly. “No, Harry, you do not understand what *I* mean. I can love you *truly* without knowing you *completely*. This is another side of you, and yes, knowing this will make me love you more, but it doesn’t change who you are inside.

She paused for a second and took a deep breath. “You have slept with four different girls.”

He blinked at the sudden subject change and stared at her quizzically. “Three,” he said softly.

She shook her head with a small smile. “Four, Harry, even though you never told anyone about her, and no, she didn’t tell either.”

“How did you know?” he asked.

“Because each time I got sick; I would be lethargic and listless, and would lie in bed crying all day.”

"I'm..." he started.

"Do not dare apologise," she whispered fiercely, her index finger going to his lips. "It was the bond's response to your pleasure with another girl and each time, I wondered if the bond would fail, if it would vanish completely."

"How?" he asked.

"Think of it like a fishing line, although I do not like the analogy. While we were apart, it was there, protecting me. But if you had suddenly fallen deeply in love with some worthy woman, it would have been like trying to catch a shark with a children's toy. You would have broken the bond without even knowing it."

"But..."

She shook her head softly. "No, the bond was there, and it did its job. You were never comfortable around other woman and so you never fell in love like a normal person. I took hope from my suffering as it meant that the bond still existed and if you had not fallen for anyone, that meant that I would have my chance to show you that I love you and that I can make you happier than anyone else alive.

"Do you remember how you felt when you won the League for the first time?"

He nodded and smiled.

"That night for me was a school ball, and I danced all night. I was so happy because I knew you were happy, and the next morning, when you were hung over, I thought about snapping the bond."

"Why?" he asked, a confused look on his face.

"So that you could get on with your life without ever knowing about the bond; I could send myself into madness and give you back the freedom I took away from you."

"Why didn't you?" he asked. His tone was curious not accusatory.

"Because I felt like it was the coward's way out," she confessed. "I created this problem, I needed to solve it. Dying might have released you, but it would never have made up for the years I had taken from you. I do not want your forgiveness, Harry; I want your permission to make it up to you, many times over.

"I know that this will make me sound like I am a bad person, but as the press started to hound you, I was excited. I knew that you were unhappy and it gave me the incentive to make my plans, because I knew I could make you happy."

"What about you, Gabby? You say you want to make me happy, but what makes you happy?"

She smiled at him brightly. "Making *you* happy makes *me* happy. You can not imagine the feeling of knowing that my Mate is happy, and knowing that I have caused that happiness makes it even more potent.

"I will be happy when you look at me and tell me you love me. I will be happy the morning when I wake up in your arms. I will be happy when I am in our bed, exhausted, because we have made love all night. And if everything goes well, in a few years time, I will be happy when we can make our own family of dark-haired boys and blonde-haired Veela girls."

He smiled crookedly, his eyes gleaming slightly. "Not blond boys and dark haired girls?"

She shook her head, a little apologetically. "The Veela genes always win, Harry."

He nodded.

"So is this where you come to think?"

He nodded. "I've talked to Merlin a few times over the last year. He doesn't say much."

"Pity," she smiled.

"I know that everyone thinks that I sit on a cliff to think, and I do that occasionally, but I find this place and the surrounding area so much more fascinating. Here, I am not Harry Potter; I am just another Muggle viewing a legendary tourist spot." He looked at his watch. "Come on, let's go back to the top. We can have a picnic, and you can ask me questions about magic."

She took a step forward, screwing up all her courage. Slowly she raised her face and kissed him on the side of his mouth. "Thank you," she whispered. "For showing me this place and even more so, for showing me another part of you. It is a gift I shall always treasure."

He pulled her close into a hug and Apparated them both straight out of the cave and back to the top of the cliff.

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Madame Maxime straightened her shoulders and threw some powder into the Floo. "Albus Dumbledore," she called.

"My dear Olympe," the Hogwarts Headmaster said in surprise. "What can I do for you?"

"I just wanted to finalise the details for our visit."

He nodded, his pale blue eyes twinkling. "The preparations are well underway," he said happily. "We are preparing to add two new towers for you and Durmstrang, and we are extending our Halls as we speak."

Olympe nodded. "That sounds excellent," she said. "We shall arrive at seven in the evening, your time, on that Friday."

"We shall look forward to seeing your carriages again," Dumbledore replied.

"Oh, I'm afraid that we won't be using them," she said.

"You won't?" he asked, the twinkling in his eyes dimming a bit. "You have another way of moving all those students from one country to another?"

"I hope so," she said. "My senior students are working on a different form of transportation for us. I expect it shall be ready in time."

The twinkling returned with a vengeance. "But you have the carriages, just in case."

She nodded.

"Then we shall see you in a few weeks," Albus said, and after saying goodbye, closed the Floo.

Olympe turned and picked up the knife she used to open letters. She made sure that her door was shut tightly, before she swore loudly and threw the knife against the wall. It quivered, embedded deeply against a child's picture of a white bumblebee.

She turned and threw some more powder into the fire, calling for Jean.

"Olympe?"

"I need to scream at someone, and as you're nominally my boss, you're volunteered," she said, abandoning the formal language she normally used. "I've just spoken with Dumbledore."

"You *do* look like someone who's just dealt with something unpleasant," he said. "Stand back; I'm coming through." The tall form of Jean-Sebastian appeared a second later, with Aimée next to him.

He placed three glasses on the table and expertly poured some port into each one. "How is Albus?" he asked, as he, and Aimée each took a seat.

"Slimy and supercilious," she grumbled. "He did not like the idea that we would be travelling a different way and was almost gleeful when he realised that the students were designing something."

"Why?" Aimée asked.

"Because he does not think that they, or we, are capable of it."

"But surely he must know that Harry is here?"

"I doubt he thinks that Harry would even suggest such a thing," Olympe grumbled. "Let alone work with the children."

"Then why let it bother you?" Aimée asked softly.

"Because he gets under my skin. He knows which buttons irritate me, and he presses them for his own amusement."

Aimée smiled slowly. "And you react, Olympe, and give him the satisfaction he seeks for knowing that he has provoked you. It is time for you to turn it around, and no longer react how he wants. If he speaks to you, you will react with equanimity and you will ignore him if you so feel."

Olympe took a deep breath. "That's easier said than done, Aimée" she admitted. "But you are right, I shall try."

"Jean and I are going to come with you this time. Officially it will be to watch Gabrielle play Quidditch, but unofficially, Jean will be watching Albus. Our Government is getting concerned about him now that Voldemort has gone; he seems to be meddling in places beyond his jurisdiction."

"Well, while you're here, any advice on my newest problem?"

"What is that?"

"Fred and George Weasley," Olympe sighed. "They have been corrupting my students with *pranks*."

"Oh?" Jean asked.

"Yesterday, one of them even slipped something into the food that turned the entire faculty's hair purple! I found it mildly humorous, but Madame Prévoyez was not amused."

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Gabrielle looked out at the endless ocean in front of her and finally understood her Mate's desire to come to this spot. She was sitting on a grassy clump halfway up a cliff face, with her back against Harry's chest and his arms around her, holding her close.

She could feel his heart beating with a reassuring steadiness that warmed her as much as his arms did. This was heaven, this quietness and aloneness. She had never felt as at peace with herself and the world. Sure, she had some residual guilt over what she had done to him all those years ago, but at the moment, it just didn't seem relevant.

They had shared a picnic and explored the ruins of Arthur's castle for hours before he had Apparated them both here. The precision of his magic had amazed her; the way he had been able to Apparate them both to a spot that was barely big enough for them to stand, a spot that was half way up a cliff. It literally took her breath away.

But she was beginning to think that it was time to try and move things along in their relationship. She lightly moved his arms away from her and turned carefully, so that she was kneeling in front of him.

She raised her right hand to his face and looked deeply into his eyes, searching for something, although she wasn't quite sure what.

Slowly she leaned in to fulfil a fantasy eight years in the making: kissing Harry Potter.

"No," he whispered, his hand moving against her chest, just under her neck.

She froze and felt a terrifying mixture of fear and dread. But his eyes were twinkling merrily, and his fingers were stroking the skin of her neck.

"Oh?" she asked, forcing the fear away.

"Not now, not here," he said. "Too many people have suggested that I kiss you here, but it is too contrived. It is almost artificial. Rest assured that I *do* want to kiss you. Besides, there's a test you must pass first," he finished playfully.

"And what is that?" she asked.

"Let's go and eat, and then I'll tell you."

"You are being frustrating," she sighed.

"I know," he said with a grin that made up for everything. "But you love me anyway, right?"

She groaned theatrically. "I guess," she said, ignoring the fact that her entire soul was shouting 'Yes' as loudly as it could.

He leaned forward, his arms going around her again and they vanished, reappearing on a paved road leading to a small town. "Come on," he grinned and jogged away from her.

His enthusiasm was infectious, so she ran after him. "Where are we going?"

"You'll see," he laughed and took her hand, pulling her eagerly down toward the sea front.

He stopped outside a place that smelled of fried oil. "Wait here," he commanded and vanished inside.

She smiled and shook her head lightly. He probably didn't even realise that if he left now, she would wait here, for as long as it took, for him to come back to her. At some stage she was going to have to explain the phenomenon to him, but not today.

He returned and handed her what looked like wrapped up newspaper in a cone shape. Inside it was what appeared to be a pile of chips, with a piece of what she presumed was fish dipped in a bright orange batter on top – a wooden fork had been stuck into the side of the fish.

"What is this?" she asked.

"Fish and chips," he smiled happily. "The chips are coated in salt and vinegar, and the fish has tartar sauce on it."

"And what do you do with it?" she asked warily.

"Eat it, silly."

"Are you sure?" she asked, sniffing delicately. "Because it looks like someone has gone to a lot of effort to fry the once perfectly respectable potatoes to remove everything that was healthy and good about them. And this fish... orange is not a good colour for food."

"Gabby," Harry groaned as he placed his paper down carefully and lifted her onto a sea-wall. "This is England, and you are eating the traditional fish and chips. You can smell the salt in the air from the ocean – it will add to the taste, I promise."

"But the fish is still orange!"

"It's batter; believe me, it won't kill you."

She stabbed the fish with the fork carefully as he sat beside her, his legs brushing against hers. "At least it is dead," she mumbled.

"Try it," he coaxed. He reached out and took her fork from her hand and expertly cut off a piece of the fish – it looked a reassuring white inside the batter – and held it up.

"Open," he ordered.

She did as she was told, trying hard to hide a smile.

He placed the fish inside her mouth. "Eat."

She locked her eyes on his as she closed her mouth and sucked the wooden fork seductively, running her tongue along the tines of the fork. He gulped and she finally tasted the fish. Considering that it had been royally destroyed by the cooking process, it wasn't that bad. Anton would probably faint if he ever saw it.

"It is somehow comforting," she said, a little confused.

"It's the ultimate comfort food," he agreed. "It's quick and easy, relatively cheap, and filling. And on the seafront, it's the perfect meal."

She wouldn't go as far as perfect, but it did seem to match the town they were sitting in. She tried one of the chips and found that it, too, was edible. Not brilliant, but there was something about it that was enjoyable.

"That's better," he smiled cheerfully and started to eat his with a vengeance.

"Hungry?"

He nodded, too busy to talk.

She laughed and settled down, eating hers at a more normal human pace. When she had finished, he took the paper from her hands and balled it up before throwing it in a bin that was a good fifteen yards away.

Her hands felt greasy, so she quickly gave herself a burst of her Veela power.

"Why did you do that?" Harry asked curiously.

"It fixes my greasy hands problem," she explained.

He laughed and bounced off the wall, lifting her back down. "Now it's time to introduce you to another great British institution: Crazy Golf."

"Golf *is* crazy," she agreed. "How Muggles can find it entertaining I shall never know."

"No," he laughed softly. "That's not what I meant." He pulled her alongside him gently and walked down the sea front. He stopped outside a small wooden cabin and came back with two putters and two brightly coloured balls.

She looked at him confused. He walked over to an artificial green covered course and placed one of the balls down. "The idea is to get the ball in the hole at the end with as few hits as possible."

"But the course isn't flat," she pointed out.

"Of course not, it's crazy," he grinned.

"And this is fun?"

"Fish and chips followed by crazy golf is great fun," he assured her. He handed her one of the clubs and casually knocked his ball up to the other end and into the hole. It didn't look that hard.

She took her ball and placed it as he had and stood in a similar pose to him. She looked down, swung her club back a little, looked at the hole, and swung competently.

And completely missed.

Harry laughed, and she shot him a foul look.

"Let me show you," he said.

Then all of a sudden, she understood just why this was the best sport in the world.

His arms were around her shoulders and over her own, his hands lightly in place over hers, his chest was against her back, his head was against hers, and his groin was in firm contact with her behind. She felt surrounded by him, and it felt absolutely right.

"Like this," he said, his hands moving her arms back a little. "Keep your eyes on the ball and hit through it cleanly like this," he moved her arms forward, and this time her club hit the ball and the ball followed his into the hole.

"See," he smiled and hugged her tightly. "Now let's do the second hole."

"The one with the house in the middle?"

"Absolutely!"

The house, a representation of an American plantation house, had three tunnels through it. She picked the middle one and stroked her ball toward it, smiling as it went straight through.

“Beginner’s luck,” he teased, as he knocked his ball through the passage to the left. “What do you think about the ideas the students came up with?”

“For the visit to Hogwarts?” she asked.

“Yeah.”

She hunched over her ball and stroked it into the hole. “Not as exciting as I had hoped for,” she confessed. “The problem is that with the wards around Hogwarts, we do not know what we can do, so everything we came up with was a variation of what already exists.”

Harry nodded and hit his own ball into the hole. “There is an idea that I read from one of Merlin’s diaries. It would be difficult...”

“What is it?”

“We take Beauxbatons with us.”

Gabrielle stood up slowly from placing her ball down on the third hole and turned to look at him. “Take Beauxbatons with us?”

He nodded eagerly.

“Can that even be done?”

He nodded. “Absolutely, but the entire school would have to work together. The lower years will be needed to work with Fred and George, while the upper school does the transporting.”

“Why Fred and George?” she asked, biting her lower lip as her ball didn’t make it over a hump, and rolled back to her.

“We won’t count that one,” Harry said. “And because if you want to make a statement, they are by far the best. The school just appearing wouldn’t be all *that* spectacular, not when compared to the school appearing with fireworks, loud noises, thunder, lightning, and everything else.”

“This is your showmanship appearing again, isn’t it?” she asked, as she hit the ball a bit more firmly. The ball made its way merrily over the hump.

He nodded. “What do you think?”

“I think it’s a brilliant idea,” she said thoughtfully. “Because it makes a spectacular impression, but also because that way, we won’t have to have our education disrupted by being in a different school, and even if we eat with them, we don’t have to worry about the other schools, nor do we have to live in a cold tower. As for the students, they will love the idea of doing something so unique. You are going to teach us the spells?”

“Yeah, because while you are doing the easy bit, I’m going to have to do the hard stuff.”

“Moving the school is easy?”

He nodded. “Compared to making a hole in Hogwarts’ wards so that we can get through them, without actually destroying anything?”

“Can you do that?”

“I hope so,” he said. “Or I’m going to be very embarrassed.”

“Could not Voldemort have done the same thing?”

“I don’t know. Probably. Playing with wards is always difficult, and it *won’t* be quiet. Everyone will know it is happening, so perhaps that was why he didn’t do it – it would have been useless for a stealth attack.”

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“I have foreseen the future,” Sybil Trelawney said in a wavering voice as she entered Snape’s potions dungeon.

“What do you want?” Snape demanded rudely.

“Be nice, Severus,” Trelawney said, her voice changing. “As I know what’s going on in Beauxbatons, and you don’t.”

“Really?” Draco Malfoy asked suspiciously. “How?”

“My colleague, Madame Prévoyez, has passed on information.”

“Why?” Malfoy demanded. “What does she want?”

“Potter humiliated, as he humiliated her.”

Malfoy smiled evilly. “Perhaps we can help her, then.”

Trelawney smiled bitterly. “He should be dead by now; he ruined my prophecy, so he has to pay. Quidditch should not be a problem; they are not very good. But they do have one slight advantage; their Seeker, Gabrielle Delacour is under Potter’s personal tutelage, and he is teaching her everything he can.”

Draco and Snape both scowled.

“So we take her out, and we can win from there?” Draco said with a shrug.

“There is one other thing,” Trelawney said. “My colleague thinks that Potter might be developing some feelings for this girl.”

“Excellent,” Snape said slowly. “Draco, when they get here, I want you to see what you can do with her.”

“In what way?”

“You’re a Malfoy, use that famous charm. Potter might have feelings, but he’s too noble to start up anything with a student. You don’t have that restriction.”

“True,” Draco agreed cheerfully. “It will be fun to steal her from under his nose.”

“And if she says no?” Trelawney asked.

“Unlikely,” Draco snorted.

“Then he will provoke her into a fight,” Snape smirked, ignoring the younger man. “Make Potter step in so that the world can see he’s mucking around with a student. And we’ll make sure that Skeeter woman is around to report on it in the best possible way.”

Trelawney bowed to both of them and retreated out of the room, in a much better mood than when she had entered.

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Gabrielle had her bottom lip between her teeth as she looked at the course in front of her. The green tilted to the left and then the right, while dropping at least a metre over an eight metre length. It was the last hole of the course, and he had already hit his ball.

For her to win, she needed to get a hole in one. He didn’t care who won the game, it simply wasn’t important. He’d had an evening of fun.

While he’d done everything before, on his own, this was the first time he had asked anyone to join him playing at being a Muggle and he had enjoyed it so much more than before.

Gabrielle was a lot of fun to be with. She talked to him directly, teased him back when he teased her and wasn’t afraid of trying new things – even if she did have to be persuaded to try the fish and chips. And she was cute standing there biting her lip.

She didn’t complain about things, like previous girlfriends had complained. The fact that he wanted to walk down to the beach earlier had been met with enthusiasm and excitement, not whining about how her shoes were not meant for walking, or how it was too far to go or too cold.

She was completely unselfconscious and didn’t even notice how the Muggles, especially the male Muggles, would stare at her as they walked by. And they had watched wherever they had gone; people had watched, because of her looks and contagious excitement at doing new things. With that had been the flattering realisation that she truly cared about him. Her entire body language screamed that she was with him and that she didn’t care what anyone thought about it.

Some of the Muggles had shot him extremely jealous looks.

It had made him think though, about how he handled himself in public. Usually the roles were reversed. He was the one under the glare of public attention, and he hated it. Watching Gabby just ignore it completely and not let it bother her had made him consider that maybe he should do that very same thing.

Throughout the day, he had seen different aspects of her personality and was starting to understand how they all fit together. She could go from cute to playful to sexy to studious without pause and seemed to enjoy all of those aspects equally. As far as he could tell it wasn’t contrived or artificial; she just reacted naturally to any situation.

More than that, though, he didn’t feel lonely with her. He’d shown her things he had never shown anyone else, and she had simply thanked him for showing it to her – in one case, even trying to kiss him.

He had said no, not because he didn’t want to kiss her – he did – but because he wanted it to be more natural than that. And it was kind of fun to let it build up between them, to play this game of crazy golf while simultaneously playing the oldest game in the world.

She pulled back the putter and swept forward. The ball rolled slowly to the edge of the slope and started its descent, swerving with the contours. It gained momentum, until it was travelling too fast to drop into the hole. It ran straight over it, causing her to groan, before it bounced against the wall and rolled back. It teetered on the edge, before dropping in.

“Yes!” she shouted happily as she dropped the putter and ran toward him. He bent forward a bit and picked her up into a huge hug, swinging her around a few times.

“Beginner’s luck,” he teased.

She smirked at him. “You are just jealous because I beat you at your crazy golf.”

“Not at all,” he denied with a grin. “You were just lucky.”



The next time, Harry Potter, I will beat you again and you will be too busy admitting you were wrong to talk about luck.”

He lowered her to her feet and picked up the putters. “Let’s get out of here,” he suggested. They walked back to the hut and handed in the putters and coloured balls. The old man spent far more time looking at Gabrielle’s chest than he liked – not that she noticed.

He took her hand and as soon as they were out of sight of the hut, he Apparated them both away to a beach.

The full moon bathed the area in a brightness that almost seemed surreal. She moved in front of him swaying softly to music only she could hear and took his hands, leaning back.

“Dance with me,” she said.

He shook his head playfully and she released his hands, dancing in front of him as he continued to move.

“You are just jealous of my skills,” she teased.

Almost without thinking about it, he reached out and caught her, pulling her close. One of his arms went around her body, while his other hand raised her chin, and he kissed her.

She seemed to be still for the briefest of moments, before her hands went around him, her body moulded against his, and she kissed him back.

Her kiss screamed of passion and desire and a raw need that shot through him. He could feel her hands burrow under his jacket and t-shirt, so that they could stroke bare skin, as she kissed him with everything she had.

It was like no kiss he had ever experienced; it felt like wildfire was burning through his blood as her fingernails gouged his back, and she seemed to be trying to get more contact from him.

He broke the kiss and looked around as he heard a noise. Further up the beach was a lone fisherman, whose face was briefly highlighted by the cigarette he was smoking.

Gabby made a protesting little whine and started to kiss his neck as she pressed against him.

“Sorry,” the fisherman said with a barely visible shrug.

“Gabby,” Harry said gently. “We need to move on.”

“No,” she murmured, as she lightly bit him.

“We’re not alone.”

“Don’t care. I want more kissing.”

He laughed and contemplated Obliviating the fisherman, but decided he had no cause to do so. He bent, lifting Gabrielle into his arms. She responded by shifting to ensure that she didn’t lose contact with him, as he walked them both away.

As soon as he could, he Apparated them a lot further up the beach and made sure that there was no one around for at least a mile.

He let her legs drop to the ground, but kept his arm around her shoulders so that she was still against him. He opened his mouth, but didn’t say anything as she pressed her finger to his lips.

“Can we talk later and go back to the kissing?” she asked, pressing little kisses against his face as her body tried to ensure that there wasn’t a square centimetre that it wasn’t touching.

“Where did you learn to kiss like that?” he asked curiously.

“Why are you asking questions now?” she complained. “I am Veela, Harry. That was my first kiss, ever. Now, can we please do it some more so I can get it right?”

“That was your first kiss?” he asked, shocked.

“I am Veela,” she groaned in frustration. “I *know* what my Mate *wants* and I *will* get better with practice.”

“It’s going to get better than that?” He felt a little awed.

“If you’ll stop talking about it and let us do it again.”

He laughed and leant down to kiss her again, but as he got near to her lips, she moved away, her hands sliding up to his shoulders, encouraging him down onto the sand. He moved to his knees and then followed her as she tugged on his shoulder so that he was lying on top of her, between her legs, holding himself up with his arms.

She sighed again and hit out at his arms so that he fell onto her; her arms went around him, so that she was holding him tightly, and she kissed him again.

He forgot about his worries about being too heavy for her, or that the sand was slightly damp and cold. He gave in to the insistent and demanding

Kiss.

The second kiss was just as good as the first, if not more so, because of the way her hands were now exploring his back, scratching lightly with her nails, and the way her chest felt against his. Further thought was rendered impossible as she opened her mouth and deepened the kiss for the first time.

He lost all conscious thought as he could feel every move she made, every reaction to him. His hand slid up her side and she shifted under him, encouraging his movements.

“Stop,” he whispered, breaking the kiss and breathing heavily. “Not here.”

“Here’s good,” Gabrielle said with a groan. Her eyes were clouded with passion and her lips looked slightly swollen. “More, please, Harry, more.”

“Not on the beach.”

“I don’t care,” she said as she writhed under him, “here, there, anywhere. Just don’t stop, please, don’t stop.”

“The bond?” he asked, realising why she wanted him to continue.

“Hang the damnable bond,” she almost shouted. “I’ll break it tomorrow, just don’t stop.” Her eyes were begging him to kiss her again, so he did, but this time it was slower. He was trying to work out why she didn’t care about the bond, when going further – making love – would make it permanent.

“No thinking,” she whimpered against his lips. “You’re not all here – kissing me.” She rolled them so that he was on his back and kissed him hard again. Her hands dived under his clothes and started to stroke his chest.

He rolled them back over, and she made a pleased sound as he settled between her legs. He pulled her hands out from under his shirt and held them above her head. He could feel her smile against his lips for a second.

“Gabrielle,” he whispered, placing little kisses against her lips, refusing her attempts to deepen the kiss again. “Relax, my Gabrielle, I’m not going anywhere.”

She whimpered again and looked at him with naked want in her eyes.

He tenderly stroked her hair back from her face. “Come back to me, Gabby.”

Slowly, with his encouragement, her eyes started to clear.

“Why did you stop?” she asked, a tear forming at the side of her eye. “Wasn’t it good?”

“It was – it was the best kiss I’ve ever experienced,” he whispered intently.

“Then why?” she asked as the tear formed a silver trail from her eye down her cheek.

“Because this is not the right place and not the right time. It’s cold, damp, and it’s only going to get colder.”

“I - don’t - care,” she whispered. “I just want to feel you again, feel your lips against mine, feel your body against me, and feel you touch me like I was born to be touched.

“We’ve only just kissed,” Harry said softly. “We’re moving a bit fast.”

“For a human girl, maybe,” Gabrielle sighed. “I am Veela, Harry.”

“Don’t you want your first time to be special?”

“My first time *will* be special. It will be with you,” she assured him. “Wherever it is.” She closed her eyes. “Don’t you want me?”

“Yes,” he whispered, “very, very much, but not like this, not now.”

“I want you,” she whispered, her eyes still closed, “so badly, Harry. I meant it, give me a single night with you, and I’ll break the bond tomorrow. It’s got nothing to do with the bond and everything to do with how much I want you. Please.”

“No,” he said gently. “Look at me, Gabby. Please.”

Her eyes shot open and he could see an obscure pain inside them. It hurt him to see it there, and he wanted to make it go away. “Don’t move.”

She looked at him, completely immobile, as he gathered his magic and Apparated them both to the Lake District and his small cottage there, placing them both on his bed. Apparating while horizontal was a bit trickier than while standing up.

She gasped as they arrived and felt the bed against her back. He pointed at the fireplace, and a fire roared into existence, quickly warming the cold room and providing some light for them.

“I’m not too heavy?” he asked.

She took a deep breath. “You make it so hard for me,” she whispered softly. “But it is not your fault; you do not understand what it is to be a Mated Veela. I look human, Harry, I appear human, and in many aspects, I *am* human. But Veela are different, when you kiss me, I feel pleasure, but I also get more pleasure from your pleasure, like a feedback loop. I can feel what you like and what you want, instinctively, and I react to you, and as I do, I get more pleasure from your responses – and when that happens I lose control of my thoughts and lose myself to the emotions and feelings.”

“Isn’t that bad?”

“Oh no – not at all; it is the most wonderful thing in existence. I am fulfilling my reason for creation. It is everything I could ever hope for and more. You are so warm; your touch brands me as yours and it is perfect.”

He rested his forehead against her and smiled. “I didn’t expect this to happen.”

“I hoped it would,” she whispered. “I want to lose myself to my Mate.”

“I do as well, Gabrielle, but I’m not ready yet.”

“What do you mean?”

“I want to feel like I am making love to the only woman I’ll ever love, that doing so is my final commitment to her, not just a passionate act of abandon.”

“Do you mean that?” she asked. She looked so vulnerable as she stared up at him from his bed.

He nodded.

She buried her face in his neck and hugged him tightly. “Did I ruin today?” she asked.

“No,” he laughed softly. “Surprisingly, having a beautiful girl kissing me like I have never been kissed, and then begging me to make love to her isn’t about to ruin my day.”

She giggled.

“You know,” he teased, determined now to lighten the mood a little. “You are the first girl to ever be here.”

“Where are we?” she asked, although he noticed she didn’t look away from him.

“My cottage in the Lake District.”

“Thank you for bringing me here,” she whispered and ran her hands over his back, causing him to wince slightly as she pressed against the scratches she’d made earlier.

She squirmed out from under him. “Sit up and turn around,” she ordered, and lifted his shirt up as he complied. “I hurt you,” she whispered in horror.

“I didn’t exactly notice it at the time,” he said dismissively.

“Take your shirt off, and lie down,” she ordered again.

He did as he was told, resting his head on his arms. He felt her slide over him, so that she was kneeling over the small of his back. “Relax,” she whispered. “I’m going to try something.”

He nodded slightly and felt soothing ribbons of coolness spread over his back. The scratches stopped hurting. He turned slightly and watched as slivers of magic emanated from her hands and slid over his back.

“You are injured,” she quietly after a few minutes of running her hands above his back.

“You just fixed that,” Harry replied.

“No, not that. Your shoulder.”

“Oh, that was my last Quidditch match,” he explained.

“That was your *left* shoulder – watching that game almost killed me. It is your *right* shoulder that feels wrong. May I heal it, please?” she asked plaintively.

He didn’t think there was anything wrong, but he nodded anyway.

Her hands slid up to his shoulder, rubbing gently in a circular motion. “I’m going to try something I’ve read about,” she whispered. “But I need you to trust me. Please, turn off your Nullifying Field.”

He flinched under her hands. The field was like his security blanket, it was something he never turned off; it kept everyone away from him, and in a way, him from everyone else. He took a deep breath and thought about it briefly. It came down to trust; it always did. He closed his eyes and deactivated the charm.

"Thank you," she said softly and he felt her lips touch the back of his neck.

She shifted over him and her hands pressed down hard against his shoulder. He felt an enormous pull upon his magic and then felt something shifting inside his shoulder. He heard a pop. A searing burst of pain forced a groan out of him. The pain was swiftly followed by a wave of nausea and exhaustion.

"It's okay, Harry," Gabrielle crooned. "I've got you; you don't have anything to fear."

He whimpered as her hands hovered over his shoulder, the same soothing softness from her Veela power removed the pain he was feeling. Her hands moved away from him and he again felt the feather-like touch of her lips on his skin. She shifted off him and held out something in her hand as he moved onto his side.

"It's bone?" he asked.

"Can you use your Dark Magic sensor on it?"

He nodded and tiredly brought the spell, along with his Nullifier, back to life. It gave off a dull throbbing echo of a ghost, and then the vital searing presence he'd known so well during the second war. "Grasnot," he grunted. "The head of the only Goblin clan to join forces with Voldemort."

"The Goblins were fond of turning their enemies' femurs into daggers," she said clinically. "You've been carrying that chip around in your shoulder for years."

"How did you know it was there?" he asked, "and how did you remove it?"

"You are my Mate," Gabrielle replied simply. "I could feel something inside you that was not you - that was foreign. I told you once that I joined my magic to yours. With your permission it goes both ways; I can use your magic to do what I need."

He nodded and then yawned deeply.

"You are tired," she said softly, "from a wonderful day and from the magic I just pulled from you." She moved off him and walked to the mahogany wardrobe in the corner of the room. She opened it and pulled one of his practice jerseys from a hanger. She turned away from him and removed her jumper, t-shirt and bra, replacing them with the jersey, smoothing it down before she kicked off her trainers and slid her jeans down her legs.

Gabrielle ran her fingers through her hair and winced as her fingers got caught in some tangles. She used her Veela power and he could actually see her hair clean itself.

She walked over to him, removing his trainers and pulling off his socks, before reaching for his belt. He shifted slightly to allow her to remove it, and then moved further as she pulled the covers back for him.

"How do you normally sleep?" she asked.

He moved so that he was on his side, slightly curled up.

"Don't move," she whispered as she climbed into bed. She turned and backed against him, so that his chest was against her back, pulling his arm around her. "How's this?"

"Perfect," he whispered, as the scent of her hair started to ease him to sleep.

"Harry?"

"Yes, Gabby?"

"I love you."

"I know," he whispered. "I know."

Sleep took him in an instant. He was content, his heart was at rest. He was no longer alone.

## Hope 7 - Milan

"Good morning," Gabrielle said, as they entered the Delacour family residence.

"Good morning, Gabrielle," Aimée replied with a welcoming smile.

"What's going on?" Harry asked, bypassing the normal formalities.

Aimée raised her eyebrows inquiringly.

"The atmosphere in here is about as stilted as when Aunt Marge would visit the Dursleys," Harry explained.

Gabrielle frowned and concentrated. "How did you pick that up so quickly?"

"Practise."

"Mama?" Gabrielle asked.

"Harry is right," Aimée admitted.

"William and Fleur had a large argument this morning," Jean added.

"What were they arguing about?" Gabrielle asked

"Mating," Aimée said. "Fleur does not want to Mate, and Bill does not understand why."

Gabrielle frowned softly. "If Fleur has any doubts, then she should not do it," she said firmly. "It is not as if you can change your mind later. I shall talk to him and explain exactly what he is asking for."

"Before you do, I'll have a quick word with Bill," Harry said to Gabrielle.

"You will?" she asked.

Harry nodded. "Bill's a Weasley, and he needs some tender, loving care before a serious conversation."

Gabrielle reached up and kissed him softly on the side of his mouth. "Thank you."

As she kissed him he reached up and brushed her hair back from her face. "Is he outside?" he asked Aimée and Jean.

"He is by the pool," Aimée said.

He nodded and walked out the back of the house, heading toward the pool. Bill was pacing angrily and scowled as Harry walked up to him.

Harry didn't pause as he approached Bill. He picked the taller man up easily and threw him straight into the pool.

The language Bill used to describe his feelings about Harry's action displayed the length and breadth of his vocabulary, even delving into some particularly nasty Goblin terms.

"Better?" Harry asked, as Bill paused for breath.

The next volley proved that Bill hadn't quite finished.

"What did you do that for?" Bill eventually demanded from the centre of the pool.

"Blame Ron, he suggested it," Harry smiled. "He said that whenever a Weasley was upset, a spot of violence was often the quickest way to get through to them. So I decided it was either hit you or throw you in the pool to cool off. If I had hit you, you would be unconscious."

"So sure of yourself?" Bill half-sneered.

Harry shook his head, amused, and muttered a spell under his breath. Bill floated out of the pool and landed in front of Harry.

"As you seem to need to get it out of your system," Harry said dryly, pulling off his jumper and moving into a fighting stance with the ease of long practice. "Come on then."

Maybe you're right," Bill mumbled, looking a little awed at Harry.

"I am. Even without magic, you're no match for me. I was trained too hard, for too long, by the best. You know that. Can we now stop with the macho posturing?"

"It hurt," Bill said, pulling up a chair. "You know?"

"No," Harry said softly. "I don't. And now that you've calmed down, I'll let you speak to someone who does know."

"Gabrielle?"

Harry nodded and turned to walk back to the house. "Bill," he said over his shoulder as he paused. "Do *not* hurt Gabby." He delivered the threat in the coldest voice he could muster and nodded as Bill paled.

He walked back into the house. "He's all yours," he said. "I'd take him a towel."

"Not a first aid kit?"

"I didn't hit him -- just let him -- cool off a little," Harry smiled.

She nodded and gave him a quick hug as she walked outside, grabbing a towel on the way.

"Fleur upstairs?"

"We are going to talk, later, about you spending the whole evening with my daughter," Jean said, avoiding the question temporarily.

Harry looked amused. "Do you want a few seconds to think about what you just said?"

Jean opened his mouth and then shut it again, while Aimée laughed softly.

"She is still my daughter."

"And my Mate," Harry pointed out. "Or she will be soon." He smiled lightly. "But if it makes you feel better, we can do all that stuff anyway. You can grill me about my prospects, and I'll lie through my teeth and pretend I'm not trying to get into her knickers."

"A curious phrase," Aimée interrupted. "I take it has lost something in translation?"

Harry frowned as he went back over his last words. "Oh, yes, somewhat. In English, the implication is not that I would be wearing them, but would have unfettered access to what they normally contain."

"Ahh," Aimée said with a nod. "I see. But please, don't let me interrupt your testosterone contest with Jean."

"You know, I just accused Bill of the same thing?" Harry said feeling rather embarrassed. "Are we done, Jean?"

"I think we are," Jean agreed, looking faintly embarrassed himself.

"Excellent," Aimée said cheerfully. "Now Harry, I believe you were going upstairs."

Harry nodded and turned, hiding a smile. He hadn't been dismissed with that much ease since he had been at school and dealing with Minerva McGonagall on a regular basis. It bought back some nice memories from school and made him make a mental note to talk to Minerva later that day. She was the only person from Hogwarts he had remained in contact with.

He didn't find it hard to locate Fleur's room. The swearing and sound of breaking vases led him straight there.

He opened the door and immediately ducked an incoming projectile. *At least she wasn't being wasteful*, he noticed. She had created a row of identical vases and was destroying them one by one.

Fleur's welcome showed that she had picked up more than a few things from her association with Bill, and one particularly vile imprecation made him wince. He ducked to avoid another vase and took a few quick steps forward and pulled her into a large hug.

She reacted by pounding his back, screaming that he had to let go. He ignored her and continued to hold her until her anger turned to tears. He'd found out early on that the best way to deal with his second girlfriend had been to just hold her through her tantrums, keeping his opinion to himself. It had been one of the reasons the relationship hadn't lasted more than a few days. He couldn't see himself marrying and spending the rest of his life with someone with such a short temper.

In a strange way, hugging Fleur helped prove that it wasn't the Veela part of Gabby that he enjoyed so much. Fleur was as much a Veela as Gabrielle was, but she didn't affect him in any way whatsoever.

"Better?" he asked softly, as he released her.

She nodded and sniffed.

"Feel free," Harry said, as he waved his hands airily.

Fleur looked at him strangely and released her Veela power, removing the evidence of her tears in a second. "That is strange," she whispered.

"What is?"

"Being able to use my powers like that," she explained. "Normally I have to be so circumspect."

"So you don't accidentally Enthrall Bill?"

She nodded and sat down on her bed.

He walked over and grabbed a chair, moving it in front of her. "And that's the problem, right?"

She shook her head slowly. "No, not really."

"Then what is the problem?"

"Bill wants me to Mate him, but I do not want to."

"Why not?" Harry asked gently. He was trying as hard as he could not to sound accusatory.

"He is thinking that Gabrielle is happy; he does not see the down side to the Mating."

"Go on," Harry prompted.

"I am not sure if I should," she said quietly. "Gabrielle..."

"It will probably help me. There are still things I don't know."

"It might," Fleur admitted. "For Veela, Mating is the most powerful force in our lives. It can override everything we are. Have you noticed that I am tall, as are both my parents?"

Harry nodded.

"And yet Gabrielle is shorter."

Harry nodded again.

"Tell me, Harry, have you ever dated a tall girl?"

"Are you saying that the Mating stopped her from growing?"

"Not from growing," Fleur clarified quickly. "She has grown properly, but she has grown into exactly the height that you prefer. That is the sort of power that Mating has and it terrifies me more than anything else. Gabrielle does not understand, cannot understand, because she doesn't remember anything else but being Mated to you."

"I am a grown woman, I have a career, a life I enjoy, and the thought of slavery to a man, any man, is almost abhorrent to me. And that fact that I would be happy with my loss of freedom and identity is not a reassuring thought. I have joked about Mating with Bill, saying that I would do it when we are married. But I find that as we get closer to that I just do not want to do it – I can't do it, Harry."

"I can't lose myself."

"Gabrielle seems to have an identity and freedom," he pointed out softly.

Fleur laughed with a tinge of self-mockery. "My sister is a lot stronger than I am." She sighed and looked directly at him. "I am going to tell you things I promised that I would not, because I think that you should know. And do not think that Gabrielle didn't tell you to manipulate you or something; it is that she does not want your pity. She wants your love honestly, and nothing else matters to her."

He nodded. "I've accepted that," he said softly.

"I love Gabrielle more than anyone else alive. Even though it is silly, I have blamed myself for her Mating to you. If I had not been so arrogant, I would not have been in that damn Tournament and she would not have been placed in danger. If I had been a more proficient witch, I would have rescued her myself, and she would not have fallen in love with you."

"Her life growing up after that was as close to hell as it could have been."

"What do you mean?"

"Let's start with physical affection. Do you remember what it was like when you were growing up at Hogwarts? Do you remember being hugged by Hermione, by Ron, by Molly, even by that Chang girl?"

Harry nodded.

"The only people that have touched Gabrielle since she Mated to you have been Mama, Papa, and I. Gabrielle would not allow herself to be touched by anyone else, and she would not let herself be seen in anything that was attractive or revealing. She would scream hysterically when we

considered having her examined by male doctors. The thought of anyone but you touching her made her physically sick. In a stroke, Gabrielle went from being an adorable, friendly girl, to being a stand-offish child terrified of anyone outside of her family touching her.

"And then there were the problems caused by an eight year old having adult emotions and desires. The tears and despair that she felt when we told her that she couldn't go to you was unbelievable," Fleur paused and looked at him directly. "She could not understand why we would not let her do what she wanted to."

Harry nodded. "I couldn't have done anything."

"We know," Fleur sighed. "We knew. An eight year old should not know the details of lovemaking, much less have overwhelming adult desires coursing through her body."

"For nearly six months we didn't know what was going to happen with her. I came close to failing school because every second I could spare was spent here. Luckily, Olympe understood what was going on – she felt her own guilt – and covered for me as much as she could."

"Gabrielle had lost her personality. She was almost a blank slate. In normal situations, she would have drawn up her personality from her contact with her Mate. She could talk, react, but there was no spark there – nothing that you could say was Gabrielle. It was like talking to a Golem."

Harry lowered his head into his hands. "It killed her personality?" he whispered. "This is more horrible than I'd imagined."

Fleur reached out and lightly took his hands, so that he looked at her. "But then Mama managed to get through to her. She told Gabrielle that you would never feel anything for an empty shell. And for the first time, Gabrielle reacted like a girl. She looked up and nodded. She asked questions, simple questions, but we were able to answer them. She asked about your best friend and who you liked. We knew that Hermione was your best friend and that you had a crush on Cho."

"Gabrielle wasn't worried about your crush; she knew about the Bond, but she looked at the girls that you liked and drew the conclusion that intelligence was one of the key factors. That was the start of her love of academics. She also knew that you loved Quidditch, so she made sure she could fly, but she didn't work too hard on that. She felt that the only person who would be able to teach her properly would be you."

"She put together a plan – without telling any of us – to make herself into the woman that she thought would have the best chance at getting through to you. And that should not have been possible. The Mating should have forced her to stay in that blank state, waiting for you."

"Mama's words put her in a position where the Magic involved was confused. And Gabrielle forged her way through that to make herself into what she wanted to be. It was the bravest thing I have ever seen."

"Some things did not change. She still would not be touched by anyone but us three; she was not interested, even slightly, in other boys as she grew up. Everything she had was dedicated into turning herself into what she thought you would want. In being who you are and the way you are, you gave her the biggest gift possible without even trying."

"What?" Harry asked, feeling confused.

"Independence. Gabrielle knew that you wanted an independent partner. She thought that having a slave would be abhorrent to you. Is that correct?"

Harry nodded firmly. "Definitely!"

"Gabrielle managed to gain her independence from the Mating by working within the constraints of being Mated. You have no idea how I feel, how all of us feel, to see you and Gabrielle together. It is like we have finally regained our Gabrielle again. She smiles, she laughs, and she is a girl again."

"But that is what has caused the problem. Bill has never known the depth of the problems with Gabrielle. He is male, and because of that, for the longest time, she would not even be in the same room with him alone. So all Bill has seen is a quiet girl blossom into this amazing beauty that is happy and he cannot understand why I do not want that."

"I have not got the strength to fight like Gabrielle has. And Bill is not you. You are different, Harry. You are protective, strong, and you believe in fairy tales."

"Fairy tales?"

Fleur nodded softly. "You believe in love being the most powerful force in the universe. You want a princess you can love and protect, and who can love and protect you. You want a magical romance."

"I'd never thought about it that way," Harry said slowly.

"You are a prince, Harry. You are strong, brave, and heroic. You have this power over Gabrielle that you could use to make her do anything, anything a normal man might dream of; you could make her perform degrading acts, and yet the thought of doing so would not even occur to you. All you will do is encourage her to be more independent."

"I think you are over-estimating me," he said softly. "But one of the things I like about Gabrielle is her innocence. I am older, more jaded, but she seems to see things as fresh and beautiful, and I want that in my life. I won't let that innocence be spoiled – not by me, and not by anyone else."

"And that is what I am talking about. I love Bill, but as a woman loves a man. Not as Gabrielle loves you, or as, we hope, that you will eventually love Gabrielle. I cannot give myself to him, like Gabrielle gave herself to you."



“And Bill can’t understand that?”

“I can not explain in English well enough; he only hears that I do not want him. And his French is not good enough for the concepts I am trying to make him understand.”

“Gabrielle is talking to him at the moment.”

Fleur smiled slowly. “She will fix it,” she said confidently. “Gabrielle knows better than anyone else what it is like, I hope that Bill will understand,” she paused and then changed the subject. “Tell me, what did you and Gabrielle do yesterday? You were both out of school and Fred told me you were on a date.”

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Gabrielle handed Bill the towel she was carrying silently and pulled a couple of chairs over to him. She sat – being careful to ensure she was very slightly out of touching range – and watched him as he dried himself.

Bill was taller than Harry and quite good-looking. But he did nothing at all for her, apart from a feeling of friendship as he was her sister’s love.

Bill finished rubbing his long hair and looked directly at her. “Harry can be the scariest person on the planet,” he sighed in English.

“Not to me,” she said simply.

“No,” Bill agreed. “Not to you. But to anyone who even looks at you in a way he doesn’t like.”

She smiled softly and didn’t disagree with him. The idea of being protected by her Mate was something that warmed her inside. “So,” she said. “Why were you and Fleur arguing?”

Bill looked away from her.

“Please,” Gabrielle said. “I think you’ll find that I know more about the problem than anyone else.”

“Then why ask?” Bill said.

“You will find that being surly does not get you very far,” Gabrielle said softly. “Telling me exactly what the problem is, on the other hand, will probably allow me to explain why Fleur reacted that way.”

“She doesn’t want to Mate with me,” Bill said, as he sunk back in the chair.

“Tell me,” Gabrielle said. “Did you tell her to go away, perhaps bluntly, during the argument?”

Bill looked up and nodded, an embarrassed expression appearing on his face.

“If Harry told me to go away, I would have no choice. I would not be able to stand there and argue with him. I would *have* to leave, no matter that each step away from him would be breaking my heart, no matter that I would be terrified that he would never see me again, and that I would keep moving away from him forever.”

“What?” Bill demanded, looking horrified.

“If Harry gives me a direct command, I must obey. No matter what it is. No matter how much it might hurt, or how painful it might be, I will do it without pause or hesitation.”

“But...”

“But what?” Gabrielle asked. “You are asking for a slave, so you must be prepared to look after one properly. I take it you do care for my sister?”

Bill nodded. “Of course I do.”

“That is good. You won’t mind then when she is incapable of doing her job for a few years, because all she wants and needs is you? You won’t mind that she will be a different girl than the one you care about? You won’t mind that you will be the absolute centre of her universe and that if you ever get bored with her, she will go insane and then die?”

“You’re not like that with Harry.”

“I have been Mated to Harry for eight years. I had to fight the magic to regain my independence, and I could only do it because Harry so desires it. I am sure that Fleur can do it as well – eventually.”

Bill frowned and leaned forward, and she leant back, just a little.

“Mating does that?” he asked.

Gabrielle nodded. “It is slavery, Bill, and it changes the Veela. It tries to turn us into what our Mate desires more than anything in the world. The Mate has a huge responsibility to look after the Veela, because she will be totally reliant on him. Of course, we have been talking about this from the negative side. The same thing, from the positive side, is that the Mated Veela will love you forever, will never leave you, never abandon you,

and will be willing to do anything that you like in, or out, of the bedroom.”

“But that sounds like – having a doll,” Bill said, running his hands through his hair.

“For a while, yes,” Gabrielle agreed. “Until she either gains a new personality that will suit you or manages to regain her current one.”

“What about arguments?”

“There wouldn’t be any. She would agree with you, and she would certainly never say no to you.”

“But that would mean no make-up sex,” Bill protested and then blushed fiercely.

“What would you need make-up sex for?” Gabrielle asked. “You would have passionate sex whenever you wanted it – with a female genetically designed to match your mood.”

Bill opened his mouth and then shut it again.

“I am only part Veela, and that I think has helped me keep some semblance of my original personality. Veela Mating is tied up so deeply in our genes that it is all-encompassing. Being a Veela Mate requires an honesty and caring deep inside you that most people simply do not have. It requires a nature where you can honestly put others before yourself, an inbuilt nobility that prevents you from taking advantage of a situation where *you* hold all the cards.”

“What would have happened if Harry hadn’t been Harry?”

“I do not know,” Gabrielle whispered. “And I do not ever *want* to know. It scares me deep inside.”

“So, to sum up,” Bill said, leaning back again. “I might get a Mate and really good sex, but I lose pretty much everything I love about Fleur for a while, and when I get it back, if I get it back, it might be different, and by that stage, it is too late, and I am responsible for her – and I will always have the nagging guilt that she did it for me.”

Gabrielle nodded.

“And *you* did that willingly?”

She smiled faintly. “I did. I compare it to playing Russian roulette with my very existence, only to make it interesting I had five bullets in the six-shooter. It is starting to look like the hammer has hit the empty cylinder.”

“Cute analogy,” Bill said with a smile. “I’ve been a little selfish, haven’t I?”

“You did not know all the facts.”

“I think I did,” Bill admitted, rubbing the back of his neck. “But I only heard the ‘No’ part.”

“So,” Gabrielle said, with as much innocence as she could muster. “You will be apologising to Fleur and having make-up sex now?”

Bill looked at her and then flushed an even brighter red than earlier.

“Come on,” she laughed softly. “I think Harry and Fleur have finished.”

“How can you tell?”

“I can feel him laughing.”

Bill nodded and followed her. As they reached the top of the stairs, Bill reached out to touch her shoulder, but as she felt his hand coming near her, she slipped away.

He looked confused.

“It is part of the Mating,” she said softly, but without apology. “I do not want any male to touch me apart from Papa, and Harry.”

“I just wanted to say ‘thanks’,” Bill said. He smiled slightly, “This explains why you have always been a little undemonstrative.”

“It is hard in your family that believes in touching, but I managed it.” She opened the door to Fleur’s room and paused.

“And,” Harry laughed. “She looked at me with the cutest expression I have ever seen and said in completely straight voice, ‘Because it looks like someone has gone to a lot of effort to fry the once perfectly respectable potatoes to remove everything that was healthy and good about them!’”

Fleur threw back her head and roared with laughter.

“Telling my secrets?” Gabrielle asked.

“Yep,” Harry said with a smile. His eyes flicked over to Bill, and he nodded as he got to his feet. “Come on, Gabby, let’s leave them to it.”

She smiled at him and nodded.

He walked out of the room and closed the door after Bill entered. “Fleur did tell me a lot about what you went through growing up,” he said to her.

She winced. “I do not want your pity, Harry.”

“How about my admiration?” he asked.

She looked at him curiously.

“I do not pity you, Gabby. But I know what it is like to fight magic, what willpower it takes, and managing to make something of yourself when fighting it is impressive.”

“Thank you,” she said, looking down while her heart raced at praise from her Mate.

“Shall we go and spend the rest of the morning with your parents and go back to school this afternoon?”

“That would be nice.”

He reached out and pulled her into a hug.

She sighed happily and snuggled into him. She looked up as she heard a loud giggle, followed by a thump from the bedroom.

“Make-up sex,” she said.

Harry groaned and raised his hand, whispering a silencing spell. He led her downstairs and into the living room, where Jean was reading a broadsheet paper, and Aimée was looking at what appeared to be the English Financial Times paper – the salmon pink giving it away.

Harry took a seat on the couch, and she sat next to him, snuggling into his side. This was what she had dreamed about for so many years, to be casually sitting next to her Mate. It was hard for her not to smile like an idiot.

“They are happy again?” Aimée asked as she folded up the paper and placed it on a small table next to her.

“They are,” Harry agreed.

“And are apologising to each other in person right now,” Gabrielle added with a smile.

Aimée raised her eyebrows. “So I should avoid that floor for a while?”

“No; Harry added a silencing charm for them.”

“My daughter is a hypocrite,” Aimée sighed. “She leaves the charm off, and it is a mistake – Jean and I forget the charm and we are accused of trying to drive her insane.”

“I have no idea how to respond to that,” Harry said, “so I’ll change the subject.”

“Thank you,” Gabrielle said, feeling her own cheeks heat up.

“Is that the magical version of the FT?”

“Of course,” Aimée said. “I like to keep track of how our stocks and shares are doing.”

“I do as well,” Harry agreed. “Admittedly, it took me nearly two months of studying to find out what it all meant.”

“When did you do that?” Jean asked, as he folded his own paper up and joined in the conversation.

“On tour, as with most things.”

“What did you actually do on tour?” Gabrielle asked.

“Normally we’d get up at around six am, especially if we were somewhere hot, and have a big breakfast. We’d relax for half an hour, and then make our way to the practise pitch. We’d normally only spend a couple of hours flying drills, because by that time we are normally at peak physical fitness, and all we need to do is maintain our current state. And at lunch time, we’d be free to do what we wanted for the rest of the day.

“I’d normally go sight-seeing with some of my team-mates, and then at night, I’d spend the time relaxing in my hotel room, doing what I could to keep myself occupied.”

“It sounds a bit boring,” Jean said.

“Some of the other young players would go out to a night club and well, erm, fraternise with the fans. I tried that once and had to do a combined Apparate/*Obliviate* to get out of there with my clothes on. The fans were a little bit rabid.”

“That’s not a surprise,” Gabrielle teased. “Harry Potter, Quidditch God, out in public for all those girls.”

“Just wait until you are out with me,” Harry said with a smile. “And you are the target of some pretty awful taunts.”

"They won't be true," she replied calmly. "Well, some of them probably will be, but that will be none of their business."

Harry shook his head and laughed.

"You two seem more comfortable with each other," Aimée said.

"I think we got a lot of things sorted out between us yesterday."

"That did not stop Harry and Jean having testosterone issues this morning," Aimée said to Gabrielle, a teasing glint in her eyes.

"Papa," Gabrielle sighed.

"Why are you blaming me?" Jean protested, raising his hands.

"Because Harry does not initiate these things, he only reacts," she said simply.

"You are still my daughter," Jean said with a shrug. "I retain the right to act like it at all times."

"And I could have handled it better," Harry stepped in. "However, our balloons were pricked neatly by Aimée, and I don't know about Jean, but I hadn't felt like that since I was at Hogwarts."

"I am married to her," Jean said, "I get it all the time."

"Well, I'd offer my consolations, but frankly, any man who has someone like Aimée by his side does not need any consolation from anyone."

Jean laughed and nodded. "Best decision of my life," he agreed.

Aimée blushed prettily and looked down demurely.

"I always knew I would have to fall in love with someone special," Jean continued, looking fondly at his wife. "She would have to understand that any female children we had would be Veela, and that they would be unholy terrors to raise."

"I was not a terror," Gabrielle protested with a smile.

"Right," Jean said in disbelief. "Of course, I had no real choice about marrying Aimée."

"Oh?" Aimée asked delicately.

Jean nodded. "Aimée was my fourth girlfriend."

"Fifth, actually," Aimée sniffed.

"Fine, fifth," Jean grumbled. "Anyway, I'd taken a few home to meet my mother, and she had dismissed all of them immediately and made a few comments concerning my intelligence about being attracted to such butterflies."

"I took Aimée home for the first time."

"And I spent the journey being warned about his mother," Aimée interjected.

"Yes," Jean agreed. "And we walked into the house, and Mama said, 'Another one, Jean?'"

"I was about to reply, when Aimée stepped in front of me, and looked at Mama. 'I am not another one,' she said, in a cold voice. 'I am the last one.'"

"Mama looked at her, and for a second, I thought there was going to be violence. No one had ever said that sort of thing to Mama before."

"What happened?" Gabrielle asked.

"Mama turned to me and said. 'Marry this girl, Jean-Sebastian, because you will be making a big mistake if you do not.'"

Harry and Gabrielle laughed.

"I always liked Jean's mother," Aimée said with a smile. "She had a wonderful directness about her and was quite willing to answer all my questions about Veela, and she was a huge help bringing up Fleur and Gabrielle."

"Sadly, she passed away last year," Jean sighed. "She had me late in life, and was very old."

"I'm sorry," Harry said softly.

Gabrielle placed her hand on his leg, stroking softly. "Mama and Nana were a lot alike," she said with a smile. "And when they would fight, which wasn't often, the only thing we could do was hide. Fleur and I would hide under Papa's desk."

"That's where you went?" Jean asked. "I'd always wondered. Personally, I would walk around the estates."

"We weren't that bad," Aimée protested.

No,” Jean agreed. “What was really bad about this and Gabrielle about about...” he trailed off, as if he suddenly realised he had said too much.

“About me wanting to go to Harry then,” Gabrielle finished softly.

“You know it wouldn’t have worked?” Harry asked softly, as he shifted so that he could look into her eyes.

“I do now,” she sighed. “Mama was right, but back then, I felt that all I would have to do is show up, you would understand, and we would move things into the bedroom.” She smiled wryly. “Explaining to a stubborn ten year old who hadn’t actually hit puberty yet that she was not ready, when she had all this knowledge in her head and overwhelming feelings in her body was not easy.”

“Impossible,” Aimée agreed with a smile.

“And we broke many vases in our arguments.”

“So it runs in the family then?”

“Not the entire family,” Jean said lightly.

“You will be staying for lunch?” Aimée asked with a smooth change of subject.

Harry nodded, “We have a practice this afternoon we need to be ready for.”

---

“How are you two doing?” Harry asked, as he handed Fred and George a bottle of water. “You’re spending more time here than the others are.”

Fred looked slightly guilty. “Well,” he said. “We might have hit on an untapped goldmine here.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah,” George agreed. “A whole school full of kids who don’t know what pranks are and have never had a need for our products before.”

“And this is why I’ve had to de-curse my food four times this week?”

“Yes,” Fred admitted. “We’re selling our products here, as the first bastion in our expansion into France. With Hermione, and now Gabrielle helping us speak the language, we’re a lot more comfortable with the idea of moving into Europe. Some of the seventh years have expressed an interest in coming to work for us when they leave.”

Harry nodded. “Good, do we need any more investment capital?”

“No,” George replied. “We’ve been putting aside twenty-five percent of our profits to fund future expansion.”

“And if we hadn’t done that, we would have paid you more than the Cannons,” Fred grinned.

“I know,” Harry admitted. “I’ve been paying close attention to your financial statements. What have you guys been thinking in regards to floating a stock offering on the stock exchange?”

“We don’t want to do it, if we can avoid it,” George said seriously. “We don’t like the fact that we’d have to answer to others. Our business is reliant on Fred and I taking risks, and adding a layer would ruin the ability we have to move fast. Sure, it might make us a lot of money, but money isn’t everything.”

“But you are our partner,” Fred said, his face just as serious. “And we’re willing to listen if you have differing advice.”

“Relax,” Harry said with a smile. “I agree. If you need the cash, I’ll supply it as a low-rate loan.”

Fred and George looked at each other and then laughed.

“You had us worried for a minute, mate,” George said.

“Yeah,” Fred agreed, fanning himself down.

“Hey, guys,” Oliver said as he walked into the room. “How’s it going?”

“Great,” George replied. “We’re looking at expanding to France.”

“Sounds like a good idea,” Katie said, as she walked in. “And look who I found wandering around like lost kittens.”

“Angelina, Alicia,” Harry said in surprise. “What brings you two to France?”

“Officially, we’re ‘just visiting friends’,” Angelina said.

“And unofficially?”

“We’re here to help.”

“You are?”

“The Falmouth Falcons have noticed that the Cannons and the Harpies are getting a lot of good publicity with Katie and Ollie helping you out. And with Flint and the Wigtown Wanderers making some wild claims, we were unofficially ordered to see if we could help out.”

“Oh man, I’m getting chills,” Oliver said. “The best team Gryffindor ever produced back together again.”

“And that gives me an idea,” Harry said slowly.

“Oh?” Fred asked.

“Don’t ask,” George advised. “He’s got that ‘I’m going to do something obscure that will pay off in a few weeks time’ look he gets.”

“True,” Fred agreed.

Harry just smiled and walked over to the Floo. “Olympe,” he called.

“Yes, Harry?”

“How’s your school budget?”

“Tight,” she said without breaking into a smile.

“Break it,” he replied. “And bring six Galleons down here.”

“I’ll see what I can do,” Olympe said dryly.

“Six Galleons?” Ollie asked. “We all earn more than that in a minute.”

“Of course,” Harry smiled. “Like George said, I’m just planning ahead.”

“Right,” Katie said dryly. “We’ll leave you three to talk about things – they’re ready with their magical promises – while we go and get tonight’s practice going.”

“Okay, get Gabby to practice her feinting.”

“So,” Angelina asked as the others moved out. “What’s so secret that you need our magical promises?”

“If you could first…” Harry said.

“Oh, right.”

The two witches cast the charm.

“It all began eight years ago…”

---

“Harry!” Oliver yelled. “Can I borrow you for a few minutes?”

“Take a break, Gabrielle,” Harry said with a smile and swooped down and over to the Keeper.

Gabrielle watched him go with a smile and looked around the Quidditch pitch. Angelina and Alicia were chatting as they flew around the perimeter, picking up the Quaffles they had been using for practice.

Katie was removing some accuracy charms from the goals. Without really thinking about it, she drifted over to the older girl.

“Hi, Gabrielle. You’re beginning to look really good,” Katie said cheerfully.

“Thank you,” she said with a smile. “Can I talk to you for a few minutes?”

“Sure,” Katie replied and waved her wand at the remaining goal. They dropped to the ground and walked into Harry’s office.

“What’s up?” Katie asked, as she perched on the end of the desk.

Gabrielle wet her lips nervously. “You know about the bond I have with Harry? And that I’ve had it for eight years? It has allowed me to see snapshots of Harry’s life when he was growing up.”

“Uh-huh,” Katie said, her body language changing, becoming defensive.

“Well, some things have not been making sense to me,” she said slowly. “You seemed overly protective of Harry, beyond mere friendship, and well, something about you pulls at the bond.” She looked up and met Katie’s eyes. “Are you the other woman Harry slept with?”

Katie slowly turned red and stumbled into a chair. She lowered her head into her hands.

Katie?" Gabrielle asked, moving closer to her. She hadn't expected her question to have this sort of response.

"What has Harry told you?"

"He confirmed what I already knew – that he had slept with four women, but nothing else. He tried to dissimulate, saying that there were only three, as he'd taken pains to keep the fourth relationship secret," Gabrielle replied. "But whenever he was intimate with someone I would know – the bond would make me sick and listless, and I would lie in bed all day terrified that I was about to lose Harry before I even had a chance to see him as my Mate."

Katie nodded and smiled bitterly. "He kept our relationship secret," she agreed. "How much do you know about what happened between us?"

"From Harry? Nothing."

Katie ran her fingers through her hair. "It started so well," she said softly, almost to herself. "We met up one night in a bar. He wanted to get out for an evening; I was out with my team mates. My date took one look at Melissa, my Veela friend, and left me in a heartbeat. Harry and I got talking, comparing bad dates, and at the end of the evening, he walked me home. We were both a little tipsy. I invited him in, but you can guess what Harry said."

"No," Gabrielle offered.

"Exactly," she sighed. "But we saw each other again, either in my house in Somerset, or his apartment in London." Katie paused and looked at Gabrielle. "Do you know anything about what happened?"

"I would get images and feelings from Harry, whenever he was feeling intense emotions. Never enough to see who or what was truly happening." Gabrielle paused and then said softly. "You have a Quaffle tattooed on your lower back, and you seemed to prefer having him in that position, while he preferred being face to face."

"The sensations were much more intense like that," Katie explained. "It was incredible for a while. And then I blew it."

"What do you mean?"

The tears were now flowing freely down Katie's face. "I've done a lot of things I'm not proud of. But I have never been with a married man, and I have never cheated in a relationship. And I expect the same from my man." She paused. "It was the week before the League Cup final. I accused Harry of cheating on me."

"We cared for each other, you know, but we just never seemed to connect – the only thing that was good was the sex. So I figured that he was just using me. It drove me crazy – I knew that there had to be someone else. I was so bent out of shape that I even accused him of betraying his friendship with Ron by 'shagging Hermione on the side.'"

"I do not imagine that went over well," Gabrielle said with a sigh.

"He should have hit me – instead he just gave me this very hurt look. I knew it was over," Katie said. "I would have done anything to take those words back as soon as I had said them."

"It was not your fault."

Katie said nothing.

"He still cares for you, you know," Gabrielle continued. "After the World Cup, when he was in the hospital, he hoped that you would visit him. That was the only time he cried," she finished, trailing off.

"I never apologised to him, you know? And when he invited me here, in a way, it was worse. Because all I felt from him was friendship." She looked up. "I should apologise to you, too."

"Why?" Gabrielle asked frankly.

"For touching what was obviously yours," Katie said, looking down at the floor. "For causing you such pain."

"You did not know, you could not have known. But if it makes you feel better, I forgive you," Gabrielle said gently. "After all, you were right, in a way."

"How's that?"

"There ~~was~~ another woman. Unfortunately, Harry hadn't the faintest notion who I was at the time."

"Well, now he does. I know him well enough to see that he's smitten with you."

"I make him sick?" Gabrielle asked, confused.

"Sorry, that didn't translate well – Harry is in love with you," Katie said.

"And you wish that you were in my place?"

Katie closed her eyes and nodded. "He's not like other men, is he? He could make my blood heat up with a look, and what made it so effective is

that he had no idea he was doing it. He is so beautiful; it comes from inside him, but that Quidditch body really helps. I miss him, but now I realise that I never really had him.”

Gabrielle took a deep breath. She knew what Harry would want her to do in this situation, so despite the fact that she had not voluntarily touched anyone not bound to her by blood or magic in eight years, she moved to Katie’s side and embraced the crying brunette.

They were silent for the longest while. No further words were necessary.

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“Fred, George,” Gabrielle called.

“You rang, oh protected one?”

Gabrielle arched an eyebrow.

“We talked to Bill,” Fred said with a grin. “It took him two pairs of underwear to get over whatever Harry threatened him with.”

She laughed softly. “I wanted to ask you two a favour. Will you help us out with our Beauxbatons move?”

“What do you want us to do?” George asked. His voice was friendly but non-committal.

“We’re going to need special effects, fireworks and explosions to make everything more dramatic. Paying for it isn’t a problem, but I need help teaching the lower years how to use them, and how to create their own.”

“You want us to work with hundreds of children and teach them how to use our products?” Fred questioned.

She nodded.

“How much do you want us to pay for the opportunity?”

“Excuse me?” she asked.

Fred smiled. “This is going to be a huge opportunity to advertise our products, the world’s press will be watching, and it’s going to give us a huge boost in sales. And we’ll also have the kids used to using our stuff, so future sales will come to us a well. This is a dream; a chance of a lifetime.”

Gabrielle laughed and shook her head. “Just agree to help.”

“You had that before you asked,” George said. “So we’ll provide our expertise and products free of charge. This sort of thing doesn’t happen very often.”

“Thank you. Although,” she looked down and faked being nervous. “I do have some bad news for you.”

“What?” they asked in unison.

“You’re going to have to be assistant professors to do this. Which means that you two clowns are going to become part of the establishment!”

Gabrielle would never forget the look of abject horror that appeared on their identical faces.

---

Gabrielle smiled to herself as she looked at the sea of faces in front of her. Fred and George were to her left, and Harry was to her right. Before her were the students from each year, as well as the headmistress and a few selected professors. Professor Idiot had not been invited.

“Thank you all for coming,” she said slowly. “We are here to tell you exactly how we are going to get to Hogwarts for the upcoming Quidditch Tournament.”

She could see a ripple of excitement run through the crowd of students. She paused to allow the tension to grow.

“We are going to work together to transport Beauxbatons to Hogwarts, in one piece.”

There was a silence from in front of them, before an explosion of noise erupted as everyone tried to shout out questions at once.

Harry took a step forward next to her and raised his hand.

Everyone, including the Professors, quickly quietened.

Gabrielle shot him a grateful look. “There will be three stages to this audacious bit of magic. We will have to work together to do it.

“The first through fourth years will work with our two new assistant professors. Your job will be to create display magic with them to make our entrance as spectacular as possible.

“The senior students will work with me to allow us to actually move Beauxbatons.”

“And the third part?” Claude yelled.



Professor Potter will make a hole in Hogwarts' wards that we can use to get in."

"Can you even do that?" a lone voice asked into the silence.

"Yes," Harry said simply, with a self-belief that made everyone in the room nod, as if he hadn't just admitted to being able to do the impossible.

"It is important that this be a secret," Gabrielle continued. "We want everyone to think that we will be travelling by carriage, so that it will be a complete surprise. So no talking about it to anyone else, not even your parents. This is for the pride of France, and we will show that we are as good as any other school in the world!"

Claude was the first to his feet, with a loud cheer that the others soon took up.

She waited until they had calmed down a little. "So, lower school to the left, upper school to the right; let's get started."

She walked with Harry over to the senior students. They all pulled up their chairs and sat waiting for her.

She reached out and uncovered a board she had prepared earlier. On it was a magical representation of Beauxbatons and all of its grounds.

"With Professor Potter's help, I have worked out the logistics for the transportation of the school to Scotland, in the north of the United Kingdom. It is not as simple as just moving the building and its contents.

"We first have to create a giant bubble around Beauxbatons. This will be the job of the fifth and sixth years. This bubble encloses us in a protective field so that any external motion will not affect the internal. For everyone inside the bubble, there will be no feeling of motion at all." She waved her wand at the board and a giant circle appeared around the castle which then floated up, leaving a large hole in the ground.

"The seventh years will be in charge of actually moving this huge bubble to Hogwarts." The castle then floated across the paper and vanished.

"The bubble is, of course, invisible to Muggles. However, Witches and Wizards will be able to see it and actually see through it."

"Question!" Henri asked loudly. "Has this ever been done before?"

"Not quite on this scale," Gabrielle replied.

"On what scale has it been done?"

She looked at Harry, who smiled slightly. "Gabrielle and I floated a small children's toy this morning with it."

"A toy?" Henri asked. "And you want to move Beauxbatons?"

"The theory is sound," Gabrielle said firmly. "And once you have the theory, all you need to do is practice and put the effort in."

"Gabrielle, you are insane," Claude sighed. "But this is why we accepted that you would be Head Girl this year. Do you think we can do it, honestly?"

She drew herself up to her full height, which wasn't as intimidating as she might have liked, and looked at them all openly. "I would not have suggested it if I had not thought that we could do it and do it well. I will not have Hogwarts and Durmstrang look down at us as they have in the past. We will turn up in style, we will play Quidditch as it is supposed to be played, and we will represent France in a way that she can be proud of!"

"Gabrielle is right," Harry said firmly. "If you work together, you can do anything. Magic is as much about belief as it is about ability. I believe in you – we believe in you!"

"We won't let you down," Claude said, after the students finished clapping and cheering.

"I know," Gabrielle replied. "So, ready to learn some new magic that will make Beauxbatons world famous?"

---

"Marjolaine?"

"Good evening, Sibyll."

"What can I do for you?"

"Something is happening, and I was wondering if you knew what it was?"

"What do you mean?"

"There was a whole school meeting run by that stuck-up little Delacour brat."

"Tell me, why do you not like her?" Sibyll Trelawney asked as she sipped on a cup of mint tea.

"She is a spoilt, arrogant little child who should not be Head Girl. Just because her father is the famous Jean-Sebastian Delacour, she has been given special privileges."

Sibyll shrugged. "Happens over here as well. Draco Malfoy, for example, was only stopped from being expelled a time or two because his father

was on the board of directors. So, what happened in this meeting?"

"I do not know," Marjolaine Prévoyez complained. "I was not allowed to participate. Ever since that bloody Potter turned up, it has been horrendous here. All the students worship him, and I receive no respect anymore. I think it might have had something to do with the Quidditch Tournament."

"He has no respect for the value of our teaching," Sibyll said coldly. "It is a mistake he will pay for. However, Albus did mention that the Beauxbatons was hoping to arrive without using the flying carriages they arrived in last time."

"It would be a shame if they couldn't," Marjolaine said with a slow smile.

"Absolutely," Sibyll agreed, matching the smile. "Embarrassing. Especially if I pass on a few rumours to the press that Potter is behind it – and when nothing happens, seeds of doubt will be placed."

"Will the English press do that?"

"Oh, absolutely," Sibyll said with a wave of her hand. "The English press like to build people up and then destroy them. It fills a deep seated need in the English psyche for people to be reminded of their proper place."

"I'll do what I can to sabotage it," Marjolaine said.

"Be careful, though," Sibyll warned. "Potter's not as innocent as he once was, and if he finds out about it, he might take some direct action."

"He is still only human," Prévoyez sniffed. "I shall be careful."

---

"Opinions?" Harry asked, as the seven of them sat and relaxed. It was nearly ten o'clock, and they had been working with the kids for four hours straight, before sending them to eat and sleep.

"You know," Oliver said slowly. "They're actually doing okay. They've been through some brutal training, Gabrielle more than anyone else, but they've really worked at it. I've got to say that I'm impressed."

"We are, too," Angelina said. "Katie had already got them on the right path, and we've been able to turn them into some good Chasers."

"And Claude and Henri are becoming really violent," George said happily, rubbing his hands together.

"Almost enthusiastically so," he grinned. "We regaled them with stories of how the Slytherins used to play, and mentioned how they will be targeting Gabrielle. They didn't like that idea. They're very protective of her."

"Good," Harry grunted. "Gabrielle has improved – as I knew she would. Now that she's got over her fear of the broom, she would give most of the league a run for their money."

"Can we recruit her?" Katie asked. "We could do with a new Seeker."

"You can try," Harry laughed. "But I think you'll find that she doesn't want to play professional."

"And she wouldn't play against Harry," Angelina pointed out.

"Yeah," Fred agreed with a smirk. "I can just see that, the two of them racing for the snitch, and both of them trying to make sure that the other got it."

The door opened and Gabrielle walked in. She walked over to Harry and held out her hands.

Harry smiled and pulled her down into his lap. Gabrielle yawned hugely. "So, are we ready?"

"You are," Oliver said.

"Thank Merlin," she sighed. "Another night like that will kill us."

"Angelina, Alicia, Katie, and Oliver are going to help with the Magic on Friday."

"Oh, good," Gabrielle smiled at them gratefully. "We're going to need all the help we can get."

"No problem," Alicia said with a smile. "But is there any way we can persuade you to turn professional?"

"At Quidditch?"

"Yep."

"No," she said with a small laugh. "I am going to have a career where I can travel with Harry around the world when he goes on tour. Having a different schedule would not work."

"You are really good, though," Katie pointed out.

"But it is not entirely fair," Gabrielle replied. "I get a lot of it from Harry; I'm pretty sure that the bond we have has been helping us along, giving me

some of his Quidditch skills.”

“I don’t think so,” Harry said. “As far as I can tell, it’s natural. If that were true, you’d be a lot better at the Wronski feint and a lot worse at the Banka-Chucka turn.”

Gabrielle turned in his arms to look at him. “Really?”

He nodded. “Sorry to tell you this, but it’s your hard work and talent that’s got you this far.”

She looked at him, her deep blue eyes clear and wide, digging into his soul. “So you are proud of me?”

“Very much so,” he whispered.

She leaned up and kissed him with incredible softness and tenderness, her hands cupping his face.

George coughed loudly, causing both of them to look up.

“Sorry,” he said, looking apologetic. “But you two are making the rest of us feel inadequate.”

“What?” Harry asked.

Fred laughed softly. “What my darling brother means, no matter how badly he put that, is that we’re normal humans, not fairy tale characters.”

“I am confused,” Gabrielle said with a small pout that took all of Harry’s willpower not to kiss.

“The emotionally constipated twins over there are trying to say that that was beautiful,” Katie said with a forced smile. “And it is the sort of thing normally seen in books, not in person, and we’re all slightly jealous.”

“Sorry,” Harry apologised.

“Oh, don’t be,” Angelina said firmly. “You deserve the fairy tale, both of you.”

“Don’t expect me to say anything,” Oliver said with a smile. “I’m with the constipated twins over there.”

“So I heard,” Angelina said icily. “Just how many groupies did you sleep with last year?”

“I lost count,” Oliver replied levelly.

“As always,” Angelina snorted.

“Oh,” Gabrielle said, before the conversation could deteriorate further. “I need some advice.”

“On what?” Katie asked.

“I need to get a present for Hogwarts and Durmstrang. It’s tradition. I just don’t know what to buy them.”

“Harry,” Angelina said. “Why don’t you take her to Milan, to the magic shops there? They have all sorts of rare artefacts.”

“Good idea,” Harry said.

“And you can have dinner as well,” Alicia said cheerfully. “You two have been working too hard and not spending enough time with each other romantically.”

“Is this normal?” Gabrielle asked Harry. “That everyone orders you to go out on dates?”

“I’m notorious for missing the point,” Harry smiled easily. “So they are just trying to help.”

“But our date was perfect,” Gabrielle pointed out firmly.

“And that was several weeks ago,” Katie said dryly. “And since then, all the two of you have done is work, work, work.”

“But I’ve learnt so much,” Gabrielle protested. “I’ve learnt new moves, new magic, and discovered one of the things that makes Harry so powerful.”

“Spoken like a true academic,” George said in mock-disgust. “We, on the other hand, want to hear stories about kisses that take your breath away and hands inappropriately placed – you know, the good stuff.”

“I’m sure it has slipped your notice,” Gabrielle said with a smile. “But I *am* Veela, and Harry *is* my Mate. So categorically there is no such thing as inappropriately placed hands.”

“Damn it, I need to date a Veela,” Oliver said enviously.

“Sadly, Ollie,” Katie pointed out, “Veela are also intelligent, and would run away if they saw you coming.”

“Moving on,” Harry interrupted the nascent argument. “I’ll talk to Olympe later and get permission to take Gabrielle tomorrow.”

"We're going to have tomorrow off," Angelina said for the others. "And then we'll come back Friday morning and spend the day helping out."

"Yeah," Oliver agreed. "The press interest in these matches is astronomical now that so many professionals are involved, and the Cannons have bulk-booked a load of seats."

"How many people are planning on turning up?" Harry asked.

"Oh," Fred said with another laugh. "I forgot, Harry doesn't read the papers, does he?"

"No," George agreed. "He doesn't know."

"Know what?"

"That they've increased the size of the stands at Hogwarts."

"They now hold seventy-five thousand people."

Gabrielle gulped audibly.

"You'll be fine," Harry said quietly, rubbing her arms softly. "I promise." He could feel her relax against him, and he turned back for the twins. "Seventy-five thousand people?"

"The press have been billing it as the future of Quidditch. All of France is behind Beauxbatons, all of Germany is behind Durmstrang, and well, England is divided."

"It is?"

"Yeah," Oliver laughed. "There are so many Gryffindors helping out France, that people are asking questions about exactly what is going on at Hogwarts, and a lot of people have switched alliances for the duration, claiming that France led by Harry Potter is at least slightly English. Enough to cheer for, at any rate."

"And our entrance is going to make a bigger splash, isn't it?" Harry said with a slight smile.

"Rumour has it," Fred said, "that Dumbledore has been telling the press about how much they will enjoy your carriages."

"How do you know that?" Katie asked.

"Percy's been the Ministry official in charge at Hogwarts for the duration," Fred said casually. "We gave him a few clues about what has been happening, and he's pounced on it."

"In what way?" Gabrielle asked.

Fred looked at George, and then at the others in the room. Slowly, one by one, they all nodded.

"Percy's part of Harry's crew," George said simply.

"My crew?" Harry asked suspiciously.

"A generation of people who watched you grow up, some of whom took part in the D.A., who helped at the final battle, who know that if the shit ever approaches the fan again, you'll be the first person in line with the umbrella. It's well known that you and Dumbledore don't get on, so everyone's been keeping an eye on him."

"We're mainly the young ones," George continued. "The people who were brought up to revere Dumbledore, but who have managed to think for ourselves and seen the manipulation and incompetence that cost us so much during the war – and how at the end, he didn't even turn up for the final battle."

"Why didn't I know about this?" Harry demanded.

"You didn't need to," Katie said. "It was never anything that formal. It was just a few old friends keeping in touch with each other. It was Neville who coined the name down the pub one night."

"So, Percy's been watching what is going on in Hogwarts, and how Dumbledore is playing games, and he has been encouraging it. It was his suggestion that the press be invited to help welcome all the schools, and Dumbledore agreed that it was a perfect idea."

"And when we show up in grand style everyone will be there to see it," Angelina finished.

Harry shook his head slowly. "So, I have a secret army?"

"Yep," Oliver said. "Loyal to you, my friend, and because you can only get in by invitation by several other members, and everyone swears the old D.A. pledge, it's stayed silent. Katie recruited me, Angelina, and Alicia a few years ago."

"Ron and Hermione?"

"Know nothing about it, at all," Fred said proudly.

“What?” Harry asked, shocked.

“They’re your closest friends,” George said. “They don’t need to be in it; they’re already on your side.”

“Wow,” Gabrielle whispered.

“Yeah,” Harry nodded in complete agreement. “Wow. I’m impressed you’ve kept it a secret from Hermione.”

Fred shrugged. “It wasn’t difficult; most of our meetings are down the pub with a few beers – not the sort of place you’d normally find her. She’s clueless.”

“As is our darling brother,” George agreed. “Charlie’s in; Bill isn’t - yet.”

“So don’t worry, Harry,” Oliver added with a grin as he stood. “You might think you’ll be going to Hogwarts on your own, but there will be a lot of people who have your back. And that’s why we agreed to tell you about it tonight. You’re going back to Hogwarts, and you need to know you have this resource available.”

“Now,” Fred said, as he, too, got to his feet. “I want to hear stories tomorrow about wandering hands. You two spend some time kissing each other goodnight and have fun in Italy tomorrow.”

“Bye,” the others said as they trooped out.

Harry leaned back and laughed softly as he watched them all leave.

“You have some very good friends there, Harry,” Gabrielle said softly.

“Better friends than I thought they were,” he agreed. “More so because they left me alone when I needed to be left alone.”

“And you should take their advice.”

“What advice?” he asked as she turned in his lap again.

She leaned forward and kissed him slowly. “The bit about the breath-taking kisses and the wandering hands,” she whispered against his lips.

His answer was muffled as she kissed him again.

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“We might not be back tonight,” Harry said to Olympe. “We’re going out for dinner after we do some shopping.”

Olympe nodded. “I would make some comments about Gabrielle’s grades, but as they have remained perfect throughout, there would be little point. Just don’t bankrupt the school with the gifts. Gabrielle’s tastes are exemplary, if somewhat expensive.”

Harry smiled slightly. “Don’t worry; I’m sure that what we buy will be within the school budget.”

Olympe nodded. “I must say, that you have exceeded my wildest expectations this year, and I am incredibly grateful. You have worked harder than any other teacher with the children, and they, especially the Quidditch teams, adore you. You’ve never treated any of them like children, and they have responded to that.

“Of course, some of the staff, led by Madame Prévoyez, are jealous about your rapport,” she noted judiciously, “but I am keeping a close eye on them.”

Harry nodded. “She still sets me on edge,” he sighed. “I’m not sure what it is about her, but something doesn’t seem right. And I don’t think it’s because she reminds me of Trelawney back at Hogwarts.”

“I will look further into her past; you have excellent instincts, Harry, and are not one to hold a grudge for no reason.”

There was a knock on the door and Gabrielle entered. She was wearing the pale blue robes of Beauxbatons.

“Ready?” Harry asked.

“I am,” she replied. “We will find it easier to get out of school today; everyone knows that we are going shopping for the school presents, so we do not have to hide.”

Harry nodded and looked at Olympe. “We’ll see you later.”

“Have fun,” she said with a smile.

Harry nodded and walked out with Gabrielle, resisting the urge to touch her. “Do you have any ideas?” he asked.

She shook her head. “I am hoping that inspiration will strike me as we look around.”

They moved through the school to the Apparation point, and as it was empty, Harry pulled Gabrielle against him and Apparated them both to Milan.

As soon as they arrived, Harry pulled Gabrielle against him and kissed her deeply.

She reached up and wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him back, making small contented sounds in the back of her throat.

He broke the kiss and smiled at her.

"What do I have to do to get more of that?" she exhaled with a bright smile.

"Be yourself," he laughed softly.

"I cannot be anything other than Gabrielle," she smiled. She reached up and kissed him gently. "Thank you."

"You never need to thank me for that; in fact, you shouldn't," he whispered. "I enjoyed it just as much you did."

Her smile seemed to say that she disagreed, but she would not push the matter. She took a step away from him, undid the buttons on her robes, and then quickly shrank them. Underneath she was wearing jeans and a t-shirt, the standard attire that Harry normally wore when they went out.

"We're going to have to get you a new dress," he said thoughtfully as he shrugged off his professor's robes and revealed the dark suit he was wearing.

Gabrielle looked horrified at the fact that she was inappropriately dressed.

"We're going to go somewhere for dinner, afterwards," he said, "and no, I didn't tell you beforehand, because I want to buy you something. You'll need something for Hogwarts, and if I can't dance with you, I'll at least know that you are wearing something of mine."

"Oh," she said and seemed to be thinking hard.

"No thinking, Gabby," he said with a smile. "You've been taking the lead in this relationship, today it's my turn."

"Yes, Harry," she replied instantly. "But you do not have to do this; I do not care about your money or anything."

He reached out and lightly tapped her nose. "No arguments, Gabby. I know you're not after money, but as I have it, and I want to spend it on you, we'll be doing just that. Now, let's go shopping," he said with a smile. He reached up and cast a concealing charm on his scar and cast the seeing-spell in front of his eyes, placing his glasses in his pocket.

"You are in disguise?" Gabrielle asked with a teasing look.

"I am," he agreed. "I'm just a normal wizard out on a date with the most beautiful girl in the world." He smiled as Gabrielle flushed at his praise. It had taken him long enough to get around to flirting back with her, and he was preparing to show her the best time he could tonight.

He wrapped an arm around her and they walked into the busy street and soon entered an odd-looking shop. It reminded him of some of the seedier shops he had seen in Knockturn Alley. It was filled with magical items that were making his Dark Magic detector go mad; it seemed like nearly half of everything in here had been used for dark purposes in the past.

He walked around, looking for something that they could give Hogwarts. He wasn't sure what was appropriate to give as a gift for a school. He picked up one item and examined it closely, it looked like a foe-glass, but the magical signature was difficult. He looked through it and dropped it quickly, feeling a blush form on his cheeks.

"What is it?" Gabrielle asked.

"It – uh – allows you to see through clothes," he mumbled.

"Oh," she grinned and took a few steps back and held her hands out wide. "Or is there a different pose you would like me in?" she asked, as she turned her back on him and bent forward at the waist.

He scowled at her, fighting a blush. She laughed delightedly and moved up to him and kissed him on the side of the mouth. "I don't mind *you* looking," she reminded him in a whisper, before drifting off to look at another aisle.

He looked at the glass on the counter and had to fight the urge to do as she had suggested.

He let Gabrielle look around, keeping slightly away from her and watched as she looked through the items on display. The store keeper came up to her and they were soon involved in a fast moving conversation in Italian. He caught small bits of it, and it seemed like she was arguing with him over one of the pieces.

Eventually, the store keeper raised his hands in defeat, and Gabrielle smiled widely at him.

"This will be perfect for Durmstrang," she said, indicating an antique telescope in front of her. "It was made by one of their first Head Boys after he left in the seventeenth century. There are only a few left."

"How much?"

She winced slightly. "I managed to get him down to only three thousand Galleons."

"I don't think that Olympe was planning on spending that much."

“She might not be,” Gabrielle sniffed. “But I am. I’ll give her a smaller bill later. We will not look cheap,” she noted firmly.

Harry smiled and took the telescope to the counter, handing over his own debit card. The storekeeper ran it through a small box and held the box up to Harry. He pressed his thumb against it and felt the magic swirl around him, as his identity was verified.

“Thank you, Mr Black,” the storekeeper said in broken English.

Harry smiled and nodded at him. “Can you ask him to send it to Beauxbatons?”

Gabrielle nodded and spoke to the storekeeper in rapid-fire Italian. As she finished, she turned and put her hands on her hips. “I *said* that I was going to pay for that,” she reminded him.

“You did,” Harry agreed, as he slid his arm through hers and pulled her against him.

“You are trying to *distract* me,” she sighed.

He guided her outside and paused to kiss her softly. “Is it working?”

“But of course,” she said with a small pout. “But it is unfair.”

“Probably, but do you think you don’t have that power over me?”

“What do you mean?”

He looked at her seriously. “I can be distracted by you as well, Gabrielle. It might not be a magical edict, but my heart can be affected by you, all the same.”

She blinked at him and he could see the confusion in her eyes.

“Close your eyes,” he commanded.

Almost before he had finished the sentence, her eyes were closed.

“I know what power I have over you,” he said as he ran his fingers over her shoulder and into her hair. “I know what the Mating has done to your free will. I don’t like it, but I know, and I promise not to abuse it.”

“You would never abuse it,” Gabrielle said with complete faith. “But I am glad that you know.”

“I told you,” he said with a smile. “I did some research about Veela.”

“I did not think that you knew,” she confessed. “I thought I would have to tell you later.”

“You can open your eyes again,” he said casually. “Now let’s find something for Hogwarts.”

Gabrielle nodded, and they started to walk further down the stone pavement. “The storekeeper said Mr Black? After Sirius?”

“Yep,” Harry nodded. “I have a second legal identity to allow me to have a degree of anonymity when I am shopping. Harry Potter buying up as much of Merlin’s diaries as can be found is big news. Harry Black doing the same is not.”

Gabrielle stood still, lost in thought.

“What are you thinking?” Harry asked.

“Does this mean that I get to marry you twice?” she asked with an impish smile.

Harry laughed. “Possibly, but we’ll deal with that when the time comes.”

“I noticed that you used a Wizard Debit Card?” Gabrielle asked, smoothly changing the subject.

“Yep, I was one of the first people to get one. I was fed up with carrying money around all the time. The Goblins did a fantastic job with it. It works like a normal Muggle card when I need it to.”

“You have a good relationship with the Goblins?”

“I’ve found that if you’re polite with them, then they are willing to be the same to you. And of course the fact that I have a lot of money with them makes me an important customer. I tend to take their advice a lot and pay them handsomely for it.”

“Do you have any ideas about what we should get Hogwarts?” she asked, as she looked around at the small shops.

“Not really,” Harry admitted. “I don’t want to get anything that endorses Dumbledore in any way.”

“Have you considered making something for them?”

Like what?" he asked curiously.

"You can manipulate the wards, correct?"

He nodded.

"How about a device that will create an Apparation point for them?"

"Good idea, I can attach it to something, and they can activate it wherever they want. If I do it tomorrow morning, it will be good practice for allowing Beauxbatons through the wards."

She smiled. "So, now what?"

"Now we go and get you a new dress for dinner."

"Where do you want to go?"

"That should be the question I ask you," Harry grinned. "You like designer clothing, and we are in Milan."

"Versace?" she asked hopefully.

He laughed softly. "You know where their boutique is?"

"But of course," she smiled. "I have watched Fleur be fitted many times – and grudgingly been done myself."

"Why grudgingly?"

"What was the point of looking my best when you were not there to see it?" she asked seriously. "I had no wish to be attractive for anyone else."

He nodded slowly, and they walked out of the magical area of Milan and into the Muggle section.

"Are they open this late?" Harry asked.

"For customers like us, they are always open," Gabrielle replied confidently.

She knocked firmly on a black door that only a small golden plaque indicated that it was a boutique. The windows at the front had thick curtains, blocking the sight of the inside from outside.

The door opened and an elderly gentleman looked out. He said something in Italian and started to close the door.

Gabrielle replied in more rapid-fire Italian, her voice cold and forceful.

The old man shrugged and said something over his shoulder.

A younger woman of about forty appeared and took one look at Gabrielle before opening the door fully.

"Little Gabrielle!" the woman cried in French. "It is so good to see you again."

"It is good to see you again as well, Madame Valerio," Gabrielle replied. "Madame Valerio, I would like for you to meet Harry Black. Harry, this is the owner of the boutique, Madame Valerio."

"Charmed," Madame Valerio said, as she held out her hand.

Harry smiled faintly and bowed his head, lightly kissing the back of her hand. "It is a pleasure," he said.

"Come in," she ordered. "Drinks, Lucio, and make it quick."

The elderly Italian man grumbled under his breath as he wandered out of the brightly lit room.

"Now, what can I do for you?"

"I need an outfit for tonight," Gabrielle said cheerfully.

"And you are here through choice?" Madame Valerio asked in surprise.

"I have never needed to look good before. I do now," she replied, glancing in Harry's direction. "What do you have?"

"If you would take a seat, Mr Black," Madame Valerio said, gesturing toward a comfortable-looking chair to one side. "We shall get started."

Harry sat and crossed his legs comfortably.

"I do not understand why you are small when all your family is tall," Madame Valerio mumbled offhandedly as she walked around Gabrielle, measuring expertly.

"My aunt was small," Gabrielle said with a shrug. "I got it from her." She threw a quick wink at Harry.



He smiled at her and accepted the cup of black coffee from Lucio.

Madame Valerio clapped her hands loudly and called out some orders in Italian. Two girls who looked to be in their mid-twenties came out and both gave him appraising looks that he ignored. They listened for a second and then vanished, returning a few minutes later with arms laden with dresses.

“Do you want to...?” Madame Valerio asked, indicating a small dressing room.

“Oh no,” Gabrielle replied, “as long as Lucio isn’t around.”

“You are still a peculiar one,” Madame Valerio said with an amused look. “And Mr Black must be special.”

“Very,” Gabrielle confirmed as she pulled off her t-shirt, leaving her upper body clad only in her bra.

“You are a very lucky girl, Gabrielle,” Madame Valerio said with a sigh. “I know many girls who would kill for your looks and figure.”

Gabrielle smiled indifferently. “All that matters is that Harry likes me,” she said.

“It is love, then?”

Gabrielle looked over her shoulder directly at Harry, and smiled at him softly. “Oh yes,” she whispered.

He smiled back at her.

Madame Valerio walked around Gabrielle slowly and looked at the clothes on the rack. “Take your jeans off, child.”

Gabrielle kicked off her shoes and undid her jeans, bending at the waist as she slid them down her legs.

Harry swallowed hard, positive that the position she chose had absolutely everything to do with the fact that it gave him a perfect view of her delectable derriere.

Madame Valerio chose a dress and said a few sharp words to the assistants, who took the rest away.

“Step,” the elderly woman ordered brusquely, holding the dress in front of Gabrielle, who stepped into it obediently.

Madame Valerio raised the dress up Gabrielle’s body and expertly fastened the shoulders and the back.

Gabrielle turned and looked at Harry, spreading her arms so that he could have a perfect view of her.

“Wow,” he said as he whistled under his breath. The dress was a shade or two darker than her blond hair and appeared to be made of a chiffon-like material. There was a band of material about nine inches high around her waist that gave the dress its shape, before it flared down from her hips, to just above her knees.

“You like?” Gabrielle asked.

“Absolutely,” he agreed.

“A man with taste,” Madame Valerio said approvingly. “I have shoes as well.” She shouted in Italian again, and one of the girls came back with some brown sandals.

Gabrielle crouched down and quickly put the shoes on, before standing. The heels added an extra couple of inches to her height and with the dress, they emphasised her legs.

“Madame Valerio is amazing,” Gabrielle said to Harry. “We are never in here long; she always chooses the right dress the first time for all her clientele.”

“It is a gift,” Madame Valerio said modestly.

“Are you going to be warm enough in that?” Harry asked.

“It is warm enough outside,” Gabrielle said reassuringly.

“And she will not want to hide beneath a coat,” Madame Valerio sniffed as she walked over to a small table with an old fashioned cash register on it.

Harry, recognising his cue, walked over, and handed her his card. She swiped it and handed him a key-pad, which he typed in his four-digit pin number. The authorisation went through immediately.

“Thank you,” Madame Valerio said.

“No,” Harry said, with a slight bow. “Thank you. Can you send Gabrielle’s clothes to her parents’ house for us?”

“Of course,” she said. “Lucio!” she yelled.

Gabrielle gave the Italian lady a quick hug and a kiss on both cheeks before leading Harry out of the door.

“Gabrielle?” Madame Valerio called. “Will you tell Fleur that my offer is still open?”

“I will,” Gabrielle replied as they walked out into the street.

“What offer?” Harry asked curiously.

“Madame Valerio would like Fleur to model for her.”

“Why not you? You are prettier than Fleur.”

“But I am too short,” Gabrielle said with a smile. “Models have to be a certain height.”

“Oh, right.”

“Besides,” Gabrielle continued. “I do not want others to look at me, only you.”

Harry nodded and took her hand in his. “Let’s go and eat,” he said.

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There was an almost visible excitement in the air as the students and professors gathered in the main hall at Beauxbatons.

Harry, along with Fred, George, Oliver, Katie, Angelina, and Alicia were talking in one corner of the room.

“May I have your attention please,” Madame Maxime said from the front, as she stood.

Everyone quickly went quiet and turned to face her.

“It is time,” she said simply. “Gabrielle?”

Gabrielle walked to the front of the school and turned to face the students. “Before we start,” she said formally, “I want to talk to you a bit about the expected behaviour during the Tournament. There has been a rash of pranks in Beauxbatons recently.” She could see some of the students’ faces drop. “I fully expect Beauxbatons’ students to show exemplary behaviour.” She paused deliberately before letting a small smile show on her face. “I also fully expect us to prove that we are not pushovers, and if we are pranked by the other schools, the pranks we do back will be *suitable* .”

There was a stunned silence from the students, as if they didn’t quite understand what she had said. “There will be some chances to attend a few lessons with the other schools. I would strongly recommend not participating in Potions or flying lessons from Hogwarts, or Defence lessons from Durmstrang. You will find that the professors and the syllabus are very different from what we teach.

“Professor Dumbledore, Professor Andropov and Madame Maxime have agreed that, for the duration of the tournament, all the professors will have equal disciplinary rights over the students, although each student will be punished or rewarded consistent with his or her school rules. So if you are going to play pranks, *do not get caught* !

“There will also be great deal of press interest in this event. We have agreed with the French National papers that you will only be interviewed with a professor present, and we have received reciprocal promises from Hogwarts and Durmstrang. This is for your own protection and any student found flouting this rule will be returned to France instantly.” She paused again to let the threat sink in. She was well aware of how Rita Skeeter had treated Harry and she wanted to make sure that none of the students had to go through a similar experience.

“We will arrive at nine in the evening, local time. The official opening ceremony will be tomorrow and will be held on the Quidditch pitch. Tonight, we will share a meal with Durmstrang and Hogwarts.

“Remember, when we are at Hogwarts, we are representing France as well as our beloved school. We will not let either down. We will act in the best possible way and we will show the world what we can do.”

She paused and took another deep breath. “Now,” she said with a bright smile at the students. “Are you ready to show the world what we can do?”

The ‘yes’ she got back was shouted at the top of their voices.

“Professor Potter,” she called.

Harry smiled slightly and walked up to the front of the school. “You remember what we have learnt?” he asked. He could see the eagerness in the faces of the pupils sitting before him.

“Where are the carriages?” Madame Prévoyez interrupted.

“We will not be taking them,” Gabrielle said. “Fifth...”

“Wait,” Madame Prévoyez interrupted again. “How are we getting there?”

“Magic,” Harry said and glared at her, causing her to go silent and back away out of sight.

Gabrielle smiled briefly. “Fifth and sixth years, begin.”

Row after row of students pulled out their wands and started to chant. The spell was in Latin and had been changed so that rather than each spell making an individual bubble, they all worked together to make a bigger one.

Harry reached out with his magic, checking the bubble as it grew, reinforcing it in a few small places as it continued to grow.

When it reached full height, he nodded at Gabrielle.

“Seventh years, lift,” she called.

The seventh years all made identical wand movements as they cast a similar spell to *Wingardium Leviosa* to make the huge castle fly.

“It’s not working,” Gabrielle frowned, an expression of concern crossing her face. “Again!” she called. “And don’t hold back.”

Harry paid close attention to the spells and the amount of magic involved. It should have been enough to lift even more than the amount they were planning. But something seemed to be blocking it.

He spread his arms wide and allowed his magic to soar into the sky. As he looked down, he could see the bubble, and he could also see something on top of it, holding it down.

He growled and traced the magic down to its source. As soon as he discovered the culprit, he returned to his body.

“*Stupefy*,” he snarled, casting a spell at Prévoyez.

Two things happened. The Professor flew back through the air and smashed against a wall, where she was held in place. And Beauxbatons started to rise into the air.

“Harry?” Olympe asked.

“She was holding us down,” Harry half-snarled. “She can stay there until we’ve landed safely.”

Olympe stormed over to the professor, a thunderous expression on her face. “You have had your final warning,” she said quietly. “Your employment at Beauxbatons is hereby terminated.”

“Oh,” Harry said. “If she’s no longer needed.” He waved his hand, and Prévoyez vanished.

“Harry,” Olympe said, as she looked at him. “I am not sure if I like your smile. What did you do to her?”

“Returned her to the Beauxbatons grounds,” Harry replied innocently.

“Harry?”

“Well, perhaps it might be more accurate to say, to the hole that we left behind,” he smirked. “It might take her a few hours of climbing through the mud to get out.”

There was a loud cheer from the younger students, the older ones being too busy keeping their spells intact to join in.

He smiled and turned back to Gabrielle.

Gabrielle looked at the ex-Gryffindor Quidditch Team. “If you’re ready?” she asked them.

They nodded, and they all cast the spell with Gabrielle, and Beauxbatons started on its journey to Hogwarts.

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Hermione clapped politely as the submerged ships vanished back beneath the water after the Durmstrang students had disembarked.

She was officially at the welcoming ceremony as Ron’s partner. With senior French and German politicians attending, Ron had been ordered to as well – an order he was more than happy to comply with.

Unofficially, she was in place to provide facts to the visiting journalists about Beauxbatons’ arrival. She had been a little miffed that she hadn’t been asked to help with such a huge scale magic project, but accepted that Gabrielle was more than capable of finding and modifying her own spells.

“Beauxbatons’ arrival should be any second now,” Dumbledore’s enhanced voice said over the chatter. The professors at Hogwarts had cast a large warming charm over the entire area so that the students from Durmstrang, Hogwarts, and the visitors could stand outside protected from the fast approaching Scottish winter.

“Over there!” Neville Longbottom’s voice, also enhanced, shouted, as he pointed to the east. In the distance, Hermione could just make out the shape of Beauxbatons as it moved toward them at a stately rate.

“That’s not a carriage,” Susan Longbottom, *nee* Bones, shouted. Hermione wasn’t exactly sure why half of her old friends were in the area. They all just seemed to coincidentally show up to help, and they all seemed to know what was going on.

“Sweet Merlin,” Ernie Macmillan yelled. “They’ve brought Beauxbatons with them!”

There was a huge upswing of noise as everyone turned. The press started to scribble rapidly, as the photographers started to take picture after picture.

“Did you know,” Hermione said casually, “that Beauxbatons weighs over one hundred and fifteen thousand tonnes, and that the amount of magic to move something so large represents one of the largest spells ever attempted in history?”

The press paused, looked at her, and then continued to scribble on their parchment. Behind them, presenters from the radio stations were describing the approaching in tones of awe.

“The idea came from Gabrielle Delacour, the Head Girl at Beauxbatons,” Hermione continued along her prepared speech. Her reputation as a know-it-all meant that no one even bothered to question where she was getting her facts from. “And all the students are helping to cast the spell.”

The castle was now fully in view, hovering just outside the boundary caused by the invisible Wards.

“They can’t get through the Wards!” one of the journalists yelled.

“Just wait,” Hermione advised. “I doubt they would have come this far if they hadn’t a plan for that.” Below, she could see Ron, Percy and Charlie start to clear people away from some of the land right next to the lake.

Above them, a bright purple light appeared from the bottom of Beauxbatons and the sound of thunder made further conversation impossible.

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“Okay,” Harry yelled. “Guys, stop moving the castle – I’ll take it from here. Help the students maintain the bubble!”

The tired ex-Gryffindors and Gabrielle nodded and changed their spells, causing looks of relief to appear on the students’ faces as their burden was lessened.

“First through third years, start your fireworks!” Gabrielle yelled.

The younger students, eager to finally help, started to cast the spells on the products that Fred and George had taught them.

Harry closed his eyes and reached deep inside for his magic. What he was about to do could not be done by a mere spell – it needed direct manipulation of his power. A wave of purple flame surrounded him as he concentrated harder, dragging his magic to the surface.

With an inarticulate yell, he poured his magic through the floor and against the wards of Hogwarts.

There was a pause as the Wards stood up to his magic. He growled and focused his magic at one spot, pouring more into it. The Wards parted, allowing his magic through.

He grunted and spread his arms, forcing the hole in the Wards to grow until it was big enough to allow the castle through.

“Now,” he whispered through gritted teeth to Gabrielle.

“Lower the castle,” Gabrielle yelled. “Fourth years, create the effects!”

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Colin Creevey raised his camera and took a few pictures of the disbelieving scowl on Dumbledore’s face, before he turned his camera back to the slowly descending castle above him.

The purple light that had created the hole in the Wards was still visible, but only just. From each of the four corners of the castle, a huge burst of flame shot out, like the bottom of a Muggle rocket, appearing to slow the descent of the humongous flying building.

“The fireworks were created by Fred and George Weasley especially for Beauxbatons,” he heard Hermione continue, as he took pictures of the fantastic display that was happening above the castle.

The circles of flames and explosions accompanied the ever-descending Beauxbatons, as bigger and bigger fireworks spells were created.

Colin could see that Ron, Percy, and Charlie had finished the clearing the area, and he took a few more pictures of Dumbledore. The Prophet would never print them, but the look of chagrin would be spread among Harry’s crew members and treated with delight.

The giant castle that looked like it belonged in a fairy tale floated downward, as slowly and gently as if it were being cradled by a gigantic pair of invisible hands. Below it, the purple light that had created the hole in the wards blasted into the lake causing the water to part, leaving a hole for the castle to settle into. As it touched down, all the fireworks and all the lights cut out completely.

The silence was soon broken by strategically planted members of Harry’s crew starting to clap and cheer. The students soon joined in, as did the fans and politicians. Soon, nearly everyone was on their feet, registering their approval of the spectacular entrance.

“Didn’t think that the French had it in them,” the photographer next to him said in awe. “But I don’t think I’ll ever forget that.”

“You think it was Potter that created the hole in the Wards?” another asked.

“Who else could create a hole like that without destroying them?”

Harry collapsed to his knees, exhausted, as he gulped for breath. All around him, the students were either on their knees or laying flat on their backs.

“Never have I been so proud of Beauxbatons,” Olympe’s voice rang out. “Every single one of you is a credit to the school.”

Harry climbed to his feet and looked around. He winced; none of the students looked capable of standing, never mind walking outside to meet Hogwarts and Durmstrang.

“Gabby,” he called, walking slowly over to her.

“Harry?” she asked.

He reached down and used the last of the magic he had available to cast an Enervate spell on her.

She shimmered and climbed to her feet. He’d replaced her physical energy, but not her mental, and there was only one thing he could think of to help that.

“Go out with Olympe and greet Hogwarts,” he ordered. “Buy us some time, and don’t let on just how tired you are. Do not let me down, Gabrielle.”

Her eyes went wide as she took in the command, and she nodded as she straightened her back. “Come, Madame Maxime,” Gabrielle ordered, as she walked out of the Hall proudly, the professors who hadn’t participated walking with her.

Simone and Claude moaned in unison as they each attempted, unsuccessfully, to sit up.

“Dobby,” Harry called.

The house-elf appeared in a flash.

“Go find Hermione and bring her back here. We need Pepper-Up potion, a lot of it, and we need it fast.”

“Dobby will be getting Ms Grangy,” Dobby said and vanished with a pop. Less than thirty seconds passed before Dobby arrived back with a very surprised-looking Hermione.

“Harry?” she asked, running over to him.

“We’ve got a large case of magical exhaustion,” he explained. “We need Pepper-Up Potion to get us all on our feet, we need to back Gabby and the others up and show that that was nothing out of the ordinary, as far as Beauxbatons is concerned; we can all sleep tonight and get our magic back.”

“Okay, Harry,” Hermione said without argument. “Dobby, I need the following ingredients as quickly as you can get them and a large cauldron.”

The elf didn’t say anything as he popped out, and more elves started to appear, setting up the cauldron, a fire, and a table.

“We should have thought of this beforehand,” Harry said with a groan. “I’ve not been this knackered since I fought Voldemort.”

“If it helps,” Hermione said, “everyone was incredibly impressed. The wireless journalists were calling it the best display of magic for over five centuries.”

Harry smiled slightly as he looked out at the row of exhausted students who were starting to pick themselves off the floor. He could see his friends in the corner – they were back on their feet and heading toward him. He wasn’t surprised; as professional Quidditch players, they were used to testing their limits.

“Damn,” Oliver said. “You know, I didn’t believe we’d do it, but these kids are amazing.”

“Damn right,” Fred agreed. “And when they’re back on their feet, we’re going to have to throw them a major party.”

“Good idea,” Harry agreed, his voice loud enough to echo through the hall. “They deserve it, every last one of them.”

He watched as Hermione started to make the potion, her movements were fluid, as she worked faster than he had ever seen to make it.

It was less than two minutes later that she looked at him. “Finished.”

“Already?”

“New version,” she said with a proud smile, before it faded. “Although, since I just invented it, it might not work.”

He walked over to her and took a glass, and without looking away from her eyes, he dipped it in the cauldron, and then drank.

The look in her eyes was almost enough to match the potion he was drinking. The gratitude at the display of trust made him smile. He could feel smoke coming out of his ears and immediately felt the exhaustion fade.

“Well done, Hermione,” he said softly.

“Thank you,” she replied.

“Fred, George, Ollie, Katie, Angelina, Alicia, get over here and get some of this, then help give it out.”

A few minutes later the students were back on their feet.

“Claude, Simone” Harry called, “lead them out.”

“Us?” Claude asked. “You should do it.”

“No,” Harry replied. “If I go out, it will be Harry Potter in the headlines, not the Beauxbatons students.”

“But you did the hard thing,” Claude protested.

“No, I didn’t. You all worked together to move Beauxbatons, and that was much more impressive. Now go out there and back Gabrielle up. And don’t forget that just because you feel fine, doesn’t mean that your magic is!”

“Okay,” Claude nodded. “Students, behind us. Remember to keep your heads raised high and let’s show the world what we are made of!”

They walked out the door, falling neatly into file as they did.

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Gabrielle walked slowly toward the gathered dignitaries outside the main entrance to Hogwarts. Slightly behind her were the professors. As Head Girl, it was her job to represent the students, and Olympe had told her to go first.

Moving the castle had been harder than anyone had expected – none of their calculations had factored in a heavy storm over the English Channel, which had forced them to fight their way through it.

She was mentally exhausted, but her Veela power was keeping her going. Harry had been extremely clever to force her magic to work for her, not against her.

“I am sorry for ze delay,” she said in heavily accented English, as she approached Dumbledore, Snape, McGonagall, and Andropov – the Durmstrang headmaster. “But ze studentz are changing into zer dress robes.” She made a mental note to wash her mouth out with soap later for butchering the language this badly but she didn’t want anyone here to know about her competency yet; she was saving that for the official welcoming feast tomorrow.

“That’s quite alright,” McGonagall said with a smile. Dumbledore had a scowl on his face as he looked at the beautiful castle now settled on what was once a part of his lake. The beauty and elegance of Beauxbatons was a stark contrast to the strong and imposing Hogwarts.

They stood in an uncomfortable silence for a few minutes, until the doors to Beauxbatons swung open, and the other students joined them, led by Claude.

“My dear Olympe, and students of Beauxbatons,” Dumbledore said loudly, his scowl abruptly vanishing as if it had never been. “Welcome to Hogwarts! I see that you decided to bring your castle with you.”

“My students felt that my carriages were out of date,” Olympe replied formally. “We thank you for your welcome.”

“Our house-elves have prepared food for the evening,” Dumbledore continued. “We hope that the Beauxbatons and Durmstrang students will join us. The formal welcome ceremony will be at lunch time tomorrow.”

“Of course,” Olympe said. “We would be delighted to join you for supper.”

“A truly impressive arrival, Olympe,” Picup Andropov, the Durmstrang Headmaster, said as he walked to the front and offered her his arm. “By far the best I’ve seen in many years.”

“Gabrielle!” the press yelled, in a multitude of different languages. “Can you tell us about the spell?”

She gave them a brief smile and shrugged helplessly as she walked over to Claude and Simone.

“They’re yours now,” Claude said with a slightly forced grin as he stepped back into the students gathered behind him.

“I am so proud of all of you,” Gabrielle said in French. “We’re going to join the others, eat, and then get to bed. The food will be strange, as you know, but remember to keep polite looks on your face. If you can’t eat it, our elves will provide proper food later.”

She turned and walked into Hogwarts, the students following her. Behind them, the Durmstrang students walked, followed by the Hogwarts students who ambled in, talking loudly about the entrance Beauxbatons had produced.

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By the end of the evening, it was pride alone that kept her from falling asleep. She simply refused to show weakness in front of any of the foreigners. The meal was interminable, and the food was bad as Fleur had warned her.

But she hadn’t let Harry down. He had sat with the other members of the Beauxbatons staff – she was amused by the idea that Harry’s first meal with them was at Hogwarts – while she had sat with the senior Beauxbatons students.

Claude had told her about the Pepper-up potion, and he slipped some into her drink for her, but the effects hadn't lasted that long – being a Veela meant that she had a different body chemistry than humans.

But with all their students back in the school, she was finally able to go to her room and collapse.

“Hi,” Harry said as she entered her room. He was sitting comfortably in front of the fire.

“Harry,” she smiled, walking over to sit opposite him.

“I'm sorry,” he said seriously.

“What for?” she asked, a little confused.

“For using the Mating against you like that.”

“Oh Harry,” she said with a soft laugh. “That was the only thing you could have done for me. Pepper-Up potions do not work on Veela.”

“Even so...” he trailed off.

She moved off the chair and slid over to him, kneeling by his feet. “Do you know how I felt?”

He shook his head.

“Energised,” she whispered softly. “You forced my magic to work with me, and it would not fail. Without it, I would have fallen asleep in that mess they called bouillabaisse. You found a way for us to make it look like we were not all dead on our feet. And you know what else? I felt a sense of pride and purpose. I was doing something my Mate had told me to do to the best of my ability.”

Harry sighed softly. “I know that here,” he said, pointing to his head. “But here,” he pointed to his heart. “It feels wrong.”

“To order me around and for me to be happy with you doing so?”

He nodded.

“And yet I am, Harry. I am not human; I do not have human reactions.” She paused and thought for a few seconds. “But, if you are racked with unnecessary guilt over what you did, then you can make it up to me.”

“How?” he asked.

“Look after me now. I am so tired, Harry. And please, sleep with me tonight. I have never slept better than I did that night in your arms.”

He looked at her for a few seconds. She felt him search along the bond, checking to see if she was telling the truth. Slowly, he smiled at her, reached down and lifted her from her knees and with a smooth motion, turned her so that he was carrying her in his arms. She sighed gratefully and snuggled into him.

He carried her into her bedroom and gently placed her on the bed. She made no resistance as he undid her robes, enjoying the feeling of her Mate caring for her in such an intimate manner.

She half-smiled as he used magic to change her bra for a t-shirt – he did have some peculiar notions about not seeing her naked – but she was too tired to protest. He slid her into bed, and a few seconds later, she felt him against her back. As she had before, she pulled his arm over her, and fell into a deep sleep. She was exactly where she belonged.

## Hope 8 - Hogwarts

Gabrielle kept her eyes closed and luxuriated in the feeling. She had no idea how long she had been awake and didn't care. Many years of dreaming did not come at all close to the feeling of actually being held by her Mate in bed.

She could feel his heart beating through his chest, which was pressed firmly against her back. His arm was over her, holding her against him, and every reassuring breath he took was exhaled against her hair.

Her Mate was holding her.

Her Mate was telling her without words that he wanted her close, that he wanted *her*. It was a heady feeling of exhilaration and joy. All the fantasies she had enjoyed growing up had centred on acts of passion and desire – in none of her fantasies had she ever stopped to think what it would be like to just *be* with him. Like a child, she had skipped the build up to get to what she thought would have been the good stuff, as a child not realising the joy that true intimacy could bring; an intimacy that did not rely on acts of the flesh, but of a mental closeness and trust that provided the basis of a true relationship.

That wasn't to say that she didn't want the passion; she did, badly. She was just appreciating the new feelings generated by her Mate's desire to take things slowly.

She had expected that once they had got together in some form that the rest would happen quickly. After all, she was Veela, a race legendary for many reasons, the chief being their openness and ability in the bedroom. And yet he seemed to ignore that reputation and was insisting on spending the time getting to know her as a person.

A person who was a contradiction in terms, who, according to the laws of magic, shouldn't, couldn't exist as she did.

As far as she could tell, she was a paradox. Her Mate desired an independent woman – so she had made sure she was. Consistent with the Mating, she was an independent, completely submissive woman.

The first few months after she had made the rash decision to Mate with Harry were a blur to her. She hardly remembered anything apart from the most extreme form of yearning she had ever known. Every part of her, magical and physical, wanted to go to her Mate and be accepted.

She didn't remember anything anyone ever said to her or if she replied or not. All of her mind was consumed with the idea of her Mate and the fact that she was apart from him.

But then Mama had told her that Harry wouldn't want a slave; that he would want an *independent* girl, and *that* had finally caught her attention.

That scared her; what if she wasn't what her Mate wanted? That wasn't supposed to be a problem. Her Veela magic was supposed to ensure that she was exactly what he wanted, that she would always do what he said. So she had spent a period of time – she didn't know how long – thinking about it, and deciding to use the Bond to see if Mama had been correct.

It had exhausted her – the Bond wasn't meant to be used over such a distance like that – but she had fought and used everything she had to do it anyway; it was for her Mate, so it didn't matter what it cost her.

What she discovered had almost made it worse. Her Mate was unhappy. Something wasn't going right for him in his fifth year; he was angry and frustrated. But she had to ignore that for now; she had to find out what he wanted in a woman. With the help of the Bond she managed to get far enough into his mind to find out what he wanted.

Mama was correct. He needed someone who could stand with him, stand up to him, and not be bowed by the terrible pressures that seemed to be his lot in life. The idea of a personal slave, the fantasy of many men, was simply abhorrent to him. What he wanted more than anything else was a partner – someone to share things with, and someone to love him as he would love them in return.

Due to his upbringing, he wasn't even sure what love was, but he yearned for it anyway with a fierce longing.

So she knew what he wanted, and what she needed to be; which forced her to become this contradiction: an independent woman, completely submissive. If her Mate wanted independence, he would have that.

Her magic had helped. It told her that she belonged to her Mate, and as she had no wish to destroy that – all she wanted after all was to be the best Mate possible – it had allowed her the freedom to overcome the passive nature of the spell and regain the freedom to become the girl she was going to be originally – only with an added layer of submission to her Mate's will.

The twist of magic worked. Putting aside her worry about Harry – his life and the danger he was in – and ignoring the worry about being accepted, she grew up as normally as was possible, considering the circumstances. She worked as hard as she could so that she would be what he wanted.



She hadn't told anyone, although Nana had known. More than anyone, Nana had understood. Nana always understood. They had talked for hours over many nights as she tried to do what she had to do, and Nana had encouraged her. It was Nana who she had first told her ideas to persuade everyone to not to talk about the Mating and allow her to try and win his heart honestly.

Nana had told her that she needed to do things her own way and not listen to other people; that she should stand on her own two feet and make a decision, even if it was a wrong one. She needed to be her own person. How else would she be independent, if she couldn't even do that?

That had been all the encouragement she had needed to go ahead and try and do things this way. She was determined that she would get what she wanted or that she would fail on her own terms, not on anyone else's.

She had failed, of course, to win his heart without telling him about the Mating. Everything was in the open now. He knew everything and yet he still chose to be near her. He still chose to allow her the chance to show him how much she needed him and how much he could need her, if he let himself.

She smiled. Now that she had glimpsed the life she could have with him, she wanted him even more. He made the most amazing things seem normal. He took her to Paris, to Barcelona, to Milan, as if it was nothing, and for him it wasn't. Even though she had travelled widely with her parents, the idea of going abroad for just a meal was almost foreign to her. It was foreign to most people. Harry didn't look at it like that, though. If it was possible and a good idea, why not do it?

It came down to his power. He knew he was powerful, but he didn't realise just how everyone else paled beside him. The idea of making a hole in the wards at Hogwarts was beyond the imagination of most people, and yet he had stood there, encased in the most beautiful purple fire that had made her want to join him inside it, and created such a hole.

Of course, that very power had put her in a quandary and made her realise that she was going to have to do two senior projects now. What she had learnt about Harry was too far too dangerous for her to ever consider letting someone else read it. She was going to complete it for him and for him alone.

Technically Harry was a Sport, a genetic variation that couldn't be explained by natural selection. It wasn't a word she liked, but the definition fit him.

All magical creatures had one thing in common; their magic came from within them. It came from a well of power that was part of the process of life itself. A wand or a broom or the equivalent allowed them to focus this power and change the world slightly, to better suit their purpose.

While it wasn't a secret, it didn't seem well known that spells and wand movements were largely irrelevant. If they were important, everyone would cast spells in one language, and yet they didn't. The English seemed to prefer using Latin for spells, like *Diffindo*, where as she had been taught that the same spell was *Fendez*. They meant the same thing – cleave – and did the same thing, but the word was different.

So the word was acting as a focus for the desire. It was pulling the power from that well and forcing it through the wand with a very clear desire to achieve something specific.

Once you understood that basic principle, you should be able to move a step beyond that and control the magic directly. But it wasn't that simple. Most people simply didn't have enough power to do it without a deep level of concentration. Their magic came from inside them.

Harry was different. His magic didn't come from inside him, it came from outside him. For some reason, he had been given the ability to take magic from his surroundings. And it was that, more than anything else, which made him almost impossible to beat. Because if you didn't win quickly, you would have lost your chance, as Harry could draw on the infinite power of life. It had been that ability that had been the cause of his victory over Voldemort.

Voldemort had used spells to increase the size of his own pool of magic. The Dark Mark had leached power from all his servants. The servants had not noticed that they had diminished slightly. It had been another reason for his frequent use of the Cruciatus curse; it had disguised the true reason why they had sometimes felt weak and tired.

So when they had finally met, Voldemort had been able to use his magic to fight Harry and cause Harry unbelievable pain, but Harry always had the deeper reserves, if he had the courage to last long enough for them to show.

She shifted slightly and hugged his arm. During the war, she had hated the knowledge that her Mate was fighting for everything, but knew he had to do it. He wouldn't be the person he was if he had hidden at the back of the crowd. She had told him that his heroism was a part of him that was deep inside, and it was. She suspected that others over history had enjoyed similar power, but not with anything near the same sense of right and wrong that Harry possessed. It was what was going to make him a legend, and why she could never tell his secret.

Her schoolwork meant more to her now than it had before. It had been a means to an end before – it had helped her be what she thought Harry wanted and allowed her to play the necessary games society demanded so that she could leave school a year early. Now, however, she also wanted Harry to be proud of her. It was a new idea to her, that her mate would want *her* to be in the limelight for what *she* could do, and she loved him even more for it. She had been willing to leave school if he had wanted her to, but had hoped that he would allow her to continue. She had never dreamed that he would push her to be the very best she could be, even though she should have guessed that he would.

It was what made her so proud to be his Mate. Of all the people in the world, she had managed to pick the one person who would force her to be this unique creature, who would force her to live to her full potential, and who would love her for doing so. Veela power and the Mating ensured that the Mated Veela was happy with life – deliriously so – no matter what her situation, and most were happy to be loved and to stay at home and be a pale satellite, revolving perpetually around their Mate's shadow. That wasn't what Harry wanted at all, he wanted the complete opposite.

She felt his breathing change as he started to wake and shifted in his arms so that she was facing him. He rolled onto his back and stretched. She took a few seconds to thank whichever Deity was looking out for her as she looked at him. His chest, suntanned to a medium-brown was hairless and muscled in a way that spoke of speed, stamina and strength. His stomach had a visible row of muscles under the smooth skin and a trail of black hair that disappeared into the shorts he was wearing. His arms were beautiful in a way that made her wish she had more artistic talent so that she could capture it forever.

He shifted up the bed and opened his eyes. "Hey," he rasped.

She smiled brightly at him. "Sleep well?"

He yawned again and nodded, reaching for his glasses.

"Wait," she said softly. "Can I...?"

He looked at her and nodded in a simple display of trust that almost left her breathless. She shifted, throwing a leg over her his body as she straddled his stomach. She paused as an almost painful wave of desire swept through her, threatening to wrest control from her. The last time she had done this, she had been straddling his back, massaging him and the desire had been controllable. This was different; she was looking down at him, and her mind was showing her a series of images: of her naked, writhing over him, her head thrown back, and his hands cupping her breasts. She bit her lip and focused on what she wanted to do *for* her Mate, rather than what she really wanted her Mate to do for her.

She slid her hands over his chest, allowing her Veela power to come to play. Without being asked, she could feel him turn off his Nullifying field and she continued up, over his shoulder and neck, to his face.

She leant forward so that her hands were over his eyes and closed her own. She let her power reach down and examine him. She told herself that her Mate was injured and that she needed to find a cure for it – she needed to fix him. Images started to shoot through her as her magic told her what was wrong with his eyes and how to fix it.

She pulled back and shuddered lightly. "I need to talk to Hermione," she said softly.

"Why?"

"Because I can do the same thing with your eyes that I did with your shoulder," she whispered. "I can use your magic to fix your eyes permanently."

"But?" he asked, as if expecting a catch.

"But I am too scared to do it without her advice," she admitted. "This isn't a shoulder that others can fix if I get it wrong; this is your eyesight. It's much more important."

He nodded slowly and shot a crooked smile at her. "I've never even thought about doing that."

"Who would?" she asked. "But you are my Mate, and if something is wrong with you, I want to be able to fix it. Veela powers by themselves are not strong enough, but with your magic, it can be done."

His gaze changed slightly, and she felt her blood start to pulse faster. He was looking at her differently, as if he was evaluating her. She wanted to put on her Veela power to ensure she looked her best but didn't. His hand moved slowly and started to play with the tips of her hair. The atmosphere had changed dramatically, and she held her breath, not wanting to break it.

His hand slid up and she leant into it. He gently cupped the back of her neck and drew her down, a movement she more than happy to comply with, and gently kissed her. It was a different kiss than the ones they had shared before. It was more open, less passionate, and more promising. As if they had moved to another level of intimacy, one he wasn't quite comfortable acknowledging yet, but that he was aware of all the same.

"You are truly beautiful," he whispered as he broke the kiss.

She smiled at him and leant down to kiss him again. She could feel his hand under her t-shirt, against the skin of her stomach, and prayed that it would continue to move so that she would be touched by the only man she wanted to touch her.

His hand continued to move, slowly tracing a gentle path up the side of her body, drifting over her ribs. She moaned her pleasure deep in her throat and kissed him harder, whimpering encouragingly.

It was the worst torture she had ever experienced and the most amazing sensation as he continued his slow exploration. His fingers pulled away, and his hand slid up so that there was maybe a millimetre between the skin of his palm and the curve of her breast; a distance that felt like a mile. She wanted to lean forward into his touch, but every thing inside her was telling her that he wanted to make that final movement.

"Please" she begged against his lips.

There was a knock on her door.

"No," she groaned in disbelief and absolute despair. She felt like crying as his hand returned to her hip, and he suddenly seemed to realise that *he* was in *her* bed, in the transported castle, outside of Hogwarts.

Well, if he wanted independence from his woman, this was her chance to show it.

"Wait here," she said, trying hard to ignore her magic protesting at *her* giving an order to her Mate. "We'll continue this in a moment."

She climbed out of bed, smoothed the t-shirt down, and stormed out of her bedroom to her door. She swung it open violently. “What!?”

In front of her was Simone, the senior seventh year Prefect who, by right, should have been Head Girl, along with Claude, Anton, Henri and the rest of the Quidditch team.

“Gabrielle,” Simone said, shaking her head and rolling her eyes. “We need to talk to you; can you please shut off your Veela power?”

She sighed; she hadn’t even realised she had turned it on, although the blank expressions on the faces of her six male team mates in front of her gave mute testament to the veracity of Simone’s statement.

“What is it?” she asked again.

“We need to talk,” Claude said, managing to avoid stuttering by speaking slowly and looking away from her.

“Simone said that already,” Gabrielle replied, her mind more on the warm and sexy Harry back in bed that she’d been forced to abandon. “Can’t it wait?”

“No, it’s serious,” Claude said firmly. “We won’t all fit in your room, so can we go to the Defence classroom?” It was the nearest classroom to her room.

“Fine,” she groaned and stepped out of the room.

“Gabrielle!” Henri croaked. “Can you please put some more clothes on?”

“Why?” she asked, looking down at herself. The t-shirt covered everything necessary, and anything else would mean extra seconds when getting undressed again to be with Harry.

“Because you’re gorgeous,” Simone said with a hint of jealousy, “and we won’t get anything done if the boys are too busy gawking at you.”

Gabrielle rolled her eyes. Why everyone couldn’t just see that she *had* her Mate and really didn’t want their attention was beyond her. She turned, picked up a pair of jeans that she’d left on the back of a chair and stepped into them. “Better?”

“Not really,” Claude sighed. “But it will do.”

She nodded and walked barefoot to the Defence classroom, hopping up onto the Professor’s desk and crossing her legs. “So, what’s so important that you wake me up at this ungodly hour?”

“To start with,” Claude said, “it’s nine-thirty, which isn’t exactly early. Secondly, well, we need to talk to you.”

“You’ve said that,” she pointed out again. “What is it?”

“Are you having an affair with Professor Potter?” Simone demanded.

“What?” she blurted.

“We’re not stupid, Gabrielle,” Claude sighed, slumping into a chair. “But what are we supposed to think when Professor Potter calls you Gabby? And you call him Harry, and that’s not even mentioning the way he ordered you to not let him down.”

“And we all remember what you did to that sixth year who called you Gabby the first year you were at school,” Henri added.

“Yeah,” Simone continued. “Are you insane? He’s just using you!”

“I am not having an affair with Professor Potter,” she said slowly and truthfully. An affair was completely the wrong word to describe the Mating. And Harry was not using her, not anywhere near using her, although if they hadn’t interfered...

Henri snorted in disbelief, and the others nodded.

“You’re not telling the truth, Gabrielle,” Claude said firmly. “And you owe us the truth. Especially if he is abusing you. We’ve put up with a lot for you over the past five years. Hell, I even gave up being Head Boy and Simone gave up being Head Girl when you jumped a year. You owe us all, Gabrielle, and you owe me and Simone. Now, the truth, please, what is going on with you and Professor Potter?”

“And if you don’t tell us,” Simone finished. “Our next stop will be the press.”

Gabrielle hissed under her breath and struggled to keep her temper under control. “Do not threaten me,” she growled.

“Simone, *shut up*!” Claude said firmly, eyeing Gabrielle worriedly. “Gabrielle, calm down. No one is going to the press, I promise.”

She heard his words through the thick fog that seemed to surround her, and she slowly started to relax. Someone had threatened her Mate, and she wanted to fight to protect him. Every instinct was telling her to stop them – to make sure they would not be able to harm him.

She closed her eyes and shuddered. “Do you know what happens when a Veela gets upset?” she asked softly.

“Giant birds and fireballs,” Henri said.

She nodded and didn't open her eyes, still trying to centre herself.

"What is that monster doing to you!?" Simone demanded.

Gabrielle growled deep in her throat and threw out her hand. Simone flew high against the wall and hung there.

"What the HELL!" Henri, Anton, and the others shouted, almost in unison.

"Quiet!" Claude yelled as Gabrielle glared at the rest of them. "Let me handle this. Gabrielle, let her down, please. Listen to me, Gabrielle, listen to me. Simone did not mean to insult Harry; she only cares about you; she didn't mean what she said, honestly."

Gabrielle looked at Simone. "She insulted him," she growled.

"Would it help if I said I'm sorry?" Simone asked fearfully from the wall.

Gabrielle waved her hand, and the girl dropped to the floor.

"You're Mated, aren't you?" Claude said softly.

She nodded proudly, her eyes still focused on Simone.

"Mated?" Simone croaked. "You're kidding. That's insane!"

"Harry is my Mate," she confirmed again.

"How did you know?" Simone asked Claude as she carefully walked back over to them and took a seat.

Claude blushed furiously. "I've been doing my senior project on Veela," he confessed. "Veela can't do wandless magic, so Gabrielle should not have been able to do that – but it is rumoured that they can borrow magical power from their Mates. So, who have we seen do that exact spell recently?"

"Professor Potter," Henri replied to the rhetorical question. "Last night to Professor Idiot."

"Exactly," Claude said. "Add to that Gabrielle's half-truth earlier, and it was obvious."

"My Mate has not been intimate with me yet," she said through gritted teeth. "Something I would have been able to rectify if you had not *interrupted* us this morning! Do you have any idea how hard it has been to get him in a situation where he might actually touch me as every damn cell in my body is crying out to be touched?"

Claude, Henri, and the others gulped.

"Gabrielle," Simone called.

She tuned to glare at the girl.

"Your powers," Simone said apologetically, holding up her hand to shade her eyes.

Gabrielle groaned softly. "I do not have to be so careful with Harry," she sighed. "I can be myself."

There was a silence as the boys pulled themselves together again.

"Harry is not a monster," Gabrielle said softly, and began to tell an edited version of what had happened over the past eight years.

Claude asked the first question. "So you weren't lying?"

She looked at him curiously, and he blushed again.

"That it wasn't me; it was you," he prompted.

She smiled faintly. "Or more accurately, it was him."

Claude nodded.

"What the hell are you two talking about?" Simone demanded.

"When Claude asked Gabrielle out, she said 'no' and that it was her, not him, that was the problem," Anton said with a slight smile. "She said the same thing to me when I asked her out as well."

Simone surveyed the rest of the Quidditch team. "All of you?"

The boys all shifted and nodded uncomfortably.

"So wait," Henri said, his face suddenly acquiring a frown. "You're saying that you're Mated to him, and you haven't done anything?"

Correct,” Gabrielle sighed.

“Is he gay or what?” Henri asked.

Gabrielle growled under her breath again.

“Sorry,” Henri said, holding up his hand apologetically. “I didn’t mean to insult him.”

“No, I’m not gay,” Harry said from the back of the room, causing everyone to swivel and stare at him in shock. “Not that that’s any of your business.”

Harry raised his hands and looked amused. “What? I create a hole in wards that have been worked on for thousands of years and everyone is blasé. I just happen to not be noticed at the back of a room, and everyone is surprised?”

Gabrielle smiled slightly and sighed, reluctantly acknowledging that her chance of getting him back in bed was now long gone.

“I’m sorry,” Simone said first. “I didn’t know.”

Harry shrugged. “I’m used to people making snap judgements,” he said calmly. “It happens a lot. I’ve learnt not to worry about what people think unless they are close friends.”

Simone, Claude and the others all winced, almost in unison.

“I am curious though, about you two giving up Head Boy and Head Girl?” Harry walked over to the desk and lounged casually against it, close enough for Gabrielle to touch.

So she did. She shifted a few inches to the left and leaned against him, smiling happily as his arm slid around her and held her close. It took all of her willpower to stop herself from purring – loudly.

“Gabrielle’s been like a force of nature through this school,” Claude said, leaning back in his chair and sticking his feet up on a nearby desk. “The first year she was here we thought we were getting another Fleur. We were all in our first year when Fleur was in her final year, so we got to see her.

“Fleur was adored, but was a complete brat as well, so we expected more of the same. Gabrielle was different, quieter and more restrained, but a scarily brilliant student. We all fell in love with her, and she was always there for us. Apart from when we were asking her out ourselves, we’d often go to her for love advice. She’d always pass on advice, and it made a lot of us a lot closer. Rather than fighting and bitching, we all seemed to be more mature.

“Of course, it wasn’t until we were older that we realised it was her influence that was making us grow up. Looking at my research, it seems obvious now that Gabrielle was Mated. She had none of the mood swings that Fleur had and was always incredibly focused on some goal. To be honest, we all thought she had decided to become the Minister for Magic and was working to that.”

Gabrielle blinked and laughed. “That didn’t occur to me.”

“Do you fancy it?” Harry asked.

She shook her head. “Papa finds Politics fun and amusing, I do not.”

“Anyway,” Claude continued. “When Madame Maxime came to us last year and told us that she was moving Gabrielle up a year, we had a meeting and decided that she should be Head Girl, and that there would be no Head Boy. We all knew that Gabrielle will not be touched, and it seemed easier that way.

“Besides,” he grinned suddenly. “She can be really intimidating.”

“I can?” she asked, a little surprised.

“Oh yeah,” Simone agreed. “When someone is being silly and stupid, you have this look on your face that makes people feel like they are six again.”

“Oh,” she said and smiled. “I get that from Mama.”

“No shit,” Henri agreed. “I still feel like I’m six whenever your parents come to a school function.”

“Still,” Claude continued, getting the conversation back on track. “This explains why you were allowed to do things with Professor Potter than most students weren’t.”

“Is this going to cause problems?” Harry asked.

“Just out of interest,” Simone said, “and I am just being curious,” she said with a look at Gabrielle. “What would you do if we were going to go to the press?”

“I would stop you. I won’t let you hurt Gabby,” he said coldly.

Claude, Henri, Simone and the others all gulped.

It's a good thing we're not going to be doing that," Claude whispered. "You are scary."

Harry nodded. "It's not something I enjoy," he explained. "But I value my privacy and my family much more than anything else."

"It is going to come out, sooner or later," Henri pointed out.

"I know," Harry agreed. "But I'd rather it didn't come out for a while. Gabrielle and I still have a lot to deal with in our relationship. When we have those things ironed out, then I will not object as much to the public knowing. But I do not want anyone thinking that I am doing this because of pity. I deserve the chance to fall in love with Gabby, and I am taking that chance."

Gabrielle felt her heart swell with pride and love at her Mate's words.

"Okay," Claude said. "We need a story for the rest of the students. Last night was a very public announcement that you two know each other."

"You do know that Fleur is getting engaged to the brother of my best friend?" Harry asked. "And that Jean and Aimée are very good friends of mine? I fought with Jean in the war."

Claude clapped his hands once. "Perfect! Old family friends would explain it for now – enough so that the other students aren't as suspicious. We will make sure that the other students know of this history – it makes an excellent cover story."

Harry looked at his watch. "I think it's time for you all to get changed; the ceremony starts in an hour."

"Can we ask what's going to happen?" Henri asked.

Gabrielle looked up at Harry, who nodded.

"We're going to enter normally and sit at the tables," she said clearly. "No dancing, no throwing of butterflies like last time."

Claude and the others all nodded.

"We'll let Durmstrang do their entrance."

"And?" Simone demanded. "We can't let them appear better than us."

"After last night's entrance, I really think that we don't need to worry about that," Harry said dryly. "And then the Hogwarts Head Boy and Girl will welcome us, Durmstrang will reply, as will Gabrielle, and the feast will start."

"That seems a little understated," Henri pointed out. "And you've shown a lot of flair so far, what's going on?"

Harry smiled wolfishly. "Why on earth would you think that anything is going on?"

Claude laughed softly. "Okay, let's leave them to it and enjoy the show," he said. "Come on; let's get ready to knock the other schools dead."

The students trooped out.

"Simone doesn't seem to like me," Harry said quietly.

"If only that was the issue, it would not be a problem," Gabrielle sighed. "She had a major crush on you that, as of this morning, just went down in flames."

"Oh," Harry said, blushing slightly. "I didn't know."

Gabrielle shrugged lightly. "I will talk to her later and make sure that she does not do something rash."

"Let's get you back to your room," he said and Apparated them both.

"How can you do that here?" she asked.

"I feel more powerful here," he said. "It's a little strange, but I always have."

She nodded slowly and mentally filed the information away for future contemplation.

He walked to her door and paused. "Gabby?"

She smiled at him.

"Knock them dead."

She nodded. It had been phrased as advice, but she decided to take it as an order. The clock on her mantelpiece pointed out that she had just an hour to get ready. She pulled some food out of her tiny fridge and made herself a quick breakfast before having a shower.

It was much easier to use her Veela powers to get clean, but it didn't feel the same as doing it properly. Like many short cuts, doing something properly was often more fulfilling, and drying her hair always gave her time to think.

She walked over to her wardrobe and took out her best school robes. They hadn't changed since the school had been founded. She pulled on a knee length skirt and a white blouse underneath, and then pulled the light blue robes over her head. The only thing she didn't do was put on the traditional beret. She had no need to hide behind the mystery it produced. The students were determined to show that they could hold their heads up this time around.

She pulled on a pair of trainers – they were not an official part of the uniform and were generally frowned upon, but she also knew that she was going to spend most of the day on her feet, and she would rather be comfortable.

She did up the buttons on the front of her robes and then looked at herself in the mirror. She smiled slightly; she looked as about as good as she could. And with Harry's words locked deep in her heart and mind, she made her way down to the Hall to meet the other students.

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Albus walked over to the side of his office and looked down at his Pensieve. It had been his friend for so long. With the practice of many years, he pulled the memory of last night's arrival by the Beauxbatons students out and put it into the Pensieve. It was a memory he didn't want to keep inside his brain.

Unfortunately, he could do nothing about the constant reminder that sat in the corner of his lake.

"Headmaster?" Snape called as he entered the office. "The guests are starting to assemble," he sneered.

"I'll be right there," Albus said as he closed his Pensieve. Perhaps he would get a chance to talk to Harry. That would be nice.

---

"How are you feeling?" Fred asked.

"Nervous," Harry sighed. "I would really rather not be here at all."

"You're not alone," George said seriously.

Harry nodded. "But on the bright side, Gabrielle is going to blow them all away today."

"You're proud of her, aren't you?"

He nodded again. "Yeah, I am. For the last few weeks, she's been practising what she's going to say, and she has all the pressure on her. She'll be alone out there."

"I don't claim to be an expert," Fred said cheerfully. "But I thought you two said you had a Bond, right?"

"Yeah?"

"Then use it, you idiot, and make sure she doesn't feel alone."

Harry felt himself slowly blush. "Thanks, guys."

"No problem, love advice is what we're good at."

"Harry, if you need love advice from them, you're in trouble," Oliver said as he joined them. "You should come to me – I can give you advice."

"Yeah," Alicia agreed. "Dump Gabby and sleep with some floozy who'll be so thrilled that she's dating a famous Quidditch player she won't even think of saying 'no', right Oliver?"

"It's always worked for me," he agreed.

"Pig."

"Oink," Oliver retorted with a serene smile on his face.

"So," Katie said, "are we all ready?"

Harry nodded. "You six are going to have to sit with the guests for now," he said, producing six tickets for the opening meal. "They are the best seats for non-professors and students." He looked at Fred and George. "I know you're assistant professors, but we want to keep that under our hats for now."

"You're being obscure again," Fred noted delightedly. "It's a wonderful talent you have."

"Thanks, I think. I'll see you guys later."

In front of them the students were lining up in their year groups. Gabrielle and Madame Maxime were at the front, but he was having trouble dragging his eyes away from Gabby. She looked amazing in the formal uniform; the light blue made her eyes shine in a way that put the sky to shame.

"She does look good, does she not?"

Harry smiled. "Hi, Aimée. Yeah, she does, very much so."

"Jean and I will be sitting next to you," she continued. "We didn't think you'd want to be alone out there."

"Thank you," Harry replied, a little touched.

Aimée shrugged lightly. "Jean is in heaven playing his politics, so I decided I'd find intelligent conversation."

"Then why are you *here*?" Harry teased.

"Harry," Aimée laughed. "You should not put yourself down."

"Yeah, I have Fred and George for that," he agreed.

Aimée laughed again. "True, they are a most imaginative pair. I do not envy Molly Weasley bringing them up."

"You had your own troubles," he pointed out. "Fleur and Gabrielle."

She shook her head. "Not really. I love them both, and it was interesting."

"I think that's what Molly would say."

"True."

"Harry!" Jean said as he strolled up. He and Aimée were both in expensive looking dress robes. "Being a Professor suits you."

"Morning," Harry replied.

"And isn't it a splendid one?" Jean said cheerfully.

"It is?"

"Absolutely; I've had messages from the Minister this morning saying how proud our Government is of Beauxbatons' entrance yesterday. The newspapers back in France have full colour spreads of every step of the journey, and they are calling it an arrival that will be remembered with awe for the rest of time. I've had English and German politicians congratulate me. We have gained so much more political capital off this event than we could have ever hoped for.

"And of course, the fact that my daughter was instrumental in achieving this just tops it off," he finished proudly.

"How did they know that, Harry?" Aimée asked.

"I gave Hermione a speech," he said with a shrug. "And just happened to make sure that she was in earshot of the reporters."

"Just happened?" Aimée asked, a sceptical grin on her face.

"Exactly," Harry grinned. "And before you interrogate me anymore, it's time to follow the others in."

Harry, Jean and Aimée were at the back of the line as they trooped ceremoniously out of Beauxbatons and up to Hogwarts.

The Great Hall in Hogwarts had been heavily modified to accommodate all the extra students and guests. In the centre were the four Hogwarts tables, along with eight extra for the Durmstrang and Beauxbatons students. On raised platforms on each side, like in a sporting arena, was row after row of tables for all the visiting politicians, dignitaries, and guests.

He could see Fred, George, Oliver, Katie, Angelina and Alicia in the best seats and nodded to them. To their right, in slightly worse seats, were Scrimgeour, Percy, Ron, and the other senior politicians. He smirked slightly; Percy had been in charge of the seating arrangements and through an oversight, had 'accidentally' managed to give Harry the best seats available.

Now that Harry knew that the old D.A. was still active and expanded, he was more than willing to use the resource to get what he wanted.

He had been slightly worried about any negative impact these actions might have on Percy's career, but Percy hadn't been concerned at all. He had told Harry, via the Floo, that he knew far too much about what actually was going on for Scrimgeour to fire him – and even if he did, then the royalties from the memoirs he would write would make Percy very rich.

Harry sat quietly next to Aimée, who was sat next to Jean, and Professor Bayard and waited. The Hogwarts students were already in place, and had clapped politely as the Beauxbatons students solemnly took their seats. The door to the Great Hall flew open allowing a strange rhythmic banging to be heard.

Two students, dressed in the blood red robes of Durmstrang marched into view, flanking the door. They were carrying wooden clubs that they were banging on the floor.

"Ladies and Gentleman," they shouted in accented English. "The students of Durmstrang!"

The drumming quickened in pace and eight students flew into the Hall, each running at full speed, before they jumped, performing some amazing acrobatics in time to the thumps. As they landed, magical sparks escaped on impact, adding to the effect.



The acrobatic students crouched, locked in place, and the drumming became martial as the rest of the students marched in, their faces carefully blanked as they gained their seats.

When they had all sat down, the acrobats ran straight towards the Gryffindor table, diving over it, and the students sitting at it. They landed, flipped once, and dived over the Hufflepuff table to their own in perfect unison.

There was pause, before a roar of approval came from the visitors and the other students. Harry climbed to his feet and applauded. Their entrance hadn't changed much from the Tri-Wizard tournament.

"I can't help but notice," Jean said nervously, "That their entrance was better than ours."

"If they are still talking about their entrance by the time Gabby's finished, I'll eat my hat," Harry muttered back.

"Friends, colleagues, distinguished guests," Albus Dumbledore said as he approached a lectern set up in front of the Hogwarts Professors. "I welcome you to Hogwarts." He paused as the Hogwarts students led a cheer. "This tournament represents the start of a new era of international cooperation."

"Not under his mentorship, it doesn't," Jean muttered.

"So I would like to welcome the students from Beauxbatons and Durmstrang."

Gabrielle, accompanied by two students in Hogwarts robes and two in the red of Durmstrang, walked in front of Albus and faced the students and audience.

"As you are not here to hear me talk, I will pass the baton to the next generation."

With a rumble of applause, Dumbledore sat down. The Hogwarts Head Boy and Girl and moved to the lectern. It was with a bit of surprise that Harry realised he didn't recognise them. He hadn't been out of Hogwarts all that long. The boy was wearing the trim of Slytherin; the girl the trim of Ravenclaw.

"Welcome to Hogwarts, friends," the girl said crispy. "On behalf of Hogwarts, we welcome you to our school, and we hope that you enjoy your visit here."

"And don't hate us when we beat you at Quidditch," the Slytherin added with a smile that caused a ripple of laughter from crowd.

The Durmstrang students moved to the lectern next. In more than passable English, they thanked Hogwarts for the invitation and assured them that any victory would be hard fought.

Harry closed his eyes as Gabrielle walked alone to the Lectern. He reached down to the Bond and sent the pride he was feeling through it. The affect on Gabrielle was almost imperceptible to anyone who didn't know her well. Her back straightened slightly, and her cheeks acquired a little more colour.

He switched his view to Dumbledore, who was surveying the events like a king. There was an almost condescending expression of superiority on his face.

"My friends from Hogwarts, I thank you from the bottom of my heart for the welcome you have given us so far," Gabrielle said in flawless English. "I know that I speak for all my colleagues when I say that so far the welcome has been more than we could have expected. The grace and respect with which we have been treated is a credit to your school and your country."

A ripple of applause floated down from the stands.

"Watch this," Harry mumbled to Jean and Aimée.

Gabrielle paused and then repeated the same speech in perfect German, turning slightly so that she was facing the Durmstrang students. The students all had surprised looks on their faces as they listened to her.

In English once more, Gabrielle continued, "As a token of our respect, we present our friends with a gift." Without pause, she switched to German and turned, approaching Professor Andropov.

"On behalf of Beauxbatons, I would like to present you with this telescope." She reached into her pocket and pulled out her wand.

Harry felt a minor pull on his magic as the gift appeared in her hands. She hadn't actually cast an audible spell.

With complete grace, Gabrielle curtsied and handed over the present. "It was made by Marcus Klein, Durmstrang's first Head Boy, whilst he was at school; this treasure deserves to return to the school."

She paused and repeated the details again in English.

"My dear friends from Hogwarts," Gabrielle continued. "To you, I bring a gift that I hope that you and your visitors will appreciate for a long time to come."

There was another pull on Harry's magic, as a gold embossed sceptre appeared in her hand. She held it up and turned slowly so that everyone could see it.

“This sceptre has been specially charmed by the students and faculty of Beauxbatons. To activate it, simply place it in an empty room anywhere in Hogwarts castle. It will create a secure, one-way Apparation point that will allow anyone with the skill to be able to leave Hogwarts without having to walk to the gates.”

She paused and translated her words into German again, before handing the Sceptre over to Professor Dumbledore.

Harry doubted that anyone else noticed, but Gabrielle did not curtsy before the Hogwarts Headmaster, who was looking at her with a strained smile.

Gabrielle walked back to the lectern and faced the crowds before her. “To finish,” she said firmly. “We are looking forward to the chance to test our skill against the renowned teams of Hogwarts and Durmstrang and may the best team win!”

There was a brief second of absolute silence, before the Durmstrang students stood and started to applaud and cheer. They were followed by the Beauxbatons students, and the Hogwarts students, and soon after by all the guests. The noise level rose as Gabrielle curtsied elegantly to them all and rejoined the other Head pupils, who were now looking a little embarrassed.

Harry, who was clapping with everyone else, felt a little sorry for them. The Hogwarts professors should have anticipated that an event like this would mean gifts.

“Do I want to know how my daughter can now do silent magic?” Aimée asked softly.

“She can use mine,” Harry whispered. “But no one else knows that yet.”

She nodded and went back to clapping.

“Without further ado,” Dumbledore said from behind his chair, “let us eat.”

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“Oh this is going to be fun,” Draco said with a leer. “I’ll say one thing for Potter, he’s got taste.”

“Just be a little careful,” Snape advised. “Her father might become the future French Minister of Magic.”

“Even better,” Draco replied. “They should recognise the benefits of having the Malfoy name attached to their family. I’ll see if I can get her alone tomorrow and pour on the Malfoy charm.”

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“My dear Olympe,” Picup Andropov said as he approached Olympe and Albus. “May I congratulate you on your Head Girl’s performance,” he gushed. “Such an honour for my school to be treated with such respect, and her German was truly outstanding.

“I’m afraid that she has stolen many a heart today,” he continued. “Please tell me she does not play Quidditch as well?”

“I’m afraid, dear Picup, that she is our Seeker,” Olympe said cheerfully.

“Then my students will feel obligated to support Beauxbatons over Hogwarts,” he replied. “No offence, of course, Albus.”

“None taken,” Albus replied dryly.

“And where did she find this priceless antique?”

“I’m afraid that I do not know,” Olympe said, raising her hands apologetically. “I gave her a budget and allowed her to choose her own presents.”

“An exceptionally generous budget,” Andropov continued. “I didn’t even know they made Sceptres like that, but I do know how much this sort of antique costs. Of course, you should have told me beforehand that you were planning on giving gifts.”

“I’m afraid that I presumed that we would be doing it,” she said apologetically, mentally making a note to ask just how much the gifts had truly cost, because it was sounding like the 300 Galleon bill she had been presented with for both was not the actual cost.

“Not to worry,” Andropov said with a shrug. “I know that my students are even now searching for an appropriate thank you.”

“Now, if you’ll excuse me, I must go and meet with the press.” He turned and strolled off, the telescope held tightly in one hand.

“You were saying, Albus?” Olympe prompted.

“You have certainly come a long way in a few years,” Albus said jovially. “However, that is not what I wanted to talk to you about,” he continued. “I have it on good authority that my groundskeeper was pleased about your return.”

“Albus, I will thank you,” Olympe said sharply, “to keep your nose out of my personal business.”

“When it affects my staff, it is not just your personal business.”

“Oh it is, Albus, and I will not tolerate you interfering.” She turned on her heel and marched off, counting to twenty under her breath in three different languages.

She hadn't even thought about Hagrid in several years. Their romance had been short-lived. As much as she might have wanted it to proceed differently, they had not been right for each other. It was nice having another half-giant to talk to, but that had been the main problem – she couldn't actually talk to him. Their interests had been too different, and while it might appear unfair, she simply couldn't take him to many of the functions she was required to attend.

She was already married, in a way that Hagrid could never understand. Running a school like Beauxbatons was all consuming and took all of her emotions.

Even today, she had been as proud of Gabrielle as if she had been her own. She could see Harry's influence on the girl and approved wholeheartedly. Gabrielle had come into her own this year, and more importantly, had made Beauxbatons totally outshine Hogwarts, and as petty as *that* was, it did her heart good to see it.

But she knew she was going to have to deal with Hagrid sooner or later. She had felt genuine affection for him, but nothing more than that, certainly nothing worth losing everything she had worked for years to attain as Headmistress of the school.

For love, she might have; for attraction and companionship, she wouldn't.

It was that simple. She wanted the fairy tale, and Hagrid wasn't quite cut out to be her prince, or even her 'bit of rough' that would make her happy for the rest of her life.

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He moved along the corridors of Hogwarts with an ease that spoke of long practice. He knew just what shadows were cast by what statue, and how to blend into them. The fact that he didn't have to sneak was largely irrelevant.

He knocked firmly on a painting and entered the room as a door opened behind it.

With a large smile, he leant forward and embraced the woman.

"Put me down, you oaf," Minerva McGonagall said with sigh, the smile on her face contradicting her sharp words.

"I'll have you know that I'm not an oaf," Harry pointed out as he dropped into a comfy chair. "I've been living in France. I'm all sophisti-ma-cated now."

"And yet you can still mangle the language like no other," Minerva sighed. "Tea?"

"Please."

"So, did you enjoy embarrassing Hogwarts?"

"I enjoyed embarrassing Dumbledore," Harry corrected. "That is something completely different. He should have known that, traditionally, this sort of event involves an exchange of gifts."

"True," Minerva agreed as she bustled around her kitchen. "I am actually surprised that he didn't do anything about it."

"I knew he wouldn't."

"Ahh yes, your infamous spy network," Minerva sniffed. "Infecting our school."

"If you'd tell me yourself, I wouldn't have to," Harry countered with a grin. "And if it helps, I didn't know about them myself until the other day."

"I know," Minerva agreed. "And you know that my first loyalty is always to Hogwarts."

"How is he, really?"

Minerva paused and walked back into her living room, handing him a cup.

"Confusing," she admitted. "He is not the same man he once was, and I do not know why."

"Dementia?"

McGonagall pursed her lips. "Yes and no," she admitted with a deep sigh. "There are symptoms that match, but he has had a regular health check up, and nothing has shown up there. I got them to scan for all the common signs, and he came out totally clean."

Harry sighed. "I really hoped that with me gone, he would return to normal."

"He hasn't. Severus and Draco have far too much freedom, and while I would normally not get involved, I will not have my children living in fear. I am doing what I can to offset their influence, but it is difficult. The faculty are split along two lines. Filius is firmly on my side, and I rely on him a lot."

Harry nodded. "I can't let this go on anymore, Min."

"No," she agreed. "You wouldn't."

"He's pulled all his strings to get me here, and it's starting to have international repercussions. I won't have the peace we all fought so hard for

disrupted simply to satisfy his desire to play games with me. As much as I hate being back here because of him, I do have a lot of fond memories of Hogwarts.

“Jean is here to keep a firm eye on him, and you know that where France leads, Germany normally follows. With two power-house economies going the same way, a lot of the other European countries will follow suit, which could tip the balance with the Americans and Asians. After the damage our Ministry inflicted during Voldemort’s return to power, we can’t afford to be isolated; our economy would stagnate in a moment.”

“An economy you seem to own most of,” Minerva said with a teasing smile.

Harry laughed softly. “Well, maybe, but that’s not relevant. I have too many friends over here to abandon the country completely. Regardless of how attractive it might seem at times when the bloody press won’t leave me alone.”

“Well, if it helps, questions are being asked over here now as to why you are happier in France than in your own country. There have been rumblings in the Wizengamot to change the laws to make the press responsible for what they print. At the moment, there is no come back for their scandalous lies.”

Harry smiled slightly. “That would be nice. It’s a pity I couldn’t just buy the Prophet.”

“You tried?”

“Yeah, made sense, you know? The owner is a curmudgeonly misanthrope. He wouldn’t sell, no matter how much my lawyers offered him.”

“What about starting a rival paper?”

“I’ve not got time,” Harry said and then paused as an idea hit him. “But maybe…” he finished slowly.

“Harry?”

He smiled and shrugged. “Just an idea.”

“Well, as you obviously desire to change the subject, let us do just that. When am I going to meet Ms Delacour?”

“Soon,” Harry promised. “Didn’t she look good earlier?”

“She’s part Veela, Harry,” McGonagall pointed out reasonably. “Of course she looks good.”

“Min,” Harry chastised her with a pout.

“She is very beautiful, Harry,” Minerva allowed. “And she is multi-lingual, a sign of intelligence.”

“She speaks German, Italian and Spanish, in addition to her native French,” Harry grinned. “She’s also Head Girl a year younger than normal, a great flyer, and will not be far off getting exam results that match Hermione’s.”

“You’re boasting,” Minerva said with a smile.

“A little,” he allowed. “I’ve not yet really had the chance to do so. Everyone else is too involved in the situation to allow me to just talk about her like a normal person.”

“You will never be normal.”

“You know what I mean,” Harry said as he settled back. “So you don’t think I’m insane for going through with this?”

Minerva paused, before lowering her cup and looking at him seriously.

“Like you, I have done my research about your situation, and grudgingly, I think that you are doing the right thing,” she told him.

“I have seen a change in you, Harry, over the past few months. You are more relaxed and happier, and if that is caused by Ms Delacour, then I heartily approve. I understand your concern about the age difference and I would share it, if she were human. And since she is not, that does make the difference.

“I will admit that I detest the idea of a professor and a student engaging in any sort of relationship at all. The handsome young professor will always be the subject of crushes, and he should never abuse his position.

“But your situation, again, is very unique. Regardless of your ability to teach, one of the reasons you were given the role was to allow you close contact with Ms Delacour. The aforementioned emotional relationship was formed before you became a professor, so again, while I do not like it, I can accept it.

“And in the end, Harry, I will admit to being more concerned about your happiness than any mere rule. If Ms Delacour is as good for you as she appears, then you have my blessing, not that you need it.”

Harry exhaled slowly and smiled at her. “Thank you,” he said quietly. “Your approval means more to me than I can explain.”

She raised her cup of tea to her lips and drank silently.

"So," Harry said with a grin. "Exactly how on earth do you find time to teach with all this damn paperwork they foist on us? Or are English schools different?"

Minerva looked at him for a second, before throwing her head back and laughing in a way he had never seen from her before.

"Harry Potter," a booming voice echoed through the Great Hall.

Harry looked up and climbed to his feet.

Moving through the crowd was a large shaven-haired man, a severe expression on his face.

Harry moved in front of his Quidditch students, as he was eating lunch with them. Around him he could see members of the press and other students turning to watch.

"Did you bring castle with you to make Durmstrang look out of date?"

Harry shook his head. "Of course not."

"You are sure?" Viktor Krum demanded, his scowl deepening.

Harry nodded.

"Then we are still friends," Viktor shouted, his expression quickly changing to a wide smile. The big Bulgarian Seeker took several steps forward and embraced Harry, easily lifting him off his feet.

"Put me down you stinking Cossack," Harry gasped.

"Oh you joker," Viktor laughed and dropped Harry. "How is your shoulder?"

Harry smiled. "It's getting better, thanks."

"Good!" Viktor turned to the press. "Without Potter, I have no competition in the league; he needs to get well soon so that I have a challenge again."

"He beat you last time," one of the journalists shouted.

"And he is now out for a year," Viktor agreed. "That is what it takes to beat Krum! Harry is the only player who understands."

"So you two are friends?" another one asked.

"Of course," Harry said, looping an arm around Viktor. "We both play the game hard, and we have the utmost respect for each other. Viktor is the hardest player I've ever met on the pitch, and sure, I might have got the Snitch last time, but he beat me the time before that."

"And it is my turn to win again next," Viktor said, clapping Harry on the back.

"We'll see," Harry said with a smile.

"See," Viktor laughed uproariously. "For a little man, he has a big heart. Now, I must go insult Flint!"

"Did you know that Flint had to do a year at Hogwarts twice, he was so slow?" Harry asked Viktor.

"Really?" Viktor's eyes lit up in glee. "You are a good friend, Harry Potter," he announced loudly, before embracing him once more, releasing him, and strolling off to find Flint. The press scurried behind him.

Harry shook his head and took his seat back at the table.

"Are you alright?" Gabby asked softly, she had felt a little twinge from him when the big Bulgarian had picked up her Mate. It had taken her biting her own tongue to stop from trying to protect Harry.

He nodded. "Viktor's always been enthusiastic."

"How did you two become friends?" Claude asked. "We all thought you had a big rivalry with him."

"We did," Harry said, picking up his sandwich. "But Viktor is a curious one; he came and visited me when I was in hospital. He loves Quidditch more than anything else, and my move to beat him showed him that I love Quidditch as well. And as far as he is concerned, if you treat the sport the same way he does, then you must be a friend."

He smiled slightly. "He's also good friends with Oliver, and the two of them have had some legendary nights out. I should know, I was called at three in the morning once to rescue them – they were both too drunk to Apparate and had tried to take the Knight Bus home. Unfortunately, they got on a Muggle Coach and ended up in Newcastle."

"Is there anyone in Quidditch you don't like?"

"Flint," Harry said honestly. "Never have, and I doubt I ever will. The only reason he didn't become a Death Eater is because he loved Quidditch

more. But enough about me, how's your first day been?"

"Better than we hoped for. We've had some fun conversations with the Durmstrang students, as we both speak bad English," Simone said cheerfully. "Some of the Hogwarts students are okay, but some seem a little arrogant."

"About normal," Henri said. "What about you, Professor?"

Harry shrugged. "I've got a lot of friends here, so it's been a lot more fun than I thought it would be." He looked at his watch. "That said; the professors have a meeting shortly to discuss student exchanges and the like. Not exactly something I am looking forward to."

He stood and then looked at Gabby. "Hermione and Ron will be floating around, probably with Jean and Aimée; speak to Hermione."

Gabrielle tilted her head. "Are you sure?"

He nodded.

She smiled brightly at him. "Enjoy your meeting."

He groaned theatrically. "Don't stay up too late, you lot," he said. "Our first match is tomorrow, and we want to do well."

They all nodded as he turned and walked away.

"So, Gabrielle," Claude said. "What's going on?"

Gabrielle smiled slightly. "Do you expect me to answer?"

"No," Simone said promptly. "We expect you to be as mysterious as always, while we come up with fun explanations."

"Then do not let me stop your fun," she replied. "I'm going to do as Harry asked."

"Gabrielle," Claude said quietly. "What's it like?"

"What is what like?"

"Being forced to do what Professor Potter tells you to."

She paused and then sat back down again. "I think this is a case where a little knowledge is worse than a lot of knowledge."

"What do you mean?" Henri asked, as the others shifted closer, effectively closing ranks around her.

"A Veela who is Mated is completely submissive; however, we are also what our Mate wants. Harry is unique, in that he wants a mate who is independent and not submissive. He has forced me, without knowing it, to become unique myself. If I truly wanted to, I could ignore an order of his – I can not ever see a situation where I would want to, but that is not important. Unlike every other Mated Veela in history, I am still myself in every way that is important.

"I love Harry in a way that I am afraid that you will never be able to understand, because you are human. To you, it looked like Harry just ordered me to go and talk to someone. To me, Harry just proved how much he trusts me, and how independent he wants me to be. I cannot explain more than that, because I will not break that trust Harry has in me, so please, do not think that I am being abused here. Nothing could be further from the truth." She paused and looked at the boys. "Ask yourself one question. If you had me, and knew that I would do anything you ask, what would you ask?"

She smiled at Simone, "Make sure they don't spend all evening thinking about that question, okay?"

Simone nodded. "We are going to need to talk soon, Gabrielle."

"I know," she said as she turned and walked out the door, heading outside Beauxbatons. The large grass area between the two schools was covered in small groups of people. She looked for the biggest and she headed toward it. More than likely her father was happily playing his politics, and that would mean that a lot of other politicians would be near him. As she suspected, Mama and Hermione were on the outskirts of the crowd, looking a little bored. She could see Ron somewhere closer to the centre, standing near Papa.

"Mama, Hermione," she greeted them.

"Gabrielle," Aimée smiled happily. "You were magnificent earlier."

She smiled brightly. "Harry was giving me encouragement all through that ordeal. I had no nerves."

"He was?" Hermione asked.

She nodded. "That is what I would like to talk to you about. Can we go somewhere a little more private?"

Aimée looked at her husband. "He's going to be playing for hours," she sighed, "Ronald, too. Let us go and talk."

Hermione nodded in agreement. "Hogwarts or Beauxbatons?"

"Why not my room?" Gabrielle asked.

Aimée nodded. “Is it at least tidy?”

“Mama,” Gabrielle complained as she led the two women in to the school. “Of course it is tidy,” she whispered. “I had Harry sleeping there last night.”

Hermione and Aimée both looked like they had a thousand questions as they both bit their lips to keep from blurting them out in public.

Gabrielle opened the door to her room and ushered them both in. “Would you like a drink?”

“Tea please,” Hermione said.

“And an explanation,” Aimée added, “exactly what was Harry doing here last night?”

“Not what you think,” Gabrielle complained. “Do you have any idea how hard it is to get that man to realise that I am female?”

Hermione laughed. “I think that is a complaint that a lot of girls have had about him.”

“What do you expect, dear?” Aimée asked. “As Jean is so fond of saying, Harry is a Chevalier.”

“True,” Gabrielle sighed. “After we moved the castle last night, Harry ordered me to stay awake, forcing my magic to help me pretend that it was nothing. He felt guilty afterward, so I asked him to look after me to make up for it.”

“He felt guilty?” Aimée asked.

“He did, despite me telling him it was the only thing he could do. I understand where he is coming from, he has explained it, and I think he is slowly getting used to the idea.”

“It will take him time, Gabrielle,” Hermione agreed. “So what is it exactly that you wanted to talk about?”

Gabrielle carried three mugs of tea into her living room, gave one to her mother, one to Hermione, and took the third to her favourite chair. She sat down comfortably.

“A few weeks ago, Harry and I kissed for the first time. I was a little enthusiastic about it, and in the process scratched his back a little.”

Aimée sighed. “At least you have the sense not to say this in front of your father.”

Gabrielle grinned. “Anyway, I was using Veela magic to heal him, when I discovered a foreign item in Harry’s shoulder – not the one he injured in Quidditch. I asked him to lower his nullifying field, and then I used his magic to help remove it.”

“Wait a second,” Hermione said, leaning forward, her eyes bright. “You used Harry’s magic?”

Gabrielle nodded. “When he allows me to, I can use his power. I summoned the fragment out of Harry’s shoulder and then healed the damage it caused. I used his magic again today to do the silent spells.”

“That explains that,” Hermione said in a pleased voice. “I had wondered.”

“Anyway,” Gabrielle continued. “When Harry woke up this morning, he reached for his glasses, and I started to think about why he needs them. I slid over him and asked his permission to try something out. He gave it, and like I did before, I let my Veela power slide over him. When I got to his eyes, I could see how to fix them.”

“You can fix his eyes?” Hermione asked excitedly.

She nodded.

“What is the problem?”

“I am unsure,” Gabrielle sighed. “When I did his shoulder, it was easy. I took my power and his power and just did it. This, however concerns his eyes. It is something a lot more serious.”

Hermione looked thoughtful as she took a sip of her tea. “So the problem you have is that you know it works on something simple, but you do not know if it works on something a lot more complicated?”

Gabrielle nodded. “I do not want to gamble, especially on his beautiful eyes.”

“I don’t blame you,” Hermione agreed. “So, let’s look at this logically. Have either of you heard about this ability?”

“The Veela have a history of being able to use their Mate’s magic,” Aimée said.

“But I do not think that a Veela has ever been Mated to someone with as much power as Harry has,” Gabrielle added.

“That does make sense,” Hermione said. “So we’re in new ground here. We’ve seen that you can use the magic to do what you want, so control is not the issue – confidence is. What does Harry think about it?”

“He would have let me try this morning,” Gabrielle said softly. “He trusts me.”

“Congratulations,” Hermione said gently. “This might not have happened how we expected, but it does seem to have worked out in the long term, and we have all learnt some lessons; me, more than anyone. Harry’s trust is something I still have nightmares about losing. But I digress. I do have an option for you.”

“Oh?”

“Heal his shoulder. The one he injured playing Quidditch.”

Gabrielle blinked. “That does make sense,” she agreed. “It is more complicated than before, and it will allow Harry to do what he loves most.”

Hermione nodded. “However, I should be there.”

Gabrielle blushed faintly. “Hermione,” she said softly. “You do know that Veela magic is based on intimacy?”

“Sorry?”

Gabrielle could feel herself blush harder.

“It means that my daughter and Harry will need to be in some form of undress, with skin contact,” Aimée said dryly.

“Oh, right,” Hermione nodded. “Much as I hate to say it, I still think I should definitely be there.”

Gabrielle sighed, “You are probably right. I could probably do that with you watching, but not Ron. I will not be seen like that by another man.”

Hermione nodded agreeably. “He has no medical expertise anyway.”

Gabrielle opened her mouth but didn’t say anything.

“Excuse me,” she said politely before focusing her attention. She could feel something was bothering Harry from her Bond. She closed her eyes and reached down into the Bond. She couldn’t tell exactly what was that matter, so she gathered the love she felt for her Mate and sent it to him.

A few seconds later she felt a gentle caress back and could tell that his spirits had lifted. She smiled brightly and opened her eyes again.

“What did you just do?” Hermione asked.

“Harry was feeling bothered, so I let him know how much I love him,” she said cheerfully. “He is feeling better now.”

“Considering he’s in a meeting with Snape and Dumbledore, I’m not surprised,” Hermione sighed. “When do you want to do this?”

“Tonight,” Gabrielle said firmly. “I do, however, have an ulterior motive.”

“Oh?” Aimée asked.

Gabrielle nodded. “It will tire us both out, so I will be able to sleep with Harry again. It may be only chance I get.”

Hermione laughed softly. “I don’t think he will mind. You are giving him back his Quidditch.”

---

Harry sat next to Greg Bayard and Olympe. To their right were Andropov, and two of his senior professors; opposite them were Dumbledore, Snape, and McGonagall.

The meeting was going absolutely nowhere, as far as he could see, and Snape was irritating the hell out of him – not that that was in any way unique, unexpected or unprecedented.

He was no longer longing to curse Snape; Gabrielle had taken care of that. Her touch had allowed him to re-centre, but if he couldn’t curse Snape, he could at least wind him up.

“*J’aimerais bien que cet idiot la ferme*,” Harry muttered. Andropov looked at him and gave a short bark of laughter.

“Harry?” Dumbledore asked in English.

“I said that I’d really like this idiot to shut up,” Harry said, indicating Snape. “We are not going to force our students to take his Potions lessons; frankly, we would not force them to be in the same building with him if we had the choice. Now, can we please move on?”

“You arrogant bastard,” Snape snarled, climbing to his feet. “How dare you.”

Harry reached under the desk and lightly grabbed both Greg and Olympe’s hands, squeezing them warningly; he then shot a look at Andropov, who seemed to understand.

Harry shook his head pityingly. “After all these years, you are still upset about what happened with my father when you were a student? It’s no wonder that you have no time for real teaching, when your mind is locked in the past.”

“Real teaching,” Snape shouted, his face going red. “What would you know about real teaching when all you do is sit on a broom all day?”



“Face it, Severus,” Harry said absently. “The Beauxbatons’ professors are better than you; our students know it, which is why they will not be in the same room as you if they can help it. And we will not make our students take sub-standard courses.”

Snape’s face seemed to turn a new shade of red, and he could feel McGonagall’s eyes digging into him.

“I...”

“See,” Harry said, deliberately goading the professor. “You can’t even string a sentence together half the time. Let’s face it, you are the only person in the room who isn’t even multi-lingual, and you wonder why we don’t respect you?”

“Hogwarts is the premier magical academy in the world,” Dumbledore said firmly.

“Oh?” Harry asked. “Just how many potions masters have you turned out recently? If you are so good, tell me, what were Fred and George Weasley’s Potions marks? The last time I checked, they are some of the most successful ex-students in history, doing things with potions that others have marvelled at for years.”

“We are better than you,” Snape said childishly.

“The next thing you’ll be saying that Hogwarts is better at Quidditch,” Harry taunted. He prayed that Minerva would keep quiet and let him finish this; he couldn’t believe he had this opportunity, and he was not going to let the opportunity pass him by.

“We are,” Snape growled. “And we’ll prove it. Hogwarts faculty playing against Beauxbatons.”

“Only official staff that are on the payroll,” Harry said, jumping to his feet in faked temper.

“Agreed.”

Harry grinned and settled back down casually.

“Harry, I think I love you,” Olympe whispered in awe.

Greg looked at Harry and then stood. “I’ll go and let the press know,” he said and walked out quickly.

“We shall look forward to seeing this,” Andropov said with glee. “Harry, if you’d like some practice, I am sure I can persuade Viktor to help out.”

Snape and Dumbledore were looking very confused, while Minerva’s face was blank, and her lips were pursed.

“What is going on?” Snape demanded.

“Why nothing, my dear Severus,” Harry said cheerfully. “You just agreed to an inter-school Quidditch match between the professors as a side-bet to the Quidditch tournament.”

“But...”

“But it’s far too late to back out now, Severus,” Harry said coolly. “My colleague has already informed the press. Now, to get back to the argument we were having... Professor Andropov, do you have anything to say?”

“No,” Andropov said thoughtfully. “I think you’ve covered everything. I will say that Hogwarts might be hosting this event, but that is it. You do not have any say in how we run our schools. Harry, I know that Durmstrang has a reputation for how we teach Defence, so I would like to invite you personally to see us in action, and make a judgement on that.”

“I would be delighted,” Harry said honestly.

Andropov turned to Snape and Dumbledore, his body language excluding McGonagall slightly. “I am extremely disappointed in what I have seen here today. You both appear to believe that you can bully your way in any situation. That is not the way we do business elsewhere, and Durmstrang will not stand for it here.” He stood, nodded, and led his colleagues out of the room.

Harry and Olympe stood. “Minerva, we’ve had a lot of requests from practically our entire school to attend some of your classes. Can we get together sometime to discuss a practical way of achieving that?”

McGonagall nodded once, and he turned and walked out with Olympe.

As soon as they were out of sight, Olympe grabbed him and gave him a bone crushing hug.

“Do you have any idea how long I have waited for someone to say that to Dumbledore?” she crowed delightedly.

“You don’t think I was being over the top?” Harry asked.

Olympe shook her head firmly. “I invited you to join us because I am still a little in awe of Albus, and it is not a feeling that I like, and despite our ability with English, it is still our second language. I will admit to being surprised by Andropov, but I will have a conversation with him later; it appears that he has reached the end of his tether as well.”

“I thought I might have gone too far,” Harry admitted. “But I saw the opportunity and went for it.”

“You do have a plan, I take it?”

Harry leaned up and whispered in her ear.

Olympe looked at him in awe. “Will you do me a favour, Harry?”

“Of course,” he replied.

“If I get on your bad side, will you just tell me straight out? Because your sneakiness I would find terrifying, if I wasn’t completely on your side.”

Harry laughed softly.

“Now,” Olympe said. “I think it’s time I went and found my Head Girl to tell her to give you the kiss you deserve.”

---

“Exactly what are you two playing at,” Minerva said disgustedly as she turned on her two colleagues.

“Minerva,” Albus said firmly. “We must stick together at times like this.”

“We are not at war!” Minerva said, slamming her hands on to the desk. “And we do not attempt to bully other schools into forcing them to do something they have already politely declined. This is the sort of petulant behaviour, Severus that makes us look like idiots.”

“It was not that bad,” Albus said lightly.

“Not that bad?” Minerva asked icily. “You have just agreed to play a game of Quidditch against Harry Potter, and might I remind you, that he is the best Seeker this school has ever seen, and only a few months ago, won the World Cup for England! And exactly who are you going to get on your team?”

“First,” Snape snapped. “Potter is injured; he will not be able to play. Second, Draco will play Seeker, I can play Chaser. Minerva...”

“Leave me out of this,” she said firmly.

“I can play Keeper,” Albus admitted. “It’s been a few years, but I still know my way around a broom.”

“And Flint will be another Chaser, as will Sinistra, if I remember correctly. Vector was a Beater back in the old days, so we just need one more.”

The door to Dumbledore’s office exploded open, and Hagrid barged in, his beard bristling. He was holding what appeared to be a large branch from a tree. “Is it true?” he demanded.

“Hagrid?” Minerva asked.

“That ‘ogwarts is playing the Frenchies at Quidditch?”

Snape nodded.

“I want ter play.”

“Excuse me?” Minerva asked.

“Olympe broke my bleedin’ ‘eart,” he explained. “I’ve got me broom,” he added, waving the huge broomstick around, causing Minerva to duck gracefully, “and I can fly and hit that Bludger.”

Snape looked at the half-giant. “Perhaps you are not completely useless, after all,” he sneered. “Welcome to the team.”

“You are allowing this madness, Albus?”

“Hogwarts will show that it is the best,” Albus said firmly.

“Best?” Minerva demanded icily. “Best laughing stock, perhaps.

“I have never felt as humiliated as I did earlier, when Ms Delacour presented us with such opulent gifts,” she glared at Dumbledore and continued, “especially after I told you that we should have gifts for them, as it is tradition. A tradition that this school even helped to set!

“I do not know what is going on here, Albus. But I do not like it. This school has changed dramatically over the past five years, and I no longer enjoy working here as I once did. I implore you to change your mind, to end this nonsense, and let us once again hold our heads high.”

“The school has not changed,” Albus said with a long suffering sigh. “We have talked about this before.”

---

Harry walked back to toward his rooms in Beauxbatons, whistling cheerfully.

“You’re looking happy,” Ron said, as he and Jean joined him.

Harry smiled at the both.

"You do know that you can't play in this match?" Ron reminded him, "with your shoulder."

"I know," Harry sighed. "But Gabrielle is a member of the school council, and technically, a member of staff."

Jean laughed softly. "And if you can't do it yourself, you'll let your protégé."

"Exactly," Harry smiled.

"What about the rest of the team?"

Harry said the six names softly and how he had organised it.

Ron froze and then looked at Jean. "If he gets into politics, I'm retiring."

Jean looked at Harry and slowly nodded. "I agree. We shall move into the business world, Ron; we are far too unsophisticated."

Harry pushed Ron playfully into a wall and pulled out his card to open his door. Inside, Aimée, Hermione, and Gabrielle were sat talking and laughing.

"Evening," he said, absently creating a few new chairs so that they could all sit down.

"Harry," Gabrielle said delightedly. "I talked to Madame Maxime earlier."

"Oh?"

She nodded and walked up to him, ignoring her father and Ron. "She gave me an order," she explained softly as he backed against a wall.

"Oh?" Harry asked again.

Gabrielle nodded. "Which of course put me in a quandary – what if that order was against the wishes of my Mate?"

Harry smiled slightly. "Then you would have to make a decision on your own," he advised.

She nodded. "That is what I thought you would say. Luckily, I do not think that this order is against your wishes," she whispered as she reached up and kissed him softly.

He kissed her back gently, his hands sliding around her.

Gabrielle broke the kiss and stared into his eyes. "She told me to kiss you firmly for what you did earlier," she continued. "As this isn't the right time that will have to hold you until I can do it properly."

He laughed softly. "I'm sure Jean is grateful."

"Absolutely," Jean squeaked from a corner.

Gabrielle took his hand and moved him over to the seat she had vacated, and then sat and rested against his legs.

"So, why is everyone in my room?" Harry asked.

"My idea," Hermione said. She looked at Jean and Ron. "To bring you two up to date; Gabrielle is pretty sure that by combining her Veela power with Harry's power, she can heal his eyes. But we both think that is a little dangerous for a first time, so we're going to get Gabrielle to heal Harry's shoulder first."

Harry blinked. "Heal my shoulder?"

"Yes," Hermione said. "Worse case will be that it takes an extra month to heal – best case is that you can be back playing Quidditch in a week."

"No, I can't," Harry said firmly. "I've signed up for a year at Beauxbatons. I am not leaving early."

Gabrielle twisted by his feet and shot him another of her special smiles that touched his heart every time. It was a look that was the physical equivalent of her mental touch when she showed him how much she loved him. He reached down and softly touched her face. "Let's do it," he said simply.

Her smile seemed to get even brighter.

"If every person in this room wouldn't kill me, I'd kiss you, Gabrielle," Ron said, a beaming smile on his face.

"Why?"

"Because this means that Harry can play for Beauxbatons against Hogwarts."

"He is right," Jean agreed happily.

"I hadn't thought about that," Harry said with a smile. "That settles it, we're going to do it, Gabby."

"I am going to be in the room," Hermione said. "Just in case," she said, with a look at her husband.

"What?" Ron asked.

"For it to work, Harry will be mostly naked, as well as Gabrielle," Hermione explained.

"Oh, right," Ron said. Then in a completely toneless voice he continued. "I am now experiencing insane jealousy, let me go lose all my friends and join the dark side."

He paused.

"There, that better?" he asked cheerfully.

Harry laughed under his breath. "He's right," he said, adopting the same blank voice. "I've had the hots for Hermione ever since Skeeter pointed it out to me all those years ago. I'm going to use having my girlfriend fixing my shoulder as a unique chat up line to finally see if I can score with the girl I consider my sister."

Hermione put her hands on her hips and glared playfully at her friend and husband.

"I'll get you two for this," she threatened. "Or actually, I'll get Ron; I'll leave Harry to Gabrielle."

"Oooh, punishment!" Gabrielle said excitedly. "I've heard of that. Harry, you must kiss me."

"I think you're missing the point, somewhat, Gabrielle," Hermione sighed.

Gabrielle looked at Hermione. "The idea is to get him to do something I want, right?"

Hermione nodded.

"But I want kissing," she pointed out.

"But it's supposed to be something *he* doesn't want to do."

"Oh," Gabrielle said innocently. "In that case, I want sex."

Harry looked around, trying to keep his laughter from bubbling out. Aimée was looking resigned, as if she had expected her daughter to say that. Jean, Ron, and Hermione seemed to be having a competition to see who could turn the deepest colour red. What was really impressive was that Jean seemed to be winning, something he wouldn't have thought possible.

"I blame you for this, Harry," Aimée groaned.

"Me?"

"She never would have said that before."

"No," Gabrielle agreed. "I would have merely thought it."

Harry laughed.

"Don't encourage her," Aimée begged playfully. "Jean is not ready for this."

"I'm sorry, Papa," Gabrielle apologised. "I promise to try not to scare you anymore."

Jean groaned and leant back in his chair. "Evil child."

"Me?" Gabrielle. "I am the only innocent one in this room," she pointed out.

"That depends on your definition of innocent," Aimée murmured.

"Quite," Hermione added. "And before this conversation deteriorates any more, I think we should start. Harry, I want to examine your shoulder first."

Harry nodded and stood. He draped his robes over the back of the chair, and then pulled off his t-shirt quickly.

Hermione walked over to Harry and lightly put her hands on Harry's shoulder, before jerking them away as Gabrielle growled at her.

Gabrielle flushed bright red as she realised what she had done. "I am so sorry," she apologised profusely. "It's an automatic reaction to someone putting their hands on my Mate." She looked at Harry with a wistful expression. "The closer we get emotionally, the harder it is for me to control."

Harry looked at her for long moment before nodding slowly. "Kneel."

Gabrielle sat up, turned to face him and looked at him from her knees.

He stood, pushed his chair back, and knelted down, sitting on his heels so that his head was the same height as hers.

"Continue, Hermione," he said softly, before looking at Gabrielle, catching her eyes. "You have nothing to worry about," he whispered. "When we finally do this, there will be no one else for me for life."

He felt like he could see her heart in her eye as she opened herself up, letting him see her soul. The expression on her face tore at his heart – the longing, the openness, the trust, and the absolute love was awe-inspiring.

"I'm finished," he heard Hermione's voice say, as if from a distance. "Gabrielle, do you think you could please release my husband?"

Harry blinked, breaking the spell, and looked at Ron. "Gabrielle."

She blinked as well, before blushing furiously. "Sorry," she apologised.

"No problem," Ron groaned. "Harry, you owe me a new couch."

"I do?"

"I'm gonna be sleeping on it for a month now," he sighed.

"I'll forgive you, this time," Hermione said dryly.

"Harry, did you have your Occlumency shields up?" Jean asked.

He shook his head.

"As much as I don't like saying it, you are truly the man for my daughter," Jean said softly. "I have never seen a non-Veela manage to keep himself sentient like that, and it was only because of my blood relationship to Gabrielle that I was not Enthralled."

"I didn't realise she was using her Veela power."

"She wasn't," Aimée said slowly, "but she wasn't blocking it either. It was unfocused; she was just being herself."

Hermione nodded in agreement. "I was watching the magic flow while I was examining your shoulder – that was exactly it."

"This is what I have wanted," Gabrielle said softly, looking at Harry. "What I dreamed of for so long – having a Mate with whom I could be myself with."

"Which is all I want too," Harry whispered, and he was rewarded with another bright smile.

"Okay," Hermione interrupted them. "I like my husband sane, thank you very much. So you two go into the bedroom and get ready."

"Yes ma'am," Harry grinned and jumped to his feet easily, reaching down and swinging Gabrielle into his arms and carrying her into the bedroom.

---

Hermione watched them go and shut the door firmly. She looked at her husband and the older couple. "You could feel it, too?"

Jean and Aimée nodded.

"Feel what?" Ron asked.

"Gabrielle wasn't the only one with her shields down," Hermione explained. "Harry was completely open."

"What does that mean?"

"I could feel his magic. It is truly immense."

"Oh, right," Ron nodded. "I think I'm going to need to learn Occlumency," he said seriously. "I can't go into a trance every time Harry and Gabrielle get lovey. If we're going to continue to be best friends, being Enthralled by my best mate's woman isn't going to work."

"I will teach you," Aimée said firmly. "Would you mind having a word with William, though? I think he would benefit from it as well. He was not interested the last time I broached the subject."

"Oh, Bill's a Weasley," Ron said. "You just have to know how to handle him right."

Jean laughed suddenly. "You mean like throw him into a pool?"

"Well, yeah, but a swift punch or two is often quicker. Who threw Bill into a pool?"

"Harry."

"Ahh, right, Harry's a little too noble to do the punching thing. He thinks he has an unfair advantage. Charlie's probably the only one of us who'd have a chance against him like that."

Hermione laughed softly. "Well, I better get in there and watch; I will admit to being curious."

"Good luck," Ron said and turned to face Aimée and Jean. "You two want anything to drink?"

"See if Harry has some wine," Jean said.

Hermione turned and opened the door to Harry's bedroom softly.

Gabrielle was sitting straddled over Harry's stomach, her hands roaming his chest as they kissed softly. She could see Harry's hands moving over her hips, and she wondered for a brief second exactly what Gabrielle was wearing under what looked like one of Harry's practice shirts.

For a second, she turned off the part of her mind that was Harry's best friend and looked at them dispassionately. They were an incredibly well-matched couple; Harry's darkness was offset by Gabrielle's light. Harry was bigger than Gabrielle, and he should have dwarfed the smaller girl, but he didn't. She radiated strength of conviction that allowed her to match her Mate.

She coughed softly, suddenly feeling like a voyeur looking in on something she had no right to be seeing.

Gabrielle broke the kiss leisurely and looked at Hermione. "When I start this, Harry's defences will shut down. Do not make a movement toward him unless things start to go wrong. I will be deep in my magic, and I will react with my power *and* with Harry's, if I sense a threat to him or to me. As you are a woman, my magic would consider you to be a threat. I will instinctively protect my Mate and my interests."

Hermione wasn't quite sure what was more disturbing; the level voice the threat was delivered in, the way Gabrielle's hands never stopped caressing Harry's chest, or the way Harry was nodding in agreement.

"Gabby's right, Hermione," he said softly. "I have to switch off to let her do this, and she'll react without thought, before I can regain enough control to stop her."

Hermione nodded and walked around the bed, taking a seat near them.

Harry leaned back against the bed, watching Gabrielle.

The blonde Veela shifted up Harry slightly. Hermione could feel the magic in the air, but she could tell that neither of them could. They were both broadcasting volumes of magic that was almost breathtaking. She found that she could see what Gabrielle was doing by following the flow of magic.

There was a steady build-up, and then a sharp burst of pure magic. She could hear Harry groan in agony, and she fought the urge to move toward them to get a better look, Gabrielle's warning firmly in her mind.

The groan became a low scream of agony, before it stopped suddenly. She held her breath.

"Shh, my love," Gabrielle crooned, her hands rubbing over his shoulder gently. "I'm here. You're not alone; you'll never be alone again." She looked at Hermione for a second and nodded.

Hermione walked closer silently, Harry's torso was covered in sweat and his eyes spoke eloquently of the pain he had just endured.

Gabrielle lent down and stretched out on top of him, her cheek touching his, as she whispered in his ear. For some reason, Hermione was glad she couldn't hear what Gabrielle was whispering. She didn't want to hear what the girl was saying; it seemed far too personal.

As quickly and expertly as she could, she cast a series of spells. As Gabrielle had promised, his shoulder was perfect, as if it hadn't been destroyed and repaired three times.

Her mind edged away from the sort of power implied in that result.

She could see Harry relax as exhaustion took over from the pain.

Gabrielle slid to the side, draping herself over Harry, holding him as she crooned softly.

Hermione took the blanket and covered them both, before walking out as silently as she could, turning the light off.

Back with the other three, she walked straight over to the wine bottle, poured herself a large glass and downed it as if it was water, before pouring herself another glass. Ron had moved to the couch, and she dropped down next to him, raising her feet onto his lap.

"That bad?" Ron asked.

"You know what Harry's pain threshold is like?"

Ron nodded. "Stupidly high."

"I have never seen him in so much pain."

"And he let Gabrielle do that?" Ron asked.

She nodded and looked at Jean and Aimée. "Harry is in love with Gabrielle. He trusts her more than he trusts Ron or me. And to Harry, trust is the ultimate expression of love."

Ron nodded in agreement.

“So why is...” Jean started and then appeared to find that he couldn’t continue.

“Then why is my daughter still a virgin,” Aimée asked in the same dry technical tone of voice she had used before.

“Correct me if I’m wrong here,” Hermione said to Ron. “I think it’s because he doesn’t fully believe that Gabrielle is acting on her own free will.”

Ron nodded. “I’m pretty sure that Harry thinks the Mating will end someday soon, and he’ll be alone again, and to him, making love to Gabrielle will be a lifetime commitment, and he doesn’t want to do that while he still doubts that Gabrielle will not leave him when she recovers from the spell she is under.”

“How do we persuade him that Gabrielle’s love is genuine?”

Hermione looked at her husband. “I need to find a way to block the Bond – not destroy it, just allow them to act without it.”

Ron looked back at her levelly. “What are you planning?”

She took a deep breath. “I’m going to find something, and then present it to both of them and explain why I found it, and leave it up to them if they do it or not.”

Ron smiled warmly at her, in a way that reminded her once more why she had married him, despite their bickering as they grew up. He had grown up, and underneath the childish defence measures was a man worthy of her love. He nodded,

“Good idea,” he said simply.

“I agree,” Jean said. “What are they doing now?”

“Sleeping, or more accurately, Harry is sleeping; Gabrielle is guarding him. That took a lot out of him.”

“Do I want to know what happened?” Ron asked.

“When we rebuilt Harry’s shoulder last time, we replaced the bone, but had to wait for the sinew, tendons and muscles to reattach properly – and the bone we used wasn’t as strong as the original. Gabrielle took that a step further, she destroyed the bone, the muscles, everything, and created an entirely new shoulder.” She paused and took another drink of the wine. “It took five of the best reconstruction certified healers nearly twelve hours to do less than she just managed in two minutes. I don’t even want to think about how much power Harry has inside him.”

“Ouch,” Jean exclaimed.

“That’s what I thought,” Hermione agreed.

Jean smiled slightly. “Well, why do we not go back to our apartment and have a late meal?”

Ron smiled. “That will be good.”

“On one condition,” Aimée said firmly.

“Oh?”

“No politics,” Hermione and Aimée said together.

---

“Nervous?” Harry asked as he looked around the dressing room.

Without hesitation, every single head nodded.

“It doesn’t get easier,” he said with a grin.

“Thanks,” Claude said dryly. “That’s exactly what I needed to hear.”

“Seriously, pay attention for a second,” Harry said, crouching in front of them. “You are all good enough to be here and to play. When you get out there the crowd will roar, but you have to ignore them and pretend they’re not there. If you spend your time looking at the crowd, you’ll miss the game.

“Now, Claude, Anton, you must remember what Fred and George taught you; protect Gabrielle when you can, try and take out their Seeker, and don’t go all out for every Bludger – one accurate Bludger hit is better than ten heavy misses.

“Henri, remember Oliver’s advice. Don’t get drawn away from the hoops, I want to see your name on them when the match is over, right?”

“Right,” Henri agreed weakly.

“I didn’t hear you,” Harry said. “Look at me.”

Henri looked up, fear visible in his eyes.

"The crowds are nothing," Harry said intently, moving in front of him. "All that matters to you is the Quaffle and keeping it out of *your* hoops. You've done it in practice, you've saved shots from some of the best professionals in the world; you can do it against Durmstrang, I promise! Now, what are you going to do?"

"Own those hoops!" Henri shouted savagely.

"Damn right," Harry grinned, and then turned to the Chasers. "Watch each other's backs, try to attack together, and don't be selfish. This is a team sport, and teamwork can make the difference between winning and losing."

"They are better than us, though," Frederick Girard pointed out. "They have played competitively before, and we have not."

"You played *us*," Harry pointed out, "and held your own. But you are not playing professionals this time; you are playing your peers. They have done it before, but you have nothing to fear, I promise. If you can withstand us, you can defeat them."

"What if we don't score enough?" Nicholas Blanc asked.

Harry bit down on his first response, deciding that sarcasm probably wasn't a good answer at this stage. "Your job is to keep the match close; it will be Gabrielle's job to win."

The Beaters and Chasers smiled and slowly nodded. The idea of the pressure being on someone else seemed to make it easier for them.

"Can I have a pep-talk now?" Gabrielle asked in a small voice.

He moved over to her but didn't say anything; he just looked in her eyes and reached through the Bond. While the students knew about their relationship, he normally didn't treat Gabrielle any different when he was being a Professor, but this was a special occasion.

"You won't let me down," he said softly, as he sent a wave of pride and confidence down the Bond.

Gabrielle's back seemed to stiffen and she turned to the other six players. "Ready to prove that we belong here, and that we're going home with the trophy?" she called.

The others nodded.

Gabrielle took a deep breath and held out her hand in the middle of them.

Harry watched as Claude turned to Gabrielle, a question in his eyes.

"We are a team," she said firmly, "teams do this."

Claude's eyes flashed to Harry, who nodded.

Slowly, the boy reached out and took Gabrielle's hand. The others followed suit shortly afterward. "Let's kick their arse!"

"Beauxbatons!" the six boys roared and started to cheer.

Harry smiled as they shouted their fear, shouted out their nerves and prepared for battle.

"Go," he said firmly. "I'll be in the dugouts."

The boys cheered again and jumped on their brooms, flying out the door, Gabrielle last.

He took a few quick steps forward and touched her shoulder. "I am so proud of you," he said, looking her straight in the eyes. "Play your best, and even if you don't win, I will still be proud of you, of what you just did, and how hard you have worked."

"Can I have a kiss for luck?"

He leaned closer and kissed her deeply. "Now, go and catch that damn Snitch." He meant it as a joke, but he could see in her eyes that she chose to take it as an order.

In the next second she was gone, out the door. He followed her on foot, smiling as he heard the familiar roar of hundreds of thousands of fans yelling and screaming.

His smile grew as he heard a familiar voice start to talk. He had no idea how they had arranged for Lee Jordan to return, but he was glad all the same. There seemed to be a degree of symmetry about this entire situation that he found very appealing.

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"Ladies and Gentleman, Wizards and Witches, Distinguished, and Not-So-Distinguished guests, Professors, and greasy sleaze balls, welcome to the first match in this highly anticipated international school Quidditch Tournament.

"In the blue we have Beauxbatons Academy of Magic. Until the start of this year they did not even *have* a Quidditch team. However, that quickly changed when a fortuitous opportunity arose. Harry Potter, one of the top three Quidditch players in the world agreed to launch their new program.



So we will soon see if Potter is as inspirational as a Professor as he is as a player, and as a defeater of Dark Lords.

“In the red, we have the team from the Durmstrang Institute, led by Professor Voltier, and assisted by Viktor Krum, their most famous graduate and another of the top three Quidditch players.

“Speaking on a personal note, let me just say how good it is to be back at Hogwarts, commentating on Quidditch again. If I squint, I can still see Oliver Wood haranguing Fred and George Weasley, while Harry Potter, looking small enough to be eaten by a good size troll, flying nervously around the stands.

“And speaking of nostalgia, I'd like to welcome Professor Minerva McGonagall back to the commentary box. However, unlike before, I am no longer a student matriculating at this school, and can not be threatened by detentions and points off.”

There was a pause, before Lee said in a shocked voice. “You'll do what?” followed by, “Can you even do that?”

“As I was saying,” Lee continued. “Professor McGonagall will be ensuring, with the aid of some very nasty curses that I don't get to out of hand.

The English portion of the crowd roared with laughter, a lot of them remembered Lee commentating and how the Professor would try to make sure he kept things fair.

“Rolanda Hooch has graciously come out of retirement to referee this tournament, and she's calling the captains together.

“The gorgeous-looking blonde in the blue is Gabrielle Delacour, daughter of Jean-Sebastian Delacour, who we remember from the War against Voldemort and how he led the French Aurors on that final day.

“The boy with the clean-shaved head dressed in the red is Gunther Stradivis, Keeper for Durmstrang, and widely reported to be joining Viktor Krum in the professional leagues next year.”

There was a huge roar of anticipation from the crowd as the match got under way.

“And Durmstrang has the Quaffle, passing it with the ease of long practice. They make their way up the pitch, easily bypassing the Beauxbatons Chasers.

“Eric Ernhand leans back to shoot.... And what the heck was that?” Lee's voice seemed to rise in pitch and intensity. “In a move not seen since the World Cup final, Gabrielle Delacour, shows the sort of training she has received from Potter by breaking up the Durmstrang attack.

“Frederick Girard has the Quaffle, the four Beaters seem to be engaged in a game of tennis as they ping the Bludgers back and forth. He passes to Nicholas Blanc, who shoots, but Stradivis saves, and launches a counter-attack at Beauxbatons.

“Durmstrang races up the pitch, and shoot, oh, unlucky Henri, he came within an inch of stopping that. The Durmstrang Seeker seems to be content to follow Delacour around; I'm not sure if it's tactical, or if he's hoping for an opportunity to ask her out on a date.”

“Leel!” McGonagall's voice echoed around the stadium, to the amusement of most of the crowd.

“Err, right, sorry,” Lee apologised. “Moving on, Beauxbatons attacks, and with a good shot, score their first points in International Quidditch.

---

Harry watched the game intently, realising that he much preferred playing to merely watching. It was much worse not being able to influence things directly.

His heart was racing like he was in the middle of a long distant run, and he felt like he was sweating more than if he was up there playing.

He had a new appreciation for the sort of things that professional coaches went through, and exactly why his had had two heart attacks by the age of fifty-seven.

They needed the Snitch, badly. As hard as they were fighting, they were slowly being overwhelmed by the more experienced Durmstrang players.

They were currently down by a hundred and ten points, and the gap was growing.

“With the score two hundred to ninety, the game seems to have settled... and having just cursed the match by saying that, the two Seekers take off, because the Snitch is visible at the other end of the pitch.

“The two players are going for it, you can see from their respective positions the influence the professionals have had. Delacour is lower, more crouched, in the position favoured by Potter, while Stradivis is using his strength to stay upright, in a position reminiscent of Krum.

“They're twenty yards from the Snitch, ten, five.” The crowd groaned as Lee shouted, “and the Snitch sneaks out the way and is now behind them, Stradivis launches into a tight Corkscrew-reverse, but Delacour keeps going.

“Sweet Merlin, a Potter Turn! A bloody Potter Turn – Potter really taught her everything in his locker, as Delacour shoots past Stradivis and catches the Snitch. Beauxbatons Wins! Beauxbatons Wins!”

Harry found himself cheering along with the rest of the crowd, as the students landed in front of him. A second later, he was at the bottom of a pile of six very happy male French Students as they jumped on him, one after the other.

With a small bit of Magical help, he pushed them all off him so he could stand, and congratulated each one individually, taking care to spend exactly the same amount of time with each student, including Gabrielle.

"Take a bow, guys," he told them, indicating the French portion of the stand, where the crowd was going absolutely berserk. "You did it; you stuck to your guns, played as hard as you could, so now enjoy the victory. Remember this feeling; remember how it feels, so that next time, you work even harder to make sure you can feel it again."

Seven faces had huge smiles on their faces as they looked at him, before turning and bowing to the crowd.

Harry walked over to the pitch and shook the Durmstrang professor's hand, offering his sincere condolences. "Viktor," he shouted.

"Potter?"

"I want you to beat Hogwarts, and we'll see you in the final for a rematch!"

Viktor grinned at him and nodded.

Harry returned to the dressing room, which was now full of students and professors, and resembled the Cannons' dressing room after they won a major trophy.

He smiled, and leaned against the wall, enjoying watching them be themselves.

"Congratulations, Harry," Olympe said as she joined him.

"They are the ones that did all the work," he said.

"You are the one who taught them, Harry; you are the one who gave them the hope that they could do this, and out there, they played for you, not for Beauxbatons."

"Oh no," Harry said firmly. "They played for their country and their school."

"Not all of them," Olympe said quietly.

His eyes found Gabrielle in the crowd with ease; she was an island of calm around the other students, and for a second she looked back.

"No," he whispered. "Not all of them."

---

Gabrielle finally finished drying her hair and looked at her watch. She had taken her time in the shower, using it to relax from the effort she had put in during the match. Simone had waited with her, but as soon as Gabrielle had finished, she'd left to join the party.

Gabrielle smiled slightly; the only party she wanted was to be away from the crowd, alone with Harry, a party that involved as little clothing as she could get away with.

She glanced at herself in the mirror, and then calmly walked out the door and headed back toward Beauxbatons.

Her mind was locked so firmly on the feeling of warmth she was getting from her Mate being proud of her, that she didn't notice the figure in the darkness.

"Good match."

Gabrielle stumbled in surprise and looked up. "Thank you," she said politely.

"I was impressed," the man said, removing his hood.

"Thank you, Professor Malfoy," she said coolly.

Draco smiled at her and she struggled to keep a polite look on her face. She could tell that he found her attractive, and that thought made her nauseous. Her Mate did not hate many people; in fact, he hardly hated anyone, but this creature in front of her was one of the people he truly detested and automatically, that made her hate him as well.

"It's rare to find someone so young and so beautiful to be talented as well," Draco said, in a tone that she presumed was his idea of being charming.

"Thank you," she said for the third time, hoping that he would leave if she didn't stop walking; unfortunately, he just fell into step with her.

"I understand the pressure you're under," he continued.

"Oh?" she said, wondering at what stage she could stop being polite. Being Head Girl had some responsibilities, and this being matter of being polite to professors from other schools was one of them. Even if the professor was a pompous, arrogant and offensive idiot.

"I too, come from a famous family – the Malfoy family have been well-regarded for centuries," he bragged.

"Really?" she said, again being polite, hiding her knowledge that the Malfoy family was full of pure-blood supremacists, and that her own father had

fought against his in the war.

“Oh, yes,” Draco continued. “Malfoy Manor is one of the wonders of England, a truly remarkable place, full of history and wealth.”

She truly couldn't believe that he was really trying to chat her up. And with stories of wealth, at that, as if wealth could impress her, a Delacour, from one of the richest families in France – especially when wealth was irrelevant, when compared to actions and personality. She really hoped he wasn't going to go onto Quidditch next.

“Of course,” Draco continued. “I was a top Quidditch player as well; I even beat Potter a few times at school. I could have turned professional, but having no need of money, I decided my time was better spent helping others.”

“How noble of you,” she said, keeping her voice straight through sheer force of will. She had studied every single match Harry had ever played in, including his one loss at Hogwarts, and the blatant lying was almost fascinating in a sick, creepy way. “It was nice talking to you,” she said, as she turned toward the safety of her school gates.

“Wait,” Draco said, grabbing her shoulder.

She froze; swallowing hard against the waves of nausea his touch caused her. “Please take your hand off me.”

“Relax,” Draco said, “There's just the two of us. Why don't we go down to Hogsmeade and get to know each other better. I'm a professor, no one will mind.”

“Please take your hand off me,” she said again, with gritted teeth. She could feel his desire, what he wanted to do to her, how he wanted to use her, and she felt the bile rise in her throat. The longer he touched her, the more she felt his desires. She felt violated by the darkness in his soul.

“Come on,” Draco said with what he obviously thought was a charming smile. “It will be fun.” His other hand raised up, heading toward her face.

“What a wonderful idea,” Gabrielle said; reacting instinctively to the threat and the anguish he had caused her. She released her Veela power.

Draco's face adopted a besotted expression.

“Take your hand off me,” she demanded.

He nodded.

“Will you do me a favour?” she asked.

He nodded again, eagerly this time.

“Run as fast as you can into that tree.”

“Anything,” Draco exhaled, as he turned and started to run in the direction she had pointed.

She dropped to her knees as the adrenaline left her, and her stomach heaved.

“Gabrielle, what is it?” Harry asked.

She had no idea why he was there, or how he was there; she just launched herself at him, crying her heart out. “He touched me, and he wouldn't let go,” she sobbed.

“Who did?” Harry growled, and she felt a surge of almost indescribable rage and anger through their Bond at her words.

“He did,” she said, pointing at the running Draco. She turned, and with a sickening thump, Malfoy hit the tree and bounced off, unconscious before he hit the ground.

“Let's get you out of here,” Harry said, his body tense, and they vanished, leaving the heir to the Malfoy dynasty, what was left of it anyway, bleeding and unconscious on the grass.

## Hope 9 - London

Harry smiled slightly as he watched the Beauxbatons students celebrate their earlier victory. They had been lucky, and without Gabrielle they would have lost, but for tonight, they deserved to celebrate.

It was just a pity that the star player hadn't turned up yet. He was looking forward to her arrival, not just because of their relationship, but because it would be the first chance that he would get to see her be the absolute centre of attention for something she had done. He had seen how she had handled the response her looks had caused with the Muggles, but that was almost abstract; this would be the first time he would see her under the same sort of pressure that he was under when out in public.

Of course, he was quite prepared to rescue her if needed. He had no intention of throwing her to the lions again, and he was quite prepared to make allowances for her age, if it was needed.

He was starting to get a slight headache, along with a general feeling of unease.

"Harry?"

"Olympe," Harry replied with a smile. "I do hope you're going to save me a dance later."

"A dance?" Olympe asked. "You don't mind being the smaller partner?"

"For a lady as beautiful as you..." Harry grinned, deliberately trailing off.

"Get away with you," Olympe laughed, shoving him in what she probably thought was a gentle manner. It took all his strength not to go flying across the hall.

"Flirting aside," Olympe said cheerfully, "I've done you a favour."

"You have?" Harry asked warily.

"I've arranged with Albus and Picup for a costume ball before the final match. You will be able to dance with Gabrielle and have an evening of fun – and no one will recognise you."

"That does sound good," Harry admitted, smiling at the Headmistress. He was pretty sure that he could come up with a disguise good enough for both of them.

"If you'll excuse me, I have to circulate," Olympe said.

"Thanks."

"You're very welcome, Harry."

Harry watched as the half-giantess made her way through the students toward some of the other teachers. Overhead, a thousand candles in a crystal chandelier spun gently, illuminating the room with endless patterns of light which only made his headache worse.

"You're losing your smile," Ron said, as he approached with two glasses of wine. He handed Harry one of them. "It's one of Jean's," he continued at Harry's enquiring look, "so you know it's good."

"Gabrielle's late; Simone arrived a few minutes ago."

"Really? I hadn't noticed."

Harry opened his mouth and then shut it again as a feeling of disgust coursed through his body. The wine glass slid from between his suddenly nerveless fingers and shattered on the polished wooden floor.

"Harry?"

"It's Gabby," Harry gasped, as the disgust increased, before turning into a feeling of nausea so intense he had to struggle to avoid vomiting. "Get Jean and Aimée to my rooms."

"Where are you going?" Ron asked.

"To *her*," he growled, as he closed his eyes and forced himself to Apparate to her location. He focused on the Bond, using it as a focus for his

Apparation, and completely ignored the wards as they tried to stop him.

He arrived and dropped to his knees next to her. "Gabrielle, what is it?" he demanded.

Gabrielle turned and threw herself at him, crying in an almost hysterical fashion. "He touched me, and he wouldn't let go," she sobbed.

"Who did?" he growled, reflexively drawing his magic to the surface.

"He did," she said, pointing.

He followed her finger and watched as the easily recognisable figure of Draco Malfoy ran into a tree at high speed. He nodded to himself for a second; at least he didn't need to deal with Malfoy right at this moment. "Let's get you out of here," he whispered, and Apparated them both to his room.

Jean, Aimée, Ron and Hermione were already there, although they looked slightly out of breath.

"What happened?" Jean demanded.

"She was accosted by Malfoy," Harry growled, restraining the urge to leave Gabrielle with her parents and return to finish off the job she had started. "But she dealt with him." He gently led her over to one of the seats near the fireplace and with a wave of his hand, expanded it so that they could sit together.

"How?" Hermione asked warily.

"She used her Veela powers and ordered him to run into a tree."

"Good," Ron said.

"What actually happened?" Aimée asked Gabrielle softly.

"H-h-he touched me," she sobbed, and buried her face into Harry's shoulder.

"Harry," Jean said, a frown on his face, "you need to get her out of the hysterics. This could have serious repercussions. Especially if Malfoy is hurt."

Harry nodded and reached down, lifting Gabrielle's chin so that she was looking into his eyes. With a slight smile, he reached into his mind and pulled out a fantasy, an image, the product of lonely nights on a Quidditch tour, and sent it to her.

Her eyes widened for a second, her pupils dilating, and her breathing increased dramatically.

"Really?" she asked.

He nodded.

She smiled and turned back to her family, absently turning on her Veela power for a second to repair the damage her tears and distress had caused.

"I was walking back from the pitch," she said with a firm voice, "when I was stopped by someone telling me I'd had a good game. He lowered his hood, and I saw that it was Professor Malfoy. As he is an instructor at Hogwarts, I replied politely, but I gave him no encouragement and just kept walking. He wouldn't take a hint. He tried to impress me with his family name and supposed wealth, not to mention his Quidditch prowess."

Ron and Harry both snorted at the same time.

"Then he asked me to go to Hogsmeade with him for a drink."

"He asked you out on a date?" Jean asked carefully.

Gabrielle nodded. "He said that no one would mind because he was a professor."

Jean nodded, a dangerous look appearing on his face.

"What happened then?" Aimée asked.

"He touched me," she whispered.

"And?" Ron asked.

"And I could feel his thoughts, his desires. He is a dark, twisted man, full of poison and rage. It was like he was invading my soul."

"On purpose?" Hermione asked.

Aimée shook her head. "Veela are empathic," she explained. "When you touch a Veela, they can read you, determine what you are like and what you like. Gabrielle's empathy grew when she Mated herself to Harry."

Harry tried very hard not to growl under his breath.

"So that's why you hate being touched, right?" Ron asked.

Gabrielle nodded. "It's hard for me to control; being a Veela, men look at me and want me, and when they touch me, I can feel what they want to do to me, and it makes me sick."

"But not Harry?"

"Of course not," she smiled. "As dark as Malfoy is, Harry is light. The things he wants to do to me, I want more than anything else in my life."

Harry lightly turned Gabrielle around in his arms and looked at her closely, searching her eyes. He could sense her confusion as he looked at her. And when he found what he dreaded finding, he lost his temper completely.

Malfoy had tainted his Mate. Malfoy had hurt his Mate's innocence. Malfoy had defiled it in some way.

He growled, leapt to his feet, and started to gather his magic. He was going to find Malfoy and kill him.

"No," Gabrielle said, grabbing him.

"Let me go," he ordered.

He felt her jerk away from him for a second, but then her arms wrapped tightly around him again.

"No," she whimpered. A wave of despair and agony shot through the Bond, piercing through his anger.

He looked at her in shock, and could see the torment she was experiencing as she fought the direct command he had given her. "Why?" he asked in disbelief.

Bright silver tears ran down her face, but she didn't look away. "Because you are not a murderer," she whispered.

"Don't let me go," he ordered. The pain stopped, and she collapsed against him.

"Oh, Gabby," he whispered, falling down into his seat again.

Gabrielle crawled in to his lap and gently pressed soft kisses to his neck. "I am so sorry," she whispered. "Forgive me, please, Harry."

"What are you sorry for?" he asked, pulling her tightly against him, holding her as close as he could.

"For disobeying you."

"You never have to apologise for that," he whispered intently. "You did the right thing. I'm sorry for hurting you."

He could almost feel the words affect her as she started to recover from the second traumatic event of the evening. He was going to have to be a lot more careful about what he said to her, but he couldn't help but be impressed by her courage and the depth of her convictions.

"I'm so proud of you," he continued. "For what you did earlier and for what you did just now."

"Really?" she asked, her eyes pleading for reassurance.

"Absolutely," he said, gathering what he was feeling and gently nudging it down the Bond.

Gabrielle smiled and closed her eyes in relief, her head lolling back slightly.

Harry looked up as Ron coughed.

"Sorry," Ron apologised, looking very uncomfortable, as were the others.

He'd forgotten that they were there. "I should be the one apologising," Harry sighed. He waved his hand absently, and the three chairs in the room moved forward so they could all sit comfortably. A fourth chair scampered in from his bedroom to complete the set.

"Gabrielle stopped me from making a large mistake," he explained. "And I ordered her to let me go."

"But she didn't," Hermione pointed out.

"I know," Harry agreed. "And it caused her an incredible amount of pain. Something I never want to do again."

"Okay," Jean said. "Let's move on and deal with this. What state was Malfoy in?"

"Unconscious," Harry said, with an indifferent shrug. "He ran into that tree at full speed with his arms by his sides."

"Good," Ron grunted. "Maybe he'll have done himself in and saved us the trouble."

Harry grimaced. "I'm not that lucky. I'm guessing that Snape'll notice he's missing and send out a search party sooner or later."

Right,” Jean said. “Then I’m sure there will be an investigation tomorrow. I will demand that he is arrested.”

“Snape will try something to protect him,” Ron said, turning slightly to face Jean. “Gabrielle used her Veela power, and in England, that is technically illegal. It’s classified as a form of the Imperius Curse.”

“That’s ridiculous,” Aimée said, in shock. “Veela power is limited; you can’t make men do anything serious with it – even running into a tree would only have been possible if Gabrielle phrased it as a way for him to impress her. Comparing Veela power to the Imperius Curse is analogous to comparing a Tickling Charm to the Killing Curse.”

“Welcome to an England controlled by Dumbledore and Scrimgeour,” Ron said sourly. “They’ve done nothing to repeal most of the outrageous laws put in place before the final battle. Exaggerating the power of a Veela allows them to try and control it and its users.”

“It doesn’t matter,” Jean said firmly. “No one assaults my daughter and gets away with it. I’ll sever all diplomatic ties to England before that.”

“Wait a second,” Ron interrupted. “Let’s not get ahead of ourselves here. The fact that Gabrielle is a student and he is a professor will count heavily in our favour, as will the fact that Malfoy is the perpetrator. Whatever Snape can come up with, Percy and I will handle.”

“I want him arrested for attempted rape,” Jean said firmly.

“You know we won’t have enough evidence for that, Jean,” Ron snapped. “Empathy is not allowed as evidence in a court room. All we could prove is that he touched her, and even that is her word against his. We’d never be able to prove intent.”

Jean growled under his breath.

“We should be able to get his teaching qualification revoked, though,” Ron continued. “And as a private citizen, you could then sue him personally – Hogwarts’ legal insurance would no longer cover him.”

Jean slowly started to smile.

Harry tightened his arms around Gabrielle and was about to agree when an idea hit him.

“No,” he said firmly.

“No what?” Jean asked.

“No, you are not going to get his teaching qualification revoked, nor are you going to sue him – yet.”

“What?” Jean demanded, glaring at Harry. “I won’t let him get away with what he has done to Gabrielle!”

“Gabby is mine,” Harry snarled back, his hands tightening around Gabrielle protectively. “And I will arrange her revenge.”

“But –” Jean began to protest.

“Jean,” Hermione interrupted, “the last time Harry had that look in his eye was shortly before he dealt with Pettigrew.”

Jean paused.

Harry looked up and met the older man’s gaze steadily. “You are looking at this from too small a perspective.”

“Oh?” Jean almost growled. “Forgive me, I am merely looking at this from a father’s perspective!”

“Yes, I understand that. However, we have an opportunity to make several large statements here, as well as eliminate a major problem, and we are going to take it,” Harry said coolly.

Aimée lightly placed her hand on Jean’s. The two stared at each other for a few seconds, communicating in the way that only couples can.

Jean seemed to sag a little and nodded at Harry.

Harry relaxed slightly as well. “Right, I’m going to go and talk to Olympe, let her know what has happened, so she can deal with the other students at the party. Gabrielle, get some clothes, we’re not staying here tonight.”

“Yes, Harry,” Gabrielle said happily.

“I’ll be back in five minutes.”

---

Gabrielle watched her Mate leave the room and turned to her mother. “I need some new clothes,” she said urgently.

“What?” Aimée asked, a look of disbelief flitting across her face.

“New clothes,” Gabrielle repeated.

“You think of that now?”

Gabrielle looked at her mother in confusion. "Oh," she said, "I am over what happened. That is not important. What is important is making the scene come true as quickly as possible."

Jean sighed and stretched his legs out. "Gabrielle," he said slowly. "No one else in this room is psychic. We're missing a few steps in your logic."

"Oh, right." Gabrielle sighed and looked at her watch. "Harry got me out of my panic by sending me some images. I cannot and do not need to think about what happened earlier – it is no longer important."

"What is important is that I now need a straight black knee-length skirt with a slit up one side, a white blouse, a black tie, and some black pumps with four inch heels."

Jean winced.

"I know," Gabrielle agreed. "Not even Harry Potter is perfect; those heels will be painful."

"That's not quite what I winced at," Jean said, his voice sounding resigned. "Can I ask what happened to Wormtail?"

"Neat change of subject," Ron mumbled. "You know that he was a rat Animagus?"

"Yes."

"Harry locked him in his rat form and placed him in a cage full of pythons."

"Ouch," Jean whispered, his tone now admiring.

"I think," Hermione interjected, "that Harry hates Malfoy more than he hated Wormtail."

"Oh, good. So he's going to do something similar to Malfoy?"

"Probably," Hermione sighed. "And what's worse is that we won't know what until it happens."

"Yeah," Ron agreed. "Convincing Harry to share his plans early is practically impossible. He still blames himself for when Chang betrayed us to Voldemort. Some good people died that day, and Harry has never shared a scheme since."

"What happened to her?"

Hermione sighed. "We didn't do anything to her. Voldemort, on the other hand... she's in St Mungo's, and will be for the rest of her life."

"I have one more question, before you can go get ready," Aimée said to Gabrielle. "Why did Harry lose his temper?"

"I am not sure," Gabrielle said with a little frown. "He was looking for something inside me, and when he found it, he lost his temper." She shrugged. "I am sure it was something to do with earlier today."

Aimée sighed once more. "Okay, go and get ready."

"Thanks, Mama," Gabrielle said cheerfully and dashed out of the room, almost bouncing with happiness.

She burst into her room and threw a new uniform and some casual clothes into a bag, before reluctantly adding Harry's practice shirt for her to sleep in. She was convinced that sleeping naked would be a lot more fun.

She had barely finished when Harry arrived. "Ready?"

Gabrielle held up her bag and walked over to him.

He pulled her into a deep hug, and they Apparated away.

---

"I swear Harry's going to turn me into an alcoholic," Hermione said with a sigh, as she raided Harry's fridge.

"And Gabrielle isn't going to help," Aimée agreed. "She can be most frustrating at times."

Hermione walked back into the room with four glasses and two bottles of wine.

"I agree," Ron said. "But I can't help envy them a little bit."

"Oh?" Hermione asked, raising her eyebrows inquisitively.

Ron smiled at her. "They aren't going to live in the real world like the rest of us. They are going to occupy a completely different level, one where a look, a thought, or a kiss can make everything better, one where outrageous feats of magic are pulled off without a second thought, and one where they'll both be obscenely happy for the rest of their lives. They'll never be bothered by self-doubt, by fear, by life itself like the rest of us."

There was silence as the others started to think through Ron's words. Hermione silently handed out the now-filled glasses of wine.

"They're going to live in a fairytale," Ron continued, his voice dropping a little. "A world where they'll be attacked by the bad guys, bad guys we will



never understand or truly deal with, yet they'll survive and grow with it. You have the rich and powerful king and his beautiful queen. You have idiots like Malfoy, who think they're more of a problem than they really are – they plot and scheme, never realising that it is only a small thread that stops the king from stomping hard – and as they push, they fray the line even more.

"And the funny thing is, neither of them will ever realise it. They'll think that they have perfectly normal lives, that love is something tangible for the rest of the world, as it is for them, and that everyone does what is right, rather than what is easy, just because they do."

"It is strange," Jean said slowly, "that as Gabrielle grew up, all I wanted for her was to be happy, and now that she has that within her grasp, I find it more difficult to let go."

"It is the way of all parents," Aimée agreed. "You wanted Gabrielle to be happy and safe. What she has with Harry will never be anything as dull as mere happiness. Ron is quite correct. They have a fairytale romance building, and they will live a life of extremes, of highs that make them like angels, and lows that the devil himself would be proud to engineer. All we can hope for is more highs than lows, and you know, I believe that will come true." She paused for a second, and then continued. "I have to believe that. Both of them deserve nothing less."

Gabrielle looked around eagerly as they arrived in an apartment. One wall seemed to be made completely of glass, showing a breathtaking view of a large city illuminated solely by the twinkling lights a city at night displays. Outside was a large balcony, one she recognised from the fantasy he had sent her earlier. She guessed that this was his apartment in London.

A glass staircase led up toward a platform, which she presumed was the sleeping area. An open kitchen was in front of her, with a living area to the right of it. The floor appeared to be made of stone, and everything screamed wealth and taste.

It was also completely devoid of personal items. It had nothing of Harry, unlike his cottage in the Lake District; this was somewhere he stayed, not somewhere he lived.

"It is nice," she said diplomatically.

"Nice?" he asked, his voice teasing her.

"It would be *nicer* if you *lived* here," she explained. "It feels too empty and unused."

"I guess that does sum this place up," Harry agreed, glancing around. "I thought you'd want to see it, as I do live here most of the time during the season."

"May I decorate?"

Harry looked at her and laughed slowly. "Moving in?"

She nodded seriously. "I go where you go."

"Then, yes, you can decorate," he smiled slightly.

"I am being very presumptuous, am I not?"

"A little," he agreed. "But with reason."

"I hope so," she sighed softly.

"Tell me something," Harry said, his voice lowering into an intimate whisper.

"Anything," Gabrielle replied, watching as he moved away from her, across from the glass wall, and stared at her.

"Did you mean it earlier, that what you feel from me is the opposite of what you felt from *him*?"

She nodded. "What I feel from you makes me feel good," she explained, understating the matter, but unsure how she could put what she felt into mere words. "And it is different, as you are my Mate; it works on a much deeper level than my automatic pull."

"And when I give you an order to follow, it feels good?"

She nodded again. "When I disobeyed you earlier, it hurt; it was hard, but the little orders you gave me afterward that I *could* follow made me forget the order I disobeyed. That, more than anything, made me feel so much better."

"Kick your shoes off."

Gabrielle blinked at him as her body moved automatically, kicking the low heels she was wearing off her feet and to one side. The coolness of the stone floor was a bit of a shock as it clashed with the feeling of warmth that shot through her body.

"Turn around."

She slowly twirled on the spot, looking at him curiously.

"Come here."

She slid forward, suddenly realising where this could be going and hoping beyond hope that it was. She met his eyes, allowing her eagerness and excitement to shine through.

She stopped in front of him and looked up.

His right hand moved out and softly touched her cheek. “You’re mine, Gabby,” he whispered.

“I know,” she replied.

He leant down and kissed her. It was a new kiss from him; it was possessive and hot, it seemed to want to devour her, and so she gave in to it immediately. Her hands slid up around his shoulders and she held onto him tightly.

Without breaking the kiss he picked her up and carried her up the stairs. The platform was dominated by a large low-slung bed. He placed her down on it gently and took a step or two back. With a smooth movement he pulled off the jumper and t-shirt he was wearing, leaving him bare-chested.

“Why now?” she asked from the bed. “Is it because of what happened earlier?” She found herself in a difficult situation. He had carried her to bed, and it looked like he was quite prepared to introduce her to a lot more than she had ever experienced in the past – and she was ecstatic about the idea. But she could also feel that he wasn’t quite in control of himself, and she knew it would kill her to wake up next to him and see regret in his eyes.

He nodded. “Partly,” he whispered.

She licked her lips unconsciously as she watched him prowl around the platform. He was beautiful in a way that left her weak with desire. Especially now, with a mixture of danger and seduction radiating off him, he could capture her mind and soul with such ease.

“But mainly because it made me realise what it would feel like if I didn’t have you. You’ve wormed your way into my soul, Gabrielle, and I don’t object to it.”

“But?” she asked, fighting down the sexual reaction his words caused.

“But you’re right,” he sighed softly. “I don’t like that he, of all people, touched you. I don’t like that he tainted your innocence.”

She looked at him curiously. “I have no real wish to be an innocent any more,” she pointed out.

He half-smiled and stopped moving, leaning against the rail. “Not that sort of innocence,” he explained, sounding amused. “You have an innocence deep in your soul, Gabrielle; you view the world in a way I can not, and I find myself wanting to view it through your eyes. You’re aware of what the world is like, but refuse to allow that knowledge to change your perception of it. But Malfoy changed that earlier, and I want to put it back.” He paused, as if an idea had suddenly come to him. “I want you to be happy,” he said slowly. “And I want to be the person that makes you happy.”

“Then do not make love to me tonight,” she pleaded, shifting so that she was kneeling on the bed, her head bowed. She breathed as slowly as she could, as she looked up at him from her position, awaiting his response.

He tilted his head to one side and looked at her in surprise.

“I have said, many times, that I do not want you by half-measures, or for my benefit because I need rescuing again. I want you when you are going to commit to me forever, when you do it because you want to, not with the shadow of an evil man clouding your judgement. I want to give myself to you and be accepted for what I am offering. I do not want to wake up and see any hint of regret in your eyes.”

“I don’t think that I would regret this, Gabby.”

She could feel the honesty of that statement through the Bond. “That is not enough,” she whispered. “I want, no, I *need* for you to be positive that you will not regret this.”

She could feel his disappointment through the Bond, as well as, for the first time, his desire to make her his.

“Could we do other things, though?” she asked hopefully.

“Other things?”

She slowly started to undo the buttons on her shirt, raising herself so she was no longer sitting on her heels. She met his eyes as she shrugged her blouse off her shoulders, dumping it on the floor. She absently cursed her parents’ need to talk; it had taken away time for her to change. She had a variety of enticing underwear she had purchased for this very occasion, and yet here she was in a very plain-looking bra.

She took a deep breath and reached behind her, her fingers going for the clasp.

“Wait,” Harry whispered.

She looked at him, hoping that he wasn’t about to tell her to stop. Not now, not after a few seconds ago when he was ready to make love to her.

His hands went to his waist, undoing his belt. He didn’t look away from her as he moved with the same fluid grace he always did, no matter what he was doing. He kicked off his shoes and removed his trousers, draping them on the rail, removing his socks quickly.

She felt her heartbeat start to race and her mouth go dry as she watched him strip for her. She broke eye contact for a second, her eyes flicking down to his crotch, and she couldn't help but lick her lips again. He was visibly aroused.

He walked over to her. "Stand," he whispered.

She jumped to her feet, a little unsteady on the soft bed. He pulled her closer, and she leant down and kissed him. The extra height from the bed made her taller than he was, and she kissed him with all the love and passion she felt, resting her weight against him.

He broke this kiss, breathing hard against her lips for a second, his eyes darker than she ever remembered them.

His hands slid up to her waist, sliding around her, as his fingers found the zipper holding her skirt up. He slid it down and eased the skirt down her legs. She placed a hand on his shoulder so that she could step out of it and keep her balance.

She groaned as his hand slid up the outside of her legs, over her hips and up her sides. He looked deeply into her eyes as his hands found the back of her bra, his fingers twisting expertly, and the pressure holding her breasts was gone. His hands slid further up, easing the straps off her shoulders.

She lowered her hands, and looked at him pleadingly, wanting him to take that last step, to finally see half of her completely naked.

To her eternal relief, he did, removing her bra completely.

She held her breath, hoping that she was what he wanted, that he would desire her. She lightly bit her bottom lip and searched the Bond for his true feelings.

His eyes slid over her chest and then back up to her eyes, until she was hit by a huge wave of pure desire, of hunger. The romantic feeling was replaced in an instant by the desire of a man who had just seen his idea of perfection.

She smiled invitingly and took a step back, dropping to her knees, before lying down and holding her arms up to him invitingly.

It didn't take more than a second for him to join her.

---

Harry and Gabrielle arrived back at the transposed castle in Hogwarts' grounds just after breakfast. A series of Floo calls gathered Ron, Hermione, Percy, Bill, Fleur, and Olympe in the headmistress' office; the latter four were quickly brought up to speed of the events of the evening before, and after a magical vow, Percy was told everything.

"So," Harry finished. "Gabby spent the evening in the infirmary here, with Olympe, recovering from the traumatic ordeal."

"Why are you asking *me* to do this?" Percy asked in surprise.

Harry grinned at him, and Percy groaned and held up his hands. "Sorry, I forgot."

"Okay, let's split up. Most of us need to be far away from here when they arrive."

"I'll call you immediately, Harry," Olympe nodded, her eyes looking very amused.

Harry walked over and lightly kissed Gabrielle, before walking out the door with the Weasley boys and Hermione.

"Fleur," Gabrielle said, "may I have a quick word with you?"

"Of course," Fleur replied.

"Use my guest room," Olympe offered, pointing to a door off to one side.

Gabrielle locked the door, and then cast a privacy charm to be extra sure.

"What is the matter, my little angel?" Fleur asked

"I'm scared I can't handle what happened last night," Gabrielle said nervously.

"Oh, Gabrielle," Fleur said, bringing her sister in for a hug. "It must have been awful, that evil man touching you."

"What?" Gabrielle asked in surprise. "Oh, no, not that!"

"Then what?" Fleur asked, a confused look on her face.

"Last night," Gabrielle tried to clarify. "With Harry."

"I am lost."

"We did not make love," Gabrielle explained, a faint blush adding a touch of colour to her face. "But we did a lot of other things."

"And what is the problem? You enjoyed it, correct?"

Gabrielle nodded eagerly. "But I've heard that making love is better?"

"Normally, yes," Fleur agreed.

"That is the problem," Gabrielle explained, holding her arms wide.

"What is the problem? I am still lost."

"Last night was amazing, but I passed out."

"You passed out from Harry making love to you – without actually doing it?"

"Twice," Gabrielle said while nodding eagerly.

Fleur sat down and started to snigger.

Gabrielle stamped her foot. "It is *not* funny!" she insisted, a little hurt at her sister's reaction. "How am I supposed to please him when he makes it so good that I pass out? And what if gets better than that? How am I supposed to survive if he can destroy my mind like that?"

"Gabrielle," Fleur said with a shake of her head, her eyes dancing with suppressed mirth. "This is *not* a serious problem."

"It is!" Gabrielle protested. "None of my books ever described such pleasure from a man's touch. Even with the feedback loop, I should not have felt this way!"

"Feedback loop?"

"I can feel his pleasure, and it increases mine," Gabrielle explained. "And he likes me excited."

Fleur sighed softly. "You are a brat," she said firmly.

"What?"

"Gabrielle, this is not an issue. You both enjoy it, so don't worry about it. You cannot die from pleasure, and with practice, you will get used to it. You will just have to wait, and then find a way to pay Harry back for it."

"Good idea," Gabrielle said with a nod. "What do you do with Bill?"

"*GABRIELLE!*" Fleur shouted. "I am NOT telling you *that!*"

---

Olympe Maxime looked at the paperwork in front of her and sighed. Her concentration was not where it should be, and the cause was her favourite student. These past few months had been the most eventful of her career, but she couldn't bring herself to complain about it.

Her school was so much more *fun* than it had been; the stilted atmosphere had been replaced by one that was more like how Hogwarts had been when Harry was there – only without the divisions that had plagued his education. Pranksters had appeared all over the place, keeping the staff and the students on their toes, and while there had been a few malicious examples, the punishments had been harsh, and those events had faded as the students had learnt the limits of what was acceptable.

Of course, not one of them suspected that she herself had played the odd prank on the student population. If they were naïve enough to think that the professors were there as targets only, that was their fault.

A charmed crystal on her desk lit up, and she smiled to herself. She touched her wand to another crystal, and waited, not putting her wand away.

Without ceremony, her doors were forced open, and Severus Snape stormed in, accompanied by Albus Dumbledore and an embarrassed-looking Minerva McGonagall.

"I demand that the tramp responsible for the assault of a Hogwarts professor be handed over immediately," Snape shouted.

Olympe almost smiled, but instead she raised her wand and fired a spell straight at Snape.

The greasy-haired Potions professor flew back against a wall, bouncing to the floor. He groaned as he got to his feet, looking a little unsteady.

"You do not barge into *my* office, shout at me like a student, or insult my Head Girl," Olympe said calmly. "And if you do so again, I shall put you in your hospital wing for a month."

Snape got to his feet, snarling, his wand in his hand.

"Cast that spell, and you'll be dead before the word is out of your mouth," a new voice said coldly from the doorway, interrupting Dumbledore, who had opened his mouth.

"Potter," Snape sneered, but he put his wand away slowly.

"You called?" Harry asked Olympe, ignoring Snape completely.

"Thank you for coming, Harry," she replied courteously. "We were just about to start a discussion concerning your Seeker."

"Oh?" Harry asked, walking over to her desk and perching on the side. He waved his hand absently, creating three low-slung seats.

"Sit," Olympe invited her three guests, hiding her smirk. The chairs he had created would make those sitting in them feel ill at ease, in addition to being low enough that the guests would have to look up at Harry, who was still deliberately perched on the side of her desk.

"Now, I'll hear your apology first," she said to Snape.

Snape blinked at her.

"Or I will throw you out," Olympe continued simply.

"My apologies," Snape said coldly. "I let my temper get the best of me."

"Accepted," she said with a nod of her head. "So, might I ask why you are here before I could summon you?"

"Summon us?" Snape thundered, almost jumping to his feet. "Your student assaulted one of our professors and you would dare summon us?"

"Severus!" Dumbledore said forcibly.

"My apologies," Snape muttered.

"Which professor?" Harry asked with interest.

"Draco Malfoy," Dumbledore said seriously.

"Somehow I'm not at all surprised. He does seem to invite trouble. Have you been promoted, Severus?" Harry asked. "I'm so sorry about your demotion, Minerva."

"I have *not* been demoted," Professor McGonagall replied icily.

"Oh, then what exactly has the Potions Professor got to do with this?" Harry asked idly. "He's not Malfoy's superior and has no further responsibility as Head of House if Malfoy is a professor, not a student, correct? Surely the Headmaster and Deputy Head are quite capable of dealing with this matter?"

There was a second of silence as Snape glared at Harry with undisguised hatred.

"Severus is an important member of the faculty," Dumbledore said firmly as he started to radiate magic.

"You know, I can do that too," Harry said with a smile and matched Dumbledore's aura perfectly.

The magic in the room seemed to warp the air.

"But all it shows is that we both have power, so please, let's not get into a stupid competition of who has more magic, and get to point of this meeting. I've got more important things to do," Harry finished, his own magic vanishing.

Dumbledore looked shocked for a brief second, and then reined in his own power and composure.

Olympe made a mental note to thank Harry later for that. She had felt more than a frisson of fear when Dumbledore had released his magic. For all the old man's manipulative ways, he was still an immensely powerful wizard.

"So," Harry said. "As I seem to be the only person who doesn't know what happened, why doesn't someone fill me in?"

"It would be a pleasure," Snape sneered under his breath. "Last night Gabrielle Delacour tried to seduce Draco Malfoy; when he turned her down, quite properly as she is a student, she lost her temper and forced him to run into a tree."

"And the problem is?" Harry asked.

"That *our* flying professor has been assaulted," Snape shouted.

"If you shout again, Severus, you *will* be ejected," Olympe said calmly.

"I'm still not seeing the problem here," Harry said absently. "The Death Eater obviously tried to assault one of our students, and forgetting that Gabrielle is a part-Veela, he has been given his just rewards."

Snape gaped at him.

"You forget how well I know Malfoy, Severus," Harry said with distaste, knowing that the use of the Potions professor's name would annoy the man. "What is Gabrielle's version of events?" Harry asked Olympe.

"Pretty much exactly how you guessed," Olympe said. "Gabrielle was returning to Beauxbatons from the dressing rooms at the pitch when Malfoy stopped her and tried to entice her down to Hogsmeade. When she said no, he touched her shoulder and wouldn't let her go. That was when she reacted instinctively to defend herself and ran back here, where I spent the evening consoling her. You do know that Veela are empathic?" she

asked.

Harry nodded. "I'd heard that."

"Well, it seems that your character reference was accurate. She has described him as having evil in his soul."

"I will not sit here and listen to a fine Hogwarts professor be insulted this way," Snape sneered.

"Then leave," Harry said indifferently. "You're superfluous to this meeting as it is. But I'd appreciate it you'd come back with the Death Eater scum and a bottle of Veritaserum."

"What?" Snape demanded.

"It's a *truth* potion, Snape," Harry said with a sad shake of his head, reverting to his preferred method of referring to the man. "Who would believe that Hogwarts now has a Potions professor who can't even recognise a simple truth potion? Are you sure that Severus is still the right candidate, Albus?"

Olympe bit the inside of her lip hard to stop herself from laughing.

"I know what it is," Snape hissed.

"Then get it; we'll use it on the ferret, get him to confess that his story was as true as his innocence during the last battle, then Albus can fire him and we can move on," Harry stated in a matter-of-fact voice. "That is," he continued, his eyes gleaming, "*if* we can trust your batch of Veritaserum. Maybe we'd better request some from a reliable neutral source. Like Durmstang's Potions Mistress."

Snape's face turned a dark puce, a colour Harry hadn't seen since he had been leaving the Dursleys and "accidentally" let slip just how rich he was.

"Potions don't work the same on Veela," Dumbledore said slowly. "And it would be unfair to only ask one side."

"Unfair?" Harry asked, raising his eyebrows. "All we need is one person's true account of the event."

"Draco's mind may have been affected by the Imperius," Snape said, "so his account may not be trustworthy."

"You mean that we're supposed to accept Malfoy's word, and ignoring generations of magical opinion to the contrary, if his testimony under Veritaserum is different, *that's* what isn't trustworthy? Well, you get points for imagination, if nothing else," Harry said.

"Nevertheless, the precedent has been set," Dumbledore responded thoughtfully, after a pointed look from Snape.

"Then we are at an impasse," Harry said slowly. "On one hand, we have the Head Girl of Beauxbatons, who happens to be the daughter of the most powerful man in France. On the other hand, we have a Death Eater. Actually, that reminds me, how *are* Aimée and Jean taking this?"

"They have threatened to cut all diplomatic ties with England if Malfoy is not punished, and I believe that if they do, Germany will follow, as will the rest of Europe," Olympe replied, watching with pleasure as McGonagall and Dumbledore's eyes widened.

"That would not be a good thing," Harry said with a frown. "It would cost me a bloody fortune." He pulled out his wand and sent off a quick messaging spell.

"What are you doing?" McGonagall asked.

"I've asked the Ministerial representatives to join us," Harry said, now sounding very irritated. "As this is now spinning into an international incident, we need to make sure that we don't make a misstep. Having England isolated could ruin my investment portfolio."

Olympe scowled at Harry, very glad that he had told her at least this part of his plan earlier. If he hadn't, she'd be tempted to curse him herself. His attitude was obviously working though, if Dumbledore and Snape's expression were anything to go by. They obviously believed that Harry's complete lack of interest over what happened to Gabrielle was genuine, and that he was more concerned about how much money he would lose.

There was a knock on her door a minute of uncomfortable silence later. "Come," she said firmly.

Percy and Ron Weasley entered, both in formal Ministerial robes. "What is going on?" Percy asked, his nose high in the air, and his voice full of snobbery.

"Last night, ferret-boy – Draco Malfoy – assaulted the daughter of Jean-Sebastian Delacour, although he is claiming that she tried to chat him up, and when he said no, she forced him to run into a tree," Harry said succinctly.

"Good for Gabrielle," Ron said cheerfully, making no attempt to conceal his delight upon hearing Draco's punishment.

Snape growled under his breath.

"Unfortunately, Jean is now royally pissed off, and is threatening to cut diplomatic ties over the whole thing," Harry finished.

"That would be disastrous," Percy said, going pale.

"Indeed," Harry agreed. "My investment portfolio would tank overnight. Can't you get Bill to talk to him? He's still dating Fleur, right?"

"I suspect that William will be on Jean's side here," Percy said solemnly. "Can't we use Veritaserum to get to the truth?"

"That's what I suggested, but the idiots here said it wouldn't be fair to the ferret as the potion doesn't work properly on Veela, and because Gabrielle might have played with his mind."

Ron snorted. "An admission of guilt, then?"

"Right, well, I could just make Malfoy *disappear*, that would fix the problem," Harry offered.

"Absolutely not!" Dumbledore said firmly.

"Pity," Percy said softly. "It would indeed solve our problems."

"I cannot believe that you are treating one of my students this way," Olympe said icily. "I will say just how disappointed in you I am, Harry."

Harry shrugged absently. "I like Gabrielle, but I'm not interested in cutting my net worth in half."

"I have a solution," Percy said after a moment of thought. "One that should appease Mr Delacour."

"Oh?" Snape sneered.

"In situations like this in the past where there is no clear guilt, one party can demand a duel, rather than go to trial."

"Are you insane?" Olympe demanded. "A professor against a student?"

"What about the use of Veela power?" Snape asked, his eyes alight with interest.

"I'm not sure I like this," Harry said.

"Quiet," Percy snapped. "This is more important than your money or your morals. This is the future of England at stake!"

"Quite," Snape agreed, as Dumbledore nodded.

"The use of Veela power, or any other form of Unforgivable, would be banned," Percy said. "And of course, if Miss Delacour said no, it would be an admission of guilt that not even her father could protect her from."

"You are ganging up on my student," Olympe roared.

"You are in England now," Percy sneered. "This is how we do business with inferiors. So, are we in agreement?"

"Wait," Harry said.

"What now?" Snape demanded.

"When is this duel going to happen? I'm not going to lose my Seeker over this, or risk humiliating the ferret before our staff match."

"How about the day after the staff match?" Ron offered.

"That should give me enough time to bring my reserve up to speed," Harry said slowly.

"And plenty of time for Draco to get ready," Snape agreed.

"Might I remind you that Gabrielle is underage," Olympe interjected acidly.

"She's sixteen, isn't she?" Percy asked.

Olympe nodded.

"Then, as a Veela, she has reached the age of majority under the English law for near-human creatures," Percy shrugged. "Are there any other objections?"

Olympe glowered at everyone in the room, but kept quiet.

"Excellent," Percy said. "I shall inform Jean personally. I'm sure he will be disappointed, but he will understand. Standard duel rules will be in force, so Miss Delacour and Professor Malfoy must stay apart until then. Professors, Harry," Percy finished, nodding at them, before turning and walking out.

Olympe glared at the remaining four people. "Mr Potter," she said firmly. "You will stay behind so that we can discuss your future employment here. You three will leave."

"Now, Olympe," Albus said, his eyes twinkling merrily.

"Leave now, Albus, or I will remove us from the tournament, and you can be sure that the press will hear every word of this conversation. I have recorded it."

Snape swallowed and Harry looked nervous.

“This could destroy my reputation,” Harry muttered. “Leave, all of you.”

With barely a backward look, the three professors trooped out.

There was silence in the room for a minute, before two doors opened, one that had been hidden before, and Jean, Aimée, Ron, Hermione, Percy, Bill, Fleur, and Gabrielle all entered.

“It’s a truth potion, Snape,” Ron said, mimicking Harry’s tones.

Harry grinned, and then started to laugh. It was a laugh picked up by the others, except for Jean and Percy.

“What is going on?” Jean demanded.

“Yes,” Percy agreed. “Why did you insist that I push for a duel? Malfoy is a skilled duellist these days.”

“Too much has gone on that I do not understand,” Jean complained. “Why is placing my daughter in such a position a good thing, especially when we had Malfoy held over a barrel? That excuse about Veritaserum was a complete fabrication.”

“Haven’t you been paying attention over the last few days?” Harry asked casually.

“Like what?” Jean asked.

“With Gabrielle’s magic?”

“Well apart from her casting a spell silently and fixing…” his voice trailed off as he looked at Gabrielle, and then his wife. “A Mated Veela can use her Mate’s magic, with permission,” he whispered. “Malfoy is going to get on the duelling platform, expecting to be fighting a teenager, but instead he is going to be faced with someone with access to more magic power than anyone else in the world,” Jean whispered reverently. “Never mind putting him in prison, you are going to have Gabrielle humiliate him in public – he’ll never live that down!”

Harry nodded with a cold smirk.

“I’ve said it before, Harry,” Olympe said with a shake of her head. “If I ever annoy you, just kill me quickly; it would be more merciful.”

Harry grinned, “Can I just say how pleased I was with your spell at Snape. It was brilliant. And Percy, you were great; I wanted to punch you!”

“Thank you,” Percy said modestly. “I do try.”

“And that’s why you wanted it on that date,” Bill said, “so that you can still beat Malfoy in Quidditch.”

Harry looked at Gabrielle and smiled softly at her. “And we will, but just to make sure, we will spend a lot of time ensuring that you are able to beat him without my magic.”

Gabrielle nodded and smiled back at him, a little nervously.

“There’s no need to be worried, Gabby; I won’t let him hurt you.”

She nodded, and her smile seemed to increase in brightness.

“Right,” Harry said, looking at his watch. It was almost lunchtime. “Gabrielle and I need breakfast, so we’re off to New York. Percy, Jean, can you arrange a press conference for later, and let everyone know what’s going on, and why? We’ll let the press decide whom they support, and keep note. It should help us flush out the racists that are still around. Jean, you should play the outraged father more than the future Minister.”

“That is not guaranteed,” Jean pointed out with a sigh.

“I’ll sever all diplomatic ties first?” Harry teased. “Sounds like someone with some degree of authority in France. And that’s a good thing, and not just because I’m falling for your daughter. France needs a strong incorruptible Minister with morals, and so do we actually, but we’ll take things one step at a time.”

“Harry is right,” Olympe agreed. “No one else can put France back on her feet, and this event is raising your profile even more. The other candidates will fail against you.”

“Exactly,” Harry nodded. “And as long as I have this damn fame, I might as well use it for good.” He looked at Gabby. “Ready?”

She nodded and walked over to him, hugging him tightly.

“We’ll see you later,” he said. “Oh, and Olympe? Let Picup know what’s going on.”

She nodded as the two of them vanished.

“Would anyone mind if I had a small rant for a second?” Hermione asked politely into the ensuing silence.

“Go ahead,” Olympe said, not bothering to hide her amusement.



“It’s impossible to Apparate within Hogwarts!”

“Feel better?” Ron asked, moving an arm around her.

“I’ve been keeping that in since yesterday,” she sighed in relief. “It was getting painful. And that’s not to mention the idea of dual Apparating three and a half thousand miles through Hogwarts’ wards.”

“Gabrielle knows how ‘e does it,” Fleur said. “But she will not tell anyone. Not even me. Her loyalty to ‘arry overrides everyzing else.”

“Good,” Percy said softly. “We need Harry as he is now, more than ever.” He looked around and took a deep breath. “We’re in a bigger mess than he, or you, know.”

“Percy?” Ron queried softly.

“No,” Percy said, “I think its time we told them.”

“You’re the boss,” Ron agreed with a small shrug.

“What is going on?” Jean asked.

“The old guard, those who had more than a small amount of support of Voldemort, are still in power, and they refuse to go. There are a small group of us younger ones who are fighting all we can, but there is a limit to what we can do. We’ve tried as hard as we can to keep Harry out of it, but it’s getting to the stage now where we need him. We need his power and influence, because we need to get rid of Scrimgeour. Urgently.”

“We want to put someone else in – and we’ve got a candidate.”

“Percy?” Jean asked.

“Oh no, not me,” Percy said with a smile. “I’d much rather run things from the shadows than have to be doing it in public. The thought of kissing babies and glad-handing fills me with dread.”

“Slytherin,” Bill teased.

“A little,” Percy agreed cheerfully. “But as Harry’s shown, a bit of ambition and ruthlessness is not a bad thing.”

“Exactly,” Ron agreed. “We did think about putting Dad in control.”

“But that would be a disaster,” Percy shuddered. “Don’t get me wrong, I love Dad, but as Minister?” Bill and Ron both shuddered as well.

“Of course,” Hermione said with a slight smile. “If Harry would take it, it would sort out every problem.”

“And kill Harry,” Ron sighed. “He’d do it, and do it well, but he’d hate every second of it, which is why we’d never ask him.”

“Besides,” Percy said, “over-dependence on Harry is a bad thing. We need to be able to do things without him, and only ask for his help if it is really necessary. That’s part of the problem with Albus. We let him deal with everything for far too long and lost the ability to think for ourselves. It’s a failing of the Wizarding World that we often take the easy option.”

“I am impressed,” Olympe said slowly. “I did not expect to hear pure-blood wizards talk like this.”

“As someone who has experienced our racism, I am sure you wouldn’t,” Percy said with a nod. “We are learning the lessons Harry has been teaching us,” he finished.

“Quite,” Jean nodded. “I don’t suppose your candidate is a pure-blood, is he?”

“Nope. He’s a Muggle born. Dirk Cresswell.”

“Your Goblin liaison officer?”

“Yeah,” Percy said. “When we started to fight Voldemort properly, he was instrumental in keeping the Goblins neutral. We’ve been planning his campaign in secret, but we need Harry’s name; otherwise we’re not going to get anywhere against the Ministry Mouthpiece.”

“Sorry?” Aimée asked.

“The Daily Prophet,” Hermione explained. “They are still touting out the Ministry’s official view as fact.”

“They don’t like me,” Percy half smiled. “Mainly because I keep trying to put laws in place that will curtail their ability to lie. I’ve come close a time or two in getting things passed, but I’ve not quite got there yet. I will, though, and then I will personally sue them into bankruptcy.”

“You know something, Percy,” Bill said, “I’m really glad you’re a Weasley again.”

“Me too,” he grinned. “It’s a lot more fun knowing that I have people backing me up, and that I don’t have to be a simpering idiot to get what I want.”

“Well, this has been fascinating, but you have jobs to do,” Olympe said. “And I have paperwork to do.”

“Come on, William,” Fleur said. “We’ll go for a walk and then see if we can meet Gabrielle and ‘arry later.”

Slowly the room emptied, and Olympe sat back, her smile slowly fading. She was starting to get very worried about Albus. His behaviour was becoming more and more bizarre.

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“Why New York?” Gabrielle asked. They had appeared in a little-used tunnel, and passed through a wall, similar to the one at King’s Cross, to find themselves in a bustling train station. Harry led the way through the crowd to the escalators leading up to street level.

“Mainly because of the time difference,” Harry explained, wrapping an arm around her waist. “I know a nice diner around the corner.”

She nodded and looked around eagerly, surprised by the sheer number of yellow cabs she could see. They walked down a long block, crossed the street and stopped outside an aluminium-covered building that looked more like an elongated caravan than a restaurant. A large green sign proclaimed “Tick Tock Diner” in illuminated letters.

Inside, they were quickly seated at a table and provided with menus. With a casual wave of his hand, Harry set up what she recognised as a privacy charm so that they couldn’t hear the noise surrounding their booth – and no one could hear their conversation.

“The noise in here can get a bit much,” he explained. “Too many New Yorkers with cell phones.”

“Morning,” an older waitress said, appearing at their table as if by magic. “I’m Sandy, I’ll be your server today. What can I get you folks?”

“Two coffees, black. I’ll have a Traffic Jam; she’ll have a Blueberry Roll Up.”

“I’ll be right back with your drinks,” Sandy said and turned, walking away.

“Coffee?” Gabrielle asked doubtfully.

Harry grinned at her. “Sorry, this is America. The last time they had good tea here, the savages wasted it by throwing it into Boston Harbour. Some local wizards tried to rescue it, but it was ruined. Ever since then we’ve made it our mission in life to send them only the worst stuff.”

He leant back and grinned at her, in a relaxed and easy manner she found fascinating. “There’s ample proof that the Americans are heathens, but the biggest proof is definitely what they do to the tea they *do* have.”

“Oh?” Gabrielle asked, entranced.

“They serve it cold on ice, often absolutely saturated with artificial sweetener.”

Gabrielle shuddered.

“Sometimes they even add fruit flavourings, too. I went to one place, and they tried to serve Ceylon that way. Ollie actually jumped me to stop me from causing a scene. I was *not* impressed.”

She laughed and rested her chin on her hands, smiling at him.

“We were in the US on tour, playing at some of their big stadiums. They’re starting to love their Quidditch over here. The Muggles play a different sport to the rest of the world, and the Americans Wizards play Quodpot, only five years ago the owner of the Cannons bet some local Americans that his team could beat the best America could put together.”

“And?”

“780 to nil,” Harry smirked. “All the press went insane at such a humiliating defeat, and demanded a rematch. It happened, but went to 830 to nothing. After that, the Americans were determined to regain lost pride, so they passed a law that requires the schools to teach Quidditch. The third time we played, we only won by 120 points, so they’ve been improving. The Cannons come over here and play the American National team every year.”

“And you won?” Gabrielle asked.

Harry grinned and nodded. “America thought that they would have us this year, they’ve been improving all the time and will be a force at the next World Cup. Their Chasers outplayed us, but they didn’t expect me to get the Snitch first, though.”

“So is that how you know about this place?”

“We played at a stadium built in a swamp across the river from here, and we were staying in the New Yorker Hotel attached to this place.”

“Here’s your coffee,” Sandy announced as she dumped two large mugs in front of them. “I’ll be back with a refill with your food.”

“Thank you,” Gabrielle said with a smile.

“Enjoy.”

Gabrielle took a sip and nearly choked on the strong taste.

Yeah,” Harry said with a grin. “They make it strong here. Let me.” He reached over and snapped his fingers, and a white liquid poured into the cup. “Getting good dairy cream is hard over here, but it’s the only way to make this gunk taste nice. If I asked Sandy there for cream, what I’d get would be half cream and half milk. Try it now.”

She nodded and took a cautious sip. “That’s almost drinkable,” she said in surprise.

He grinned and lounged back again, keeping his own black. “The second time we toured here,” he said, “was a lot more fun than the first.”

She watched him, allowing herself to relax completely, enjoying the way his mouth moved as he talked, the way he emphasised some things with decisive hand movements. This was Harry with his shields completely down, and it was with a thrill that she came to the conclusion that it was because of her. He trusted her enough to allow her to see him at his most relaxed.

Later she wouldn’t be able to say what the food was like, or what it tasted of, as the only thing she would remember was the half-smile on his face and the stories he told her, as she fell in love with another new facet of her Mate.

---

Minerva looked at her watch and poured two cups of tea on the table next to her. Exactly five seconds later, Harry Potter appeared in the empty chair.

“Thanks,” he said as reached out to take a cup.

“You were never this prompt when in school.”

“I know,” he said with a grin. “But when Apparating into someone’s private rooms, it’s better to be on time.”

She nodded.

“Just in case you did take it the wrong way, I’ll just say I’m sorry for including you in the ‘idiots’ remark earlier.”

“No offence was taken, Harry. But I would appreciate knowing what is going on.”

“Gabrielle can use my magic,” he said simply.

Minerva frowned for a second as she thought about it, before her memory pulled up the exact page she had read. “Don’t tell me,” she sighed. “With you involved, it goes beyond a mere Summoning Spell?”

“I can give her everything I have,” he agreed with a smile.

“You set Mr Malfoy up?”

“Not quite,” he replied with a frown. “Malfoy did assault her last night, and if Gabby hadn’t disobeyed a direct order from me, he would be dead.”

“Oh?”

“I told her to let me go, so I could go and kill him for tainting her innocence. She obeyed for a second, but then she grabbed me again and wouldn’t let go. I could feel it, Min; I could feel the pain she was going through.”

“It was bad?” Minerva asked, blowing on the surface of her tea.

“As bad as the Cruciatus, and I caused it. I hurt her without even realising it.”

“What have you learnt from that?” she asked.

“To be more careful with what I say,” he said with a deep sigh.

“Then it was a lesson well learnt,” Minerva said firmly. “I take it you’ve made it up to her?”

Harry blushed slightly and nodded. “And I’ll do so for a lot longer.”

“Then that lesson is over,” Minerva declared. “So, Mr Malfoy is going to get a surprise?”

He nodded. “I hope so. I think I know how he’ll react, and I have plans in place.”

“Care to share them?”

He shook his head with a slight smile. “You’ll see when it happens, *if* it happens. I don’t want anyone to be able to claim that you conspired with me in a set-up.”

She laughed softly and lightly touched his hand. “You’re a far cry from the tiny boy I remember first arriving here.”

“I know,” he agreed. “Those days seem like a different life.” He paused and looked away for a second before turning and concentrating on her totally. “I wanted to talk about Albus.”

She nodded. “This morning’s display was shocking. There is something seriously wrong with him.”

“But still no idea what?”

She shook her head. “It is frustrating,” she sighed, “to see a once-great man fall like this. He made very little attempt to rein Severus in this morning. And Severus? Well, he is obviously planning something, because his behaviour was strange this morning as well.”

“Stranger than normal, you mean. I think I’m going to have to go against them directly if this continues.”

“And you don’t want to do that?”

“Not directly; it could get messy,” Harry said with a sigh. “Dumbledore is still very powerful, but I’m a lot younger, and I’ve stayed in shape. Snape is an evil bastard, but not a challenge in the power stakes.”

“I hope it doesn’t come down to that,” Minerva said softly.

“So do I. So do I.”

They sat in silence for a few minutes, before Harry looked at her with a smile. “So, how do you propose to deal with the fact that most of our students want to be taught by the famous Professor McGonagall?”

She felt herself blush as she looked at him. “Scamp.”

---

“Harry Potter!” Viktor Krum’s booming voice was audible throughout most of Hogwarts.

“Viktor?” Harry asked, walking across to the Seeker.

“Ve need to talk,” the Bulgarian said seriously.

“Hold on,” Harry said and grasped his shoulder, Apparating them to his room in Beauxbatons.

“Drink?”

“I vill ignore de Apparating,” Viktor muttered to himself. “Milk?”

Harry nodded and poured two glasses. The two Seekers settled themselves comfortably on the seats in front of the fireplace, facing each other.

“Explain,” Viktor said firmly.

“Explain what?”

“I am no idiot, Harry” Viktor said. “I haff seen tings dat the uddhers do not. Veela and Harry are together, and I vant to know vhat Professor is doing with Student.”

“I am Gabrielle’s Mate.”

Krum blinked. “By Veela choice?”

Harry sighed and spent a few minutes explaining.

“I knew dat you vere a goot mon,” Viktor said, a smile appearing on his face. “You are helpink your Mate learn for dis duel?”

Harry nodded. “Malfoy won’t know what hit him.”

“Excellent,” Krum said, rubbing his hands together in unforced glee. “I vill help as vell.”

“I’m sorry, Viktor?”

“Durmstrang used to teach the Dark Arts,” Krum explained. “I vas goot student at Durmstrang, despite being famous Quidditch star. Malfoy is Death Eater scum, and I vill tich Veela chick how to beat Dark Arts.”

“Thank you,” Harry said with a smile.

Krum nodded. “You know a lot, Harry Potter, bot I am var nastier dan you are, and I will show her some tings that vould nevah occur to you.”

“You mind if I tag along?”

“I vould not expect you to do anything less.”

“Now,” Harry said with a smile. “Fancy going for a fly before dinner?”

Viktor beamed at him.

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Jean, Aimée, mind if I pop through?"

"Of course, Harry," Aimée said.

She stepped back, and a second later Harry appeared through the fireplace.

"I'm here for a déjà-vu conversation," he said.

"Oh?" Jean asked, folding his paper up.

"I would like your permission to marry Gabrielle."

The paper fell out of Jean's hand as he gaped at Harry.

Harry grinned at him.

"What has bought this on?" Aimée asked.

"The last few days," Harry admitted. "But, I guess, it was two things in the end. The first was when she disobeyed me yesterday. It took courage for her to do what she did, and a firm belief in me. I know I caused her pain, and I still feel guilty about it today, but she couldn't have chosen a better way to impress me."

"And the second?" Aimée asked.

Harry took a deep breath. "After the Malfoy incident, I took Gabrielle to my apartment with the intention of, well, claiming Gabby permanently and ensuring that she would never go insane."

Jean's eyebrows seemed to disappear in to his hairline, and he started to look a little pale.

"We were in my bed, and I could feel Gabby's desire," he continued, focusing on Aimée.

"And?" she prompted.

"Gabrielle asked me not to make love to her."

Jean exhaled suddenly.

"She did?" Aimée asked in surprise.

"And I think that was when I finally knew, without doubt. The easiest thing for her to do would have been to do what I wanted. But for the second time, she put me first, before even thinking of herself. She made that decision because she didn't want me to regret it. She did what was right, not what was easy. I knew then that it was real, that I could trust her with my heart and my soul, and that she would never let me down, never stop caring for me.

"Then when I was playing the role in Olympe's office, and pretending I didn't care, I almost felt sick inside, but she was there for me, sending me little feelings of love while I was doing it. How could I not fall in love with her?"

Jean nodded and slowly started to smile. "You don't need our permission," he said. "The law says she is an adult over here."

"I will not use a law I disagree with for my own benefit. British Muggle law states that a sixteen-year-old can get married with her parents' permission, and that is the law I will follow."

Aimée nodded. "I wouldn't expect anything less from you."

"When are you going to ask her?" Jean asked.

"After the tournament is over," Harry said.

"Can I ask about the Bond?"

"I've accepted it," Harry said. "And actually, I'm starting to really like it. For the first time I don't have to worry about my partner when she's out of my sight. The person I marry will always be a target, and Gabrielle showed that she could handle herself yesterday, and that if she does get in trouble, I'll know about it instantly. The benefits far outweigh the negatives." He paused and flushed slightly, before looking up at them. "When we, erm, *experimented* a little Saturday night, well, any doubts I had about compatibility went straight out the window."

Aimée nodded, while Jean looked away.

"Anyway," Harry continued, changing the subject. "I just wanted your permission and Aimée's help."

"What for?"

"Ring shopping," he said, smiling hopefully.

"Good idea," Jean nodded. "You do, of course, have our permission." He paused and smiled at Harry. "Welcome to the family."

“Thank you,” Harry replied, with a relieved look.

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“Any luck?” Ron asked.

“A little,” Hermione said, stretching and looking up from the books she was reading. “I’ve found a few things that I might be able to combine that will allow them to stop the Bond, but not send Gabrielle mad.”

“You are a genius,” Ron said, with a smile.

“I know I am,” Hermione replied, with a matching smile. “Harry deserves to be as happy as we are, and I can help that.”

“Yep, I’m sure it will help him make his mind up on Gabrielle,” Ron said. “You’ve got thirty minutes before you’re stopping for the evening, though.”

“Thirty minutes?” Hermione protested. “I’m so close. I need more time.”

“Nope, in thirty minutes you are stopping, having a bath, and then joining me for dinner. No more work tonight.”

“Okay, Ron,” she sighed.

He smiled and walked out of her study. She smiled at his retreating back for a few seconds. He had found a way to stop her habit of over-studying, and was very strict about the time she could spend on any one problem. It had been the cause of many arguments when they had first been married, as she preferred to spend the night studying, regardless of Ron.

When she remembered how they were at Hogwarts, she was still surprised that they were together. Their antagonistic behaviour to each other had been childish, and they had both needed to grow up.

But now that they had, she was happier than she had ever expected to be.

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“And welcome to the second of the three matches that will decide the finalists in this Three Nations Quidditch Cup. Once again, I’m your host for this afternoon’s match, Lee Jordan, and today is the first time that we will see the Hogwarts team.” The stands were heaving with spectators as the Hogwarts stalwarts showed up to support their school. Hogwarts school banners and individual House flags waved everywhere.

“The members of the Durmstrang team are hurting after losing the opening match to Beauxbatons, and they need to win today to keep their chances of reaching the final alive.

“The Hogwarts team is made up primarily of Slytherins, and are coached by Draco Malfoy –” this statement was met with cheers from the Slytherins in the audience and some grudging flag waving by members of the other Houses “– who we all know is having a duel with the Beauxbatons Seeker after the next match. In my opinion, this is yet another example of the backward society we live in, and just why Harry Potter went to France. When you have a professor too scared to take Veritaserum to prove his own innocence, well, then, you just know he’s guilty!”

“Lee Jordan!” yelled McGonagall.

“Sorry, Professor. I digress,” Lee said with as much sincerity as he had ever been able to muster back during his school days. “Back to the match. Durmstrang and Krum, the Seeker for Bulgaria, have made a lot of friends so far, with their open attitude. At their invitation, I, a few other members of the press, and Harry Potter, were invited to watch one of their Defence lessons, and let me tell you, rumours of Durmstrang and the Dark Arts are wide of the mark. What we were treated to was an informative and educational display of advanced duelling technique and how to counter the Dark Arts.” The short non-entity who was this year’s Defence teacher at Hogwarts attempted to glower threateningly at Lee but failed miserably. He settled for hunching down and becoming invisible among the mass of teachers, at which he achieved more success. “It was quite a pleasure to see four Durmstrang students duel Harry Potter to a standstill. I can’t help but think that if we had enjoyed lessons like that, Voldemort would never have stood a chance. Which is yet another sign of the political insanity that runs this country. But before Professor McGonagall yells at me again for going off on a political rant, we’re about ready to start.

“And before we do, I’ll make one last comment.” McGonagall, who had begun to relax, tensed up again, prepared to squelch the irrepressible announcer if necessary. “If the Hogwarts team plays like the Slytherins did in my day, I’ll be supporting Germany before the end of the match. I will not stand for being embarrassed by my Alma Mater.” Minerva groaned, but before she could express her half-hearted displeasure, Lee was off again, introducing the Durmstrang and Hogwarts teams with professional flair.

“And the players are on the pitch and in position. Madam Hooch gives the signal and we’re away!

“And for Merlin’s sake, Hogwarts, you’ve only been on the pitch for six seconds and you’ve fouled! Krabbe blatches Ernhand to interrupt a pass, but now Durmstrang has a free throw, and it’s ten nil to the Germans. Good goal that, shows confidence in their ability.

“Hogwarts attack and look to be keeping it clean at the moment. Tristan Antworthy passes to Rose Parkinson, who scores, and that’s more like it. That’s what I want to see, good play by the Hogwarts crew, but now they have to defend as Matthias Wechsler, and try saying that after a butterbeer or two, launches the Bludger directly at Sean Murphy, the Hogwarts Seeker.

“He evades it casually and shoots a glare back. Otto Melman has the Quaffle and is at the head of a Trident Attack, and he chooses just the right moment, to drop the Quaffle behind him; Fritz Reiter grabs it, and that’s twenty to ten to Durmstrang.

“It looks like we’re going to have a good match on our hands today, as Durmstrang appear to have put their shock defeat at the hands of Harry

Potter's Beauxbatons far behind them.

"As another attack breaks up with some good defensive work by Keeper Gunther Stradivis, whose brother, Reinhold, is playing Seeker again, and looks to be a lot more focussed this match, and let's face it, without the gorgeous Miss Delacour out there, who wouldn't?

"Eric Ernhand shoots and scores, taking the score to thirty-ten. Hogwarts is on the attack again, and they are still keeping the game nice and clean."

The Hogwarts team was in possession of the Quaffle and indulged in a simple round of keep-away, allowing Lee to get in a bit of colour commentary. "A few days ago, I was in Hogwarts doing some research on some of the players, when I was treated to a rather spectacular show, as Harry Potter and Viktor Krum practised together, and let me tell you, it made me realise just why they are professionals and I'm not.

"Otto Melman breaks up another Hogwarts attack, and he's taken the Quaffle! He's flying down the length of the pitch and scores easily past Ian Jackson. Come on, Hogwarts, you can do better than this!" The crowd agreed, screaming their displeasure.

"Charles Shaw has the Quaffle, he passes to Michelle McKrinnon, she shoots, but Stradivis saves, and launches the Quaffle at Reiter." While the Durmstrang team retrieved the Quaffle and began another run down the pitch, Lee continued his story. "Potter and Krum's practise speed was faster than I've ever flown, and let me tell you how nice it was to watch two fierce competitors help each other out. I had the fortune to catch up with Krum later, and I asked just why he was helping Potter out. And another goal for Durmstrang! They're starting to build up a sizeable lead already, and the Snitch is nowhere in sight." Both Seekers were just above the level of play, as Stradivis performed a search pattern, while trying to coax the Hogwarts Beaters into launching a Bludger at him, as any Bludger hit toward him was one his chasers didn't have to deal with. Murphy was trailing him closely, in a manner reminiscent of Malfoy trailing Harry Potter.

"Krum replied, in his own inimitable fashion, that it was the game that mattered, not personal rivalry, and if he could learn something from Potter, there was no reason not to return the favour. It's that attitude that really sets Potter and Krum apart as the two best players in the league. Both of them love the sport as much as anything else in their lives, and it shows in their dedication and commitment, something these young players in front of us can learn from."

The Quaffle slipped by Ian Jackson again. He signalled to Madam Hooch who replied with a sharp blast of her whistle. "And as Durmstrang score another ten points, Ian Jackson calls a time-out. If you ask me, these time-outs are a ridiculous invention from the Americans to let their press shove adverts down people's throats, but sadly, no one asked me, and the International Quidditch Association has approved them."

The Hogwarts team members were on the ground near their dugout, and Malfoy was on the pitch in the centre of the group. "Malfoy looks to be pretty upset with his team's performance so far and is giving some strict instructions. And doing a bit of ridiculous yelling and arm waving while he's at it. The Durmstrang players are not bothering to talk to their coach, and are flying around, keeping warm. They are a well oiled unit, full of Teutonic efficiency, and it shows in how well they play as a team.

"And while we wait; a word from the people who gave me enough money to read this stuff out." He started to read from a piece of parchment before him. "Weasley Wizard Wheezes have today announced a new product, a controllable flying castle so that you can recreate the Beauxbatons arrival in the comfort of your own home. Complete with fireworks and purple column, this limited edition toy for all ages is available for only fifty Galleons each."

"Lee Jordan, you will NOT advertise during a Quidditch match, especially after your hypocritical condemnation earlier."

"Sorry, Professor, how about I cut you in on the deal?" He finished reading the text as quickly as he could, to get it in before he was interrupted again. "Castle Beauxbatons will be available from all WWW outlets as of tomorrow, so you better hurry, as we expect them to fly!

"And the game is on again, and again, Durmstrang scores. The Germans are looking in better and better form as this match continues. They shoot and score... no, wait, that was flacking! A blatant foul by Ian Jackson. Free shot to Durmstrang and Melman misses! And they say cheaters never prosper. For those who are unfamiliar with the term, flacking is when the Keeper reaches through the hoops to stop a goal. Personally, I think a player should be sent off for that sort of thing. Come on, Hogwarts, play the game properly!

"Hogwarts has the Quaffle, and is using the Hawkshead Attacking Formation; they throw the Quaffle and score!

"Durmstrang retaliate with Parkin's Pincer, perfectly executed as well. Good attack by the Germans. Hogwarts retaliate, but Reinhold Stradivis breaks up the play, and the Germans launch yet another successful offence. They are really racking up the scoring here, and if they keep going, the Snitch is going to be irrelevant.

"Melman intercepts another Hogwarts attack and starts to shoot, but Victor Krabbe takes a moment out of his beating duties to help out, no wait, that was skinning!

"Hooch has spotted it, and has given the Durmstrang players another free-throw, which Murphy saves. I'm really not liking the tactics I'm seeing here. Hogwarts is racking up the foul count; of course, they are long short of the infamous 1473 World Cup Match where all seven hundred possible fouls were committed, and fifteen that were not banned until after the match. It's thanks to them that we now have official rules banning the raising of the dead during a Quidditch Match, and as I reminisce, Durmstrang has scored another three times in quick succession, and I make that to be one hundred to twenty to the Germans.

"Draco Malfoy is turning a rather unflattering shade of red as he yells at his team. Rose Parkinson and Victor Krabbe combine and launch a nasty Doplebeater Defence at Stephan Adler, who only evades by performing a Sloth Grip Roll, nice evasive work and nice attacking work by Hogwarts.

"But it doesn't stop Durmstrang from scoring again, and yet again. Hogwarts look powerless to stop the team that seem to have been trained properly. I can see Marcus Flint talking to Malfoy down in the dugout, and they send a signal up to their Seeker, who passes the message around.

“And Hogwarts responds immediately, but not in the way I had hoped for. They commit another foul, skinning this time, and they follow it up by the most blatant attempt at stooging I’ve ever seen.

“Come on, Madam Hooch, get a hold of these players! We don’t want any injuries. Hogwarts scores and the Durmstrang players are looking a little shaken at the sudden aggressiveness of the Hogwarts Players.

“McKinnon is saying something to the referee and FOUL! That was a blatant punch! But Hooch didn’t see it; I can see Krum going mad in the Durmstrang dugout. Come on Rolanda, you can’t fall for the tricks from the Slytherins!” The Beauxbatons and Durmstrang contingent in the audience were stampeding their feet and screaming in protest now, as well as, surprisingly, a large number of Hogwarts students and alumni who seemed to agree that good sportsmanship trumped school loyalty. Lee had to raise the level of his *Sonorus* spell to be heard over the uproar.

“Hogwarts scores again! If Murphy catches the Snitch now, they’ll win the game.

“Stradivis calls for a timeout, and this time it’s the Hogwarts crew that fly around, ignoring the boos from the crowd. Oi, Jackson, there’s no call for making vile gestures at the announcer!” Lee shouted, leaning forward over the edge of the back. He then settled back, seething. “That just shows the sort of influence that Malfoy has had on this team. That would never have happened in the old days.” He brightened as an idea came to him. “Hey, Professor McGonagall, since Malfoy is challenging Delacour to a duel, can I teach this little shit a lesson?”

“JORDAN!”

“Whoops, sorry about that folks, I solemnly swear that’s the last expletive that shall pass these lips today. And I’m sad to say that my lovely colleague has banned me from teaching Jackson just why I was on the battlefield on that last day, fighting for my life with the other Defence Association members against the family members of some of his team mates, while he was cowering under his bed, sucking his thumb.

“But the game is on again, and no change of tactics from either team, Hogwarts is still cheating, so, as I said at the start of the programme, ‘Ich bin ein Berliner’.” Whistles and cheers, mixed with some laughter, rose from the Durmstrang crowd.

“Come on, Durmstrang, keep it up, you’ve done fantastically well so far, Krabbe and Parkinson are walking close to the line, almost fouling Adler. And... Murphy kicks off Reinhold Stradivis’ broom! That’s a clear foul! What’s he... *he’s chasing the Snitch! It just showed up at the other end of the pitch!*” The entire audience was on their feet, shouting and screaming as Lee screamed to be heard over the barrage of noise.

“Stradivis is closing in fast. He seems the better flyer. Parkinson hits the Bludger, and it’s a good shot! Stradivis takes evasive action. Murphy grabs the Snitch, and the game is over! *Hogwarts win!*” Lee pounded on the railing of the box and then fell back into his seat as the players landed so that Murphy could display the Snitch to Madam Hooch and verify the win. “This is the first time I’ve ever said that with such a foul taste in my mouth. Hogwarts win, and Malfoy is grinning like a loon, congratulating his players. Well, here’s a thought for you, especially you cheering Hogwarts students. Your flying professor has just sabotaged the career of every Hogwarts player on the pitch before they even get a chance. No respectable team manager is going to sign players that show such disrespect for the rules and spirit of the game, and the Wigtown Wanderers don’t have that many vacancies!” Lee wasn’t sure how many people were actually listening to him at this point, but he had to say something.

“Well, with Durmstrang having lost both matches now, the last of the heats is now irrelevant, and I wish we could go straight to the final between Beauxbatons and Hogwarts, where the winner will take home the pride and the legendary Cup of Throbus. Of course, after the pointless match, I’ll be back for the challenge match – some say that it’s a grudge match – between the staff of Hogwarts and Beauxbatons, although it’s a pity that Harry Potter won’t be playing, due to his shoulder injury.

“I look forward to talking at you again soon. From the Quidditch Stands, I’ve been Lee Jordan, and this is one embarrassed ex-Hogwarts student saying goodnight!”

“Okay, Gabby, I want you to take my magic and shoot a stunner at the wall.”

Gabrielle nodded and took a deep breath. She reached out for his magic, to find that he was already pushing it at her. She exhaled once and then shouted “*Stupefy!*” as she slashed her wand down.

A vibrant red beam shot out of her wand and totally demolished the target wall that had been erected inside Beauxbatons’ Duelling Hall, which was possibly the only room outside of Hogwarts which could stand up to the levels of magic being bandied around.

“Dhat vas your magic?” Viktor Krum asked, looking at Harry in awe.

“Almost,” he said with a shake of his head. “Do it again, Gabby, and this time, don’t hold back.” He waved his hand and the wall rebuilt itself.

Gabrielle nodded firmly and shouted, “*Stupefy!*” again. This time the beam was so bright it was difficult to look at it. Instead of demolishing the wall, it disintegrated it.

“Better,” Harry nodded.

“*Better?*” Krum croaked. “Vhy are ve teaching Veela chick to duel? Van spell from her like dhat, ve all go down to pub ant celebrate.”

Gabrielle looked at Harry.

“This is a little more political than that, Viktor.”



I hate politics," the Bulgarian grumbled.

"Me, too," Harry said with a deep sigh. "Unfortunately, there are reasons it can't be avoided. First, at the moment Malfoy is ruining the chances of the kids here to become professional Quidditch players. With the changes I've already started to make in France, and what you are doing in Germany, England is going to be left behind, and that's a bad thing." Harry ticked off the points on his fingers.

"Secondly, he's Death Eater scum, and we need the world to see it, so that next time he does something, I can kill him and we can all breathe easier. He's been keeping his nose way too clean for my liking." Harry hadn't forgotten that a high number of Durmstrang students had allied with the Light before the final battle, and an even higher number who had refused to join the Dark. Krum had told him in the past that, despite his close friendship with Karkaroff, he had always felt that Death Eaters could not be tolerated.

"Third, if it's obvious that Gabby is using my power, the idiots in charge are likely to claim she's cheating and declare a win in favour of Malfoy, which would totally vindicate him and make her out to be a sexual predator using Veela powers to seduce an innocent wizard." Gabrielle snorted in a most unladylike manner at the notion that Malfoy could ever be considered 'innocent'. "This would backfire on the Veela and possibly the whole non-human community.

"Fourth, on a purely personal level, we don't want people to know that Gabby is mine yet. We want to wait until after the tournament when we can announce it at our convenience, since it isn't anybody's business but ours.

"So, I'm going to be teaching her to disguise her magic while you check her duelling skills, and show her how Death Eaters fight. I intend for Gabby to look like she's fighting normally, but my magic will back her up secretly."

"Sneaky," Krum said with a large smile. "I knew dere was a reason I like you. Come, Gabrielle. To vork."

She smiled as she followed him. She was feeling a lot more secure these days, and her own magic was coursing through her veins like a fine wine. She had her Mate, and while they hadn't actually consummated things yet, she knew they would, and she could not be happier. She had managed to win despite doing everything wrong, and she would be eternally grateful to her Mate for that.

Krum turned out to be a good teacher, one quite willing to be cursed to prove a point. She learnt more than she had even thought existed about underhand tactics that people who didn't care about the rules could use. The use of weapons, like daggers, while frowned upon, was perfectly legal, and she had to learn how to defend against them as well.

Without warning, Krum pulled a dagger from behind his back and threw it toward Gabrielle. She stumbled backward and raised her hands defensively, and was more than a little surprised when a shimmering shield appeared in front of her.

"Gabby," Harry called.

She let the glimmering shield dissipate and looked at him, smiling.

"You're holding back. You're not getting into the magic properly. You're treating it like a coat and wearing it. Take what I'm giving to you. Take it inside you, and feel it, feel the magic."

She nodded, closed her eyes, and welcomed his gift into her, drinking it in.

She opened her eyes and stumbled for a second. "This is how you feel normally?" she asked breathlessly.

She felt him peek through the Bond. "Yep."

"How does it veel?" Krum asked, looking curious and the faintest bit envious.

"Like I've been seeing in black and white all my life and now I am seeing colour for the first time," she gasped. "Like I have been the lowliest squib, and now I'm magical. I feel like I can do anything." She reached out and created a chair, not with a spell, but by focusing the magic.

"Viktor, throw the knife at her," Harry said.

The Bulgarian nodded and did exactly that.

This time she saw it coming as if it was in slow motion. She saw the light bounce of the blade and seemed to hear the sound as it cut through the air. She swayed to one side casually, her right hand coming up and catching it by the hilt. Without conscious thought, she threw it back, faster, aiming to just miss him.

Krum gulped as the knife embedded itself in the wall next to his ear.

She turned and walked over to where Harry was standing, leaning against a wall. Sinking to her knees, she looked up at him. "How do you do it?" she asked.

He looked down at her curiously.

"How do you keep from abusing this power? I can feel Hogwarts. I can feel Beauxbatons. They are singing to me. The *magic* is singing to me, and everything is so easy. How are you not corrupted by this? How have you not taken over the world?"

He reached down and pulled her up into a hug, and his magic was gone from her, leaving her shivering in his arms.

"I don't want the world, Gabby," he whispered. "I just want you."

She melted against him and hugged him hard. "Thank you for trusting me," she whispered. "I was tempted to take it and run."

"But you didn't," he said simply. "And I knew you wouldn't."

"Mushy stuff makes me sick," Krum interrupted them as he rolled his eyes playfully. "Come. Fight now, make goo-goo eyes later."

Harry laughed and turned her around. "Go, your teacher awaits."

She turned her head and shot a grin at him before walking back over to her coach. "Sorry," she apologised. "I've never felt anything like that, it was like being cocooned in pure magic and knowing it would respond to my every whim."

Krum nodded. "Take magic again; magic without control is useless. Harry, come help."

"What do you want me to do?" Harry asked, moving over to them.

"Dodge, as your Mate fires spells at you."

"I could hurt him," Gabrielle protested, as she pulled Harry's magic back.

"Then you will learn control quickly," Krum said firmly. "Start with Stunner."

"*Stupefy*," she said, pointing her wand at Harry.

He tried to twist out the way, but didn't make it. Even though it was less powerful than the spells she had used earlier, the force of her spell threw him toward the wall.

"Harry!" she yelled, working automatically. He seemed to bounce off the now-soft wall and fall to the ground. Without thinking about it, she was there, catching him before he could land, easing him to the floor and cradling his head gently in her lap.

"*Ennervate*," she chanted, pointing at him.

He took a deep breath and opened his eyes.

"I'm so sorry," she whispered, tears pouring down her cheeks.

"Hey," he said back with a grin. "None of that," his tone made it clear that he was giving an order, and her tears stopped instantly. "You did the right thing, but you still over-powered it. That's what we're working on. I'll bet you won't do it again, right?"

She nodded solemnly.

"Good," Krum said. "Leave slow-boy where he is and try again."

"Slow-boy?" Harry asked. "I'll remember that the next time we're on the pitch."

Gabrielle giggled as she bent and kissed Harry quickly, before returning to her position.

"Do try to dodge this time," Krum added to Harry, before giving her the nod to throw a curse at her Mate again.

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Harry growled as he looked up from the coach's dugout, watching his players silhouetted against the sky.

This match was pointless, and he'd tried to get it removed from the schedule, but Hogwarts had refused, and he could see why. The Hogwarts players were bullying the Beauxbatons players, intimidating them – and it was working.

He was going to have to put some serious work in to toughen his players up before the final. Gabrielle was the only person who didn't seem intimidated; she just seemed furious that they were being treated like this, and he'd had to deny her use of his power twice as she'd reacted to some of the blatant cheating that had been occurring so far. He didn't doubt that they'd be finding pieces of the Hogwarts players in the stands if he let her have his way. Claude and Anton were doing their best to protect the others, but were being overwhelmed by the sheer vindictiveness and underhandedness of Krabbe and Parkinson.

He smiled slightly as he saw Murphy try to foul Gabrielle, only for the girl to corkscrew under him, causing him to lose his balance. Righting himself, the Hogwarts Seeker glared as Lee mocked him.

Like a flash of golden sunlight, Gabrielle took off, leaving the distracted Hogwarts Seeker for dust. A few seconds later, the Snitch was in her hands, and this embarrassing travesty of a match was over. Hogwarts had won, 310 to 190.

As much as he liked Rolanda Hooch as a person, he was going to try and get her replaced for the final. Some of the fouls being committed were extremely professional – ample evidence of the sort of things that Marcus Flint had been teaching them – and while she had been calling them during the Durmstrang game, she had missed a lot more in his match.

He followed his team into their dressing room. He didn't need to access his Bond to Gabby to realise how down they all were at having lost. It was

more than obvious in the set of their shoulders and in the way they just dropped to the benches.

"It feels like someone has just killed your pet, doesn't it?"

Slowly, they all looked at him as he crouched down in front of them. "It feels like nothing else on earth, the feeling that you went out there for a match and that you lost. That you put all that effort into it and got nothing back. And the fact that you were cheated out of it makes it even worse, doesn't it?"

They started to nod.

"The worst time for me was when I was injured for the Cannons during a Cup-run, and when I regained consciousness we were out. That was it. No rematch, nothing. I felt horrible, I sulked for days, was miserable to be around, but you know what?"

"What?" Claude asked.

"I still remember that day today, and every time I'm on a Quidditch pitch, I am determined to never feel like that again. I am determined to never feel so helpless."

"But what can we do?" Henri asked. "If it was a straight match and we had lost, then we would have been beaten by better players, and it wouldn't hurt as much. The Durmstrang players were better than they were. They at least played honourably, but they were still beaten."

"I know," Harry sighed. "I'm going to try and get a World Cup referee for the final, but we are going to need to work on dealing with the tactics they're using. Some of them, while unpleasant, were within the rules of the game."

"But it's *supposed* to be fun," Frederick said angrily. "That was not fun up there – that was attempted manslaughter on a broom."

"Have you ever seen the Wanderers play?" Harry asked with a wry smile. "It can be like that. It's supposed to be fun, but it is also a very serious game. Now, what do you think the purpose of their play was today?"

"To win," Anton said.

"Wrong. Gabrielle?"

"To intimidate us," she said slowly, as if the idea had just come to her. "So that in the final, we'll be too scared to play, and they can win without playing as dirtily as they just did."

"History records the victor," Harry explained. "If they can win the final cleanly, everyone will forget that they cheated against a better team to get there."

"So the question is, what are we going to do about it? Are we going to let them intimidate us? Are we going to capitulate and give up?" He stood up and walked between the benches. The players' eyes followed him attentively. It was a vast improvement over their staring at the floor.

"Or are we going to fight? Are you going to work with me and develop tactics to beat Hogwarts? Are we going to make your school and country proud?"

"Do you think we can do it?" Claude asked, looking Harry directly in the eyes.

"Yes," Harry said simply. "I truly believe you can."

"Then, damn it, we will fight!" Anton said.

"Damn right," Henri agreed. "I want revenge on that Parkinson bitch."

Harry sniggered, "You have no idea how many times I've thought that about her sister."

There was a knock on the door, and with a nod from Harry, the door opened, and seven students trooped in.

"Gabrielle?" Gunther Stradivis started, before launching into a long spiel in German. Gabrielle responded in kind, and they had a conversation, peppered with input from the other Durmstrang players.

Gabrielle turned slowly and started to smile. "The Durmstrang players are here to help," she said. "They want to help get some revenge on the cheating Hogwarts players, and they can't think of a better way to do that."

"What do you think?" Harry asked the Beauxbatons players.

"If they can teach us some of the things they were doing, that would be incredible," Anton replied.

Gabrielle turned back and started to speak to the players.

Harry concentrated on Gabrielle, moving through the Bond, until he found what he was looking for. He shuddered imperceptibly as he copied parts of it into his own brain. It was very similar to the way Hermione had taught him French, but it was a lot faster with the Bond.

As Gabrielle finished, he moved forward. "We're going to have a practice tomorrow morning at nine," he said a little hesitantly, using the German he had just learnt. "So if you want to join us then, you'll be more than welcome."

“We will,” Gunther replied in German, before nudging his brother.

Reinhold stepped forward, and looking like a reluctant schoolboy, asked, “And would you teach me the Potter Turn?”

Harry laughed. “Of course. We’ll see you guys tomorrow?”

“We will,” Gunther replied. “Good luck against the Hogwarts professors tomorrow.”

Harry smirked at him, “Believe me, luck won’t have anything to do with it.”

“Really?” Otto asked. “They do have some good players.”

Harry’s smirk seemed to grow. “Just wait and see.”

The Durmstrang students nodded and filed out.

“They’re going to help at tomorrow’s practise session,” Harry said in French.

“I didn’t know you spoke German,” Claude said.

“In fact,” Henri added, “if I didn’t know better, I’d say you managed to learn German in between sentences – your eyes seemed to change, before they became really alert.”

Harry nodded. “I didn’t. Hermione taught me French by using some spells to download the lexicon into my brain, and then worked on my patois, pronunciation and word choice. This time I cheated. I copied all of Gabrielle’s knowledge of German into my own brain.”

“It felt very strange,” Gabrielle said. “Like everything I had ever learnt flashed before my eyes in a second.”

“You do know that’s impossible, right?” Henri asked.

“Can anything be impossible if it has just been done?” Harry asked back with a small grin.

“I’ll qualify it,” Henri sighed. “Impossible for normal people. But the important question is, will Gabrielle be ready for this stupid duel?”

“Yes,” Gabrielle said cheerfully. “I’ve even had some instruction on how to fight from Vik, and more importantly, how to read a Death Eater so I can get out of the way of his spells.”

“Vik?” Nicholas asked.

“Viktor Krum,” Harry said. “He offered to help – he knows that Gabrielle and I are Mated as well.”

“This is not a very good secret,” Henri pointed out.

“I know,” Harry agreed. “It only has to be until the end of this competition, and then we’ll announce it and face the press.”

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Gabrielle snuggled into the shape at her side and woke up with a protesting groan when she realised she was cuddling a pillow. Sure, the pillow might smell of Harry, but it had none of the other attributes that she enjoyed.

She yawned and sat up. The sound of the shower told her where her Mate was, so she rearranged the pillows and checked the time. The electrical clock on the bedside table told her that it was still early, so she clambered out of bed and pulled on a pair of jeans and a t-shirt over the tap pants and camisole she had worn to bed.

She thrust her feet into her trainers and pulled her hair back into a ponytail. She looked around for some parchment and a quill, but there was nothing in Harry’s apartment that even suggested that he was a Wizard. She did find some note paper and a biro and scrawled out a quick note for him.

*Gone to get some breakfast  
Love you,  
-me*

She walked out onto his balcony and took a deep breath before she concentrated hard on her home, gathered as much power as she could from Harry, and Apparated away.

It was the first time she had ever Apparated by herself, but she knew the theory behind it, and had been Apparated by Harry enough times to understand the mechanics.

The first half of the journey was fine, but the second half seemed to be like traversing through warm treacle.

She appeared in her father’s office to the sound of alarms going off. Jean and Bill ran into the room, their wands out, almost immediately. Her father was wearing a dressing gown obviously thrown on in haste, and Bill was still in his nightclothes, with a bad case of bed hair.

Gabrielle?!"

"Whoops," she said with a smile, holding up her hands. "Sorry."

With a wave of his wand, Jean cancelled the spell. He took a deep breath to calm himself and asked, "What are you doing here?"

"I wanted to get some breakfast for Harry and me from Anton," she explained. "So I borrowed some of his Magic and Apparated here; I didn't know I had to do something to disable the wards."

"These are new wards," Jean said, perching on the edge of his desk. "They're supposed to set off the alarms if someone makes it through."

"Then they work perfectly," Gabrielle said cheerfully.

"They do, indeed," Jean agreed.

"Not a pleasant way to wake up though," Fleur said as she walked into the office, yawning. She wandered over to Bill and snuggled into his arms while looking at her little sister. "You're looking cute."

Gabrielle looked down at herself and shrugged. "I just threw on what was lying around. So, if you don't mind, I'm going to get our breakfast and Apparate back – it would be nice to have it ready before Harry gets out of the shower."

"If you'd taken lessons when you were younger, you could have made breakfast yourself," Aimée said, as she joined them. She had obviously taken the time to get dressed for the day. "And should we expect a notification about underage magic?"

"Not from England," Gabrielle sniffed disdainfully. "We 'near-human creatures' are considered adults there. It's possibly the only advantage to that stupid law of theirs."

"True," Jean nodded. "Go, get breakfast, and remember Harry will want something pretty filling as he'll be playing later."

"I can't wait," Gabrielle replied excitedly. "It will be the first time I'll be up close and personal as he flies, and I'll know what he's thinking and feeling!"

Jean laughed. "Go, you wicked child. I'm going back to bed."

Aimée shook her head, "No, we're going to have a nice breakfast, the four of us."

"Yes, dear," Jean replied obediently.

Gabrielle smiled and walked down to the kitchens.

"Little Gabrielle!" Anton greeted her. "What are you doing here?"

"I need a breakfast for a hungry Veela and a Quidditch star," she grinned.

"Sit," Anton said, "and watch a Master at work." He started to wave his wand and ingredients flew out of cupboards and containers to arrange themselves on the counter. "So, now that you're spending the night with the Chevalier, are you ready to start learning to cook?"

Gabrielle frowned lightly. "It might be a good idea," she admitted. "One of us should be able to cook. Popping out for breakfast is not always going to be possible, and it would be nice to have romantic meals without going out."

"Why not bring Harry along?" Anton offered, "I'll teach him as well." As he talked he moved his wand in gentle patterns, causing eggs to crack themselves, chives to become perfectly chopped, and toast to brown perfectly.

"Would you?" Gabrielle asked excitedly. "That would be wonderful."

"Of course," Anton smiled. "So, you are happy?"

"Happier than I've ever been," she agreed. "Harry treats me like a princess, and I'm learning so much. I Apparated on my own for the first time today."

"Congratulations. Are you going to learn how to avoid setting off the wards next?"

Gabrielle poked her tongue out at the chef.

He grinned, and with a few more waves of his wand, the food slid into two warming boxes, tied with silver ribbons. "One French breakfast, and one English breakfast, cooked by a Master – it will fill him up, but not be as heavy as he is used to."

"Thanks, Anton," Gabrielle said and grabbed the boxes. "Can I steal your paper?"

"Of course," Anton agreed. "I've read it already."

"I'll see you soon." She concentrated on Harry's balcony and Apparated back. She found moving through the treacle a little easier on the way back, and appeared where she wanted to.

"Breakfast's ready," she announced as she cast a warming charm on the balcony and sat at the small table.

Harry walked out barefoot, wearing only a pair of jeans and a t-shirt. His hair was still damp. “I’m impressed, taking an international trip for your first solo Apparation. Enjoy it?”

She nodded. “I couldn’t have done it with my own magic, but yours makes everything so much easier. Anton has offered to teach us both how to cook.”

“You know, that could be fun,” Harry said. “Being able to cook a surprise meal for Ron and Hermione would be worth the effort.”

Gabrielle opened the paper and passed him the business section.

“The Ministry Mouthpiece?”

“Anton reads it, he’s such a gossip,” she grinned. “And its sport section isn’t bad.”

Harry snorted, but folded the paper over on the stocks and shares page and started to read.

Gabrielle took a bite of the croissant and started to look at the sport pages.

“Listen to this,” she said with a laugh. “‘Draco Malfoy, heir to the Malfoy Dynasty and an unfortunate victim of the Imperius Curse during the war, and in the top ten bachelors list, is excited about the Hogwarts match today.’”

Harry snorted eloquently.

“‘It’s not often that I get a chance to show that I could have been professional,’” Gabrielle quoted. “‘His deep grey eyes had this reporter tingling, ‘It’s just a pity that Potter can’t play, as I would love to be able to have a rematch with him. We were very close rivals at school together, and I always played my best against him. After the war, I had a chance to go professional as well, but felt that it would be better teaching others how to play the game properly.’””

Harry shook his head disgustedly.

“‘When asked about his duel with the Beauxbatons Veela, Gabrielle Delacour, the charming professor replied, ‘It’s a pity it’s come to this, and I’ve been tainted with some scandalous accusations, but everyone will see that I am innocent on Sunday.’””

“That’s why I don’t read that paper,” he grumbled.

“At least the Prophet’s credibility is fading all the time and the Quibbler will overtake it soon.”

“I can hope,” Harry agreed. “This is a really good breakfast; I wonder if your parents would mind if I poached him,” he finished with a grin.

“They would disown me and declare war on you,” Gabrielle predicted with complete confidence.

“True,” Harry smiled. “And thanks.”

“For what?”

“This,” Harry said, indicating breakfast and the warming charm. “It’s the first time I’ve used this balcony.”

“But not the last,” Gabrielle purred. “Just wait until you see the skirt Mama got me; it will fit your fantasy perfectly.”

Harry gulped and looked at her, his eyes wide.

“What? You thought I wouldn’t remember?” she leaned forward until her lips were brushing against his earlobe. “I’m looking forward to seeing how it ends.”

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“Welcome, one and all, to this very special challenge match, where the Professors of Hogwarts take on the Professors of Beauxbatons,” Lee Jordan said.

“Hogwarts’ team has some notable members, not least Albus Dumbledore himself in position of Keeper. It took a team of historians a long time to track it down, but we did find that in his youth, Albus was a fine Keeper, and played for one of Gryffindor’s most successful teams.

“One of the surprises for this team is Rubeus Hagrid, Hogwarts’ Groundskeeper playing at Beater. There hasn’t been a giant in the professional leagues since Ulath the Great back in 1847. Whether or not Hagrid can play as well as Ulath, remains to be seen.

“The rest of the line-up is filled out by Professor Viviana Vector as the other Beater. For Chasers we have Assistant Professor Marcus Flint, from the Wigtown Wanderers, and Professors Siderea Sinistra and Severus Snape. The Hogwarts faculty team captain is Flying Instructor Draco Malfoy, who tomorrow will be duelling to try and prove his innocence. Today, however, he will be Seeking for Hogwarts. I know that this team has practised hard, and with the exception of Hagrid, every one of them performed well on their House teams in their day.

“The Beauxbatons team sheet has yet to be passed to me, but judging by the smirks that have been seen on the faces of the Beauxbatons students today, it is something special. And, as if by magic, the team sheet appears before me. Thank you, Harry.”

Harry waved back from his spot by the changing rooms and waited cheerfully for the explosion.

“Sweet Merlin on a bike,” Lee said in an awed whisper. “If my bookmaker is listening, everything I own on Beauxbatons! I don’t care what the odds are!” He ran his eyes down the list again, to make sure he had read it correctly. “It’s times like this that it’s no surprise that we beat Voldemort; he never had a chance, really. I hate to think about how long ago Potter was organising this, but I have in front of me magically binding contracts, predating this tournament, for every member of the Beauxbatons team. This is legal, before the Hogwarts people try and complain.”

Harry could hear the crowd go silent and almost hold its breath as Lee got ready to introduce the players.

“First, Keeper for Beauxbatons, from the Chudley Cannons, Flight Instructor Oliver Wood!”

Oliver flew past Harry, smacking him on the shoulder as he flew out, cannon-rolled in front of the cheering crowd and gave them all a cheerful salute.

“I didn’t think I’d ever get to say this again,” Lee continued, the excitement audible in his voice. “It is my pleasure to introduce the Beaters for Beauxbatons, my two personal friends, and the best Beater team Gryffindor ever produced, Associate Professors Fred and George Weasley!”

The cheers seemed to get louder as Fred and George flew past Harry and bowed to the crowds.

“For Chasers,” Lee continued, “I have the rare privilege of introducing the team that I, and many others, think should be the three people who play Chaser for England. Assistant Professors Alicia Spinnet and Angelina Johnson from the Falmouth Falcons and Katie Bell from the Holyhead Harpies!”

The three witches shot past Harry and performed an intricate movement where they all seemed to be corkscrewing around each other, as they too, bowed to the crowd.

“And finally,” Lee’s voice lowered to an awed hush, “having been cleared by both Madam Hooch and the Chudley Cannons physician, the Seeker and Captain for Beauxbatons, HARRY JAMES POTTER!”

Harry enjoyed the look of shock tinged with fear that appeared on Malfoy’s face. He grabbed his broom and jumped into the air, smoothly sliding the wood between his legs and rocketing up vertically. He levelled off in front of the crowd and jumped to his feet, balancing on the broom, with a quick movement, he placed one foot under the broom, and flipped it while he jumped in the air – the broom reversed, but continued to fly in the same direction. Before it could slow down too far, he flipped the broom around again and landed, still standing. He bowed and waved to the crowd, grinning at them widely.

“And Potter pulls off Krum’s famous Reverse-Broom-Sweep, first seen eight years ago during the Quidditch World Cup – and I suspect that we will see Krum doing a Potter Turn during the next European Cup Match.”

Harry couldn’t help the smile that was on his face; he’d missed the thrill of competitive Quidditch more than anything else during his layoff. And the fact that he was back playing with the others made it all that sweeter.

Oliver was yelling at Fred and George, telling them to get ready as Harry remounted his broom properly and flew up to where Malfoy was circling.

“Ready, Ferret? First I’m going to give you a lesson in flying, and tomorrow, Gabrielle is going to prove you’re guilty in public, according to your own stupid laws. You’d have been better off just confessing, you know. Empathy isn’t allowed in court and you might even have won. All you did was ask her out and then touch her shoulder – it was immoral and stupid, but not exactly illegal. But hey, you can always thank Snape personally.”

“I know you like that bitch, Potter, and we’ll prove it and ruin your reputation and money,” Malfoy hissed.

“Good for you,” Harry smirked, knowing that it would irritate Malfoy. “Though it’s hard to ruin money. You should know, it’s the only thing that’s kept your reputation as clean as it is. Now, are you ready to live up to your boasts that you ‘could have been professional’?”

“I could have been,” Malfoy protested.

“For a third-rate fourth league team like the Colchester Cranberries, possibly. But look, the game has started; I’ll be back in a second.”

Harry shoved his broom down vertically and kicked it into high gear. His broom, one of only three custom-made brooms of its design, attained top speed in five seconds, the charms ensuring that he wasn’t thrown off. He did a high speed loop near Dumbledore, before flying between Sinistra and Flint, catching the Quaffle. He threw it to Katie and returned to Malfoy who had barely moved.

“Seeking isn’t just sitting around looking for the Snitch,” he said in his best professor voice. “You have to be the seventh member of the team as well.” He grinned as Katie faked an attempt at scoring, but at the last second passed to Angelina who scored easily past Dumbledore since the Headmaster had been drawn out of position. “Why don’t you give it a try?”

“I’ll show you, Potter,” Malfoy sneered and flew down toward the Gryffindor players.

Harry laughed under his breath; age certainly hadn’t made Malfoy grow up. He almost winced as Katie, Angelina, and Alicia exchanged a look. This wasn’t going to be pretty.

Katie swung her broom to the left, passing the Quaffle to Angelina, who faked a pass to Alicia, before looking back at Katie, telegraphing the pass back to her.

Malfoy accelerated, concentrating on the Quaffle.

Angelina threw the Quaffle to Katie, and with a yell of triumph, Malfoy intercepted it and flew directly into Snape. The two professors collided with an

audible thump and spun down to the ground. The Quaffle flew wild and Flint scooped it up.

Harry could feel Gabrielle laughing and smiled to himself. Those Chasers didn't need any protection from anyone. Playing in the big leagues was a mile away from the pedestrian Quidditch they had played at school. The speed was a lot faster, and everything was a lot rougher. He'd had to toughen up fast his first season, as things that would have been called a foul at Hogwarts were considered normal play professionally.

But he wouldn't change it for the world. There was something brilliant about giving everything against another opponent, and both of you having a drink afterward.

While Malfoy and Snape picked themselves up, he paid closer attention to Fred and George. They were the two he was a little concerned about, as they were not professional players. Hogwarts had the Bludger and Vector batted it to Hagrid who smacked it as hard as he could toward Fred and George. Harry blinked; he'd never actually seen a Bludger hit quite that hard.

Fred and George both took evasive action, flying back to catch the Bludger. To their right, Flint was on a one-on-one with Wood, since Snape was recovering from his collision, and Sinistra had been caught out of position.. Flint tried to pull off a Triple-Fake-And-Throw, but Oliver read it correctly and stopped the Quaffle with ease.

"Ready for your next lesson?" Harry asked Malfoy as he pulled back up.

Malfoy sneered back at him.

"This one is called, 'how to lose a tail'. All you have to do is keep up with me. Think you can handle that, or shall I catch the Snitch now and end this charade?"

"I can handle it!" snapped Malfoy, reacting like a clockwork toy to Harry's winding.

"Good for you," Harry smirked. He lazily swung his broom until it was facing down. "Ready?"

Malfoy nodded.

"Catch me if you can," he said and stuck his broom into reverse.

Malfoy accelerated toward the ground, leaving Harry smirking. He could hear Lee's almost hysterical laughter as he described the manoeuvre, and as he met Malfoy's eyes, he accelerated away from the Slytherin.

He was careful to be a little slower than Malfoy's broom; it would hardly be any fun to lose him immediately. He looked at Fred and George, and indicated where he wanted them to hit the Bludger. They nodded, and stopped playing their game of tennis with the opposing Beaters.

Harry circled and flew straight toward the twins, who hit the Bludger directly at him. He looked over his shoulder to make sure that Malfoy was directly behind him. He slowly raised his feet and crossed his toes over the end of the broom, flying on a collision course toward the Bludger. As it got near, he bent further over and pushed with his arms and feet, raising himself over his broom, creating a gap for the Bludger to move through.

The Bludger flew between him and the broom, smacking straight into the face of Malfoy. There was a familiar-sounding crunch – very similar to when he had run into a tree – and the blond started losing altitude, clutching his nose. No timeout was called, since Malfoy, as Captain, would have to have done it himself, and he was just a little distracted.

With a tight grin, Harry flew over to the commentary box. "What's the score?"

"140 to nil," Lee replied, his voice still amplified. "And I hope that the England selectors are watching. Fred and George might not be as good as some of the other Beaters in the League, but the teamwork these guys are showing should be on show for England. These seven players are the best to ever play for Hogwarts, and they are rampaging over what, on paper, is a more than credible side. I've watched the Hogwarts professors practice hard since this match was announced, and they were easily at the level of the other teams here then, which makes this display of Quidditch from the Beauxbatons-adopted Professors all that more impressive. Give them all some training and we WILL win the next World Cup, with a team that's as English as it gets, even if the current corruption in the Ministry and Hogwarts has them playing for France."

Harry smiled and surveyed the pitch. With a couple of quick hand gestures he passed the next movement to Oliver, who started to shout. He dove to the ground at full speed, pulling up at the last second, his feet grazing the ground, before he shot into the air at full speed. Fred and George hit the Bludger toward Snape, and Harry rocketed past the Potions Professor, distracting him so that he didn't notice the Bludger until it was too late.

With Snape spiralling down, he nodded his thanks to Fred and George. Snape and Draco had both been hit now, and he decided to catch the Snitch as soon as possible. As fun as the game had been, it was now heading toward the embarrassing, and he didn't want to embarrass Hagrid, Vector, or Sinistra; they were innocent in this private game of attrition between him and Hogwarts.

He'd been a little shocked at Albus volunteering to play Keeper. The old man must have known that he would be outclassed in a young man's game, unless he felt that his magic would help him. To his credit, Albus had been playing well. He wasn't up to Oliver's standard, but then, no one else in the league was quite as obsessive about it as Wood. Albus had pulled off some very good saves and had distinguished himself, although it was obvious that he was not capable of keeping three of the best Chasers in England from romping past him.

Hagrid and Vector were turning into a unique pairing. Vector tended to trap the Bludger and pass it to Hagrid, who while not very mobile, was extremely accurate with his shots – and they had frightening power behind them. Harry had a feeling that one or two of the professional teams would be experimenting with a similar pairing.

It was the Chasers that were letting the Hogwarts side down. Flint was a good Chaser, but without his usual cohorts, his dirty tricks were



impossible, and the three witches all had personal grudges against him – Katie because she felt he had her place on the England team – and were determined to make him look bad. Sinistra was playing the best, now that she'd settled down a bit. The attractive young professor proved a deft hand at interception and flying skills, but wasn't very good at the shooting part – and Oliver Wood was in the sort of mood where every single shot was a personal offence and was treated as such.

Harry looked to his tail and found Malfoy was following him again, bearing the signs of emergency magic to patch up his face.

He grinned and sent a few signals to Katie, Angelina and Alicia. They nodded and stopped attacking; Katie flew to the left, engaging Snape, while Angelina flew to the right, and engaged Flint. Alicia moved forward to Vector, pulling her out of the play.

Fred and George were working together like old times, returning Hagrid's shots with hits of their own – their coordination with a Dopplebeater was still superlative, and the two of them almost equalled Hagrid's power. Even if their own hits caused them to fly back a few metres, they were more than effective.

From one set of hoops, Oliver sent a salute to Dumbledore, who returned it, his eyes visibly twinkling. He didn't seem to be overly concerned about the drubbing that his team was taking at the moment, but was clearly enjoying the game.

Harry could see the Snitch, but didn't think that Malfoy had spotted it – an idea that was validated as Malfoy followed him away from it. He dived down toward the stands, corkscrewing so that he slid parallel to the flags aiming for the ground. Upside down, he pushed up so that he flew across the pitch dangling beneath his broom, daring Malfoy to follow him.

Malfoy did, but not upside down. He'd obviously decided that he didn't have Harry's skill with a broom. Without warning Harry pushed his broom hard, executing a ninety degree turn straight up the middle of the pitch, the Golden Snitch directly in front of him.

He pushed his broom as fast as it would go, rising from the ground like a rocket. In front of him, Angelina and Katie crossed, each followed by their opposing player. Harry took a deep breath and pushed himself even harder, lying as flat against the broom as he could to keep down the wind resistance. He flew between the gap they created and reached out for the Snitch.

Behind him heard the smack of flesh and wood colliding as Malfoy tried to follow him and was scissored between Snape and Flint.

He grabbed the Snitch and raised his hand in triumph – and with it, the roar of the crowd came back to him. Lee Jordan was yelling in triumph, a wide grin on his face, and he could feel Gabrielle's excitement.

He landed and was jumped on by Oliver Wood. "That was the most fun I've ever had!" Ollie yelled in delight. "Man, the seven of us, together again!"

Katie and Alicia landed next. Both were immediately pulled into huge hugs by their team mates and swung around wildly – the witches were laughing hard. Angelina joined them, and then Fred and George.

"I can't remember the last time we had this much fun," Fred said.

"That was brilliant," George continued. "Man, you five are just incredible flyers; we were honoured to be on the same pitch as you!"

"What about you two, when you launched those Dopplebeaters at Hagrid? Even I winced."

The twins grinned madly. "Anyone keep score?" they asked.

"300-nil," Oliver said proudly. "I wasn't letting a goal in tonight, no matter what."

"And you did a great job," Alicia said, pounding him on the back. "I have to play with you guys again. I love my team mates, don't get me wrong, but we're special – and Harry, Harry, you're an absolute dream to play with, not a single foul all evening, and we still managed to knock out three of them – and your hand signals? I wish our Seeker was as clear."

Harry opened his mouth and shut it again, shaking his head.

"What?" Fred asked slowly. "You've got that look again, the one that set this up, but you're afraid."

"And what," George asked, "could make Harry Potter scared?"

"Oliver, your contract is up this summer, right?" Harry asked slowly.

Oliver nodded.

"And I'm on a year-long rolling contract – I put the clause in, in case I ever wanted to quit because of the press. Fred, George, how many people do you have working on inventions now?"

"Fourteen."

Katie was the first person to twig what he was hinting at. "You are insane, did you know that?" she asked. "You can *not* be serious."

"Why not?" Harry asked, a slow smile forming. "But this isn't the time to talk about it. The crowd are going nuts and we need to do a lap of honour."

"What?" Oliver demanded. "Come on, Harry, tell us what it is, please!"

Harry shook his head and hopped onto his broom.

"Katie, please?" Oliver asked.

"Sorry, Ollie, if you think I'm going to break this surprise, then you've got another thing coming."

She joined Harry as they started to circle.

Harry looked back and smiled at the confused faces of his team-mates. The plan was insane and only half-formed, but if they could pull it off...

He shook himself and banished it from his mind, flying to a stop near one of the stands, and began to sign autographs. These people had paid money to let him do what he loved, and the least he could do was give them some attention back.

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The changing room was a boisterous place as they all teased each other about their performances and laughed about what had happened. They were all showered and dressed when the door opened with a creak, shutting immediately afterward.

Harry wasn't worried; he could feel it was Gabrielle entering the room, hidden under his Invisibility Cloak.

She removed the cloak and smiled, "Great game, everyone; one of the best I've ever seen in terms of teamwork." She seemed to be almost vibrating with excitement.

"Gabrielle," Oliver said firmly. "We'd think that you would know by now not to hold back with us. Do what you came for!"

"Thanks," she said, grinning.

Harry braced himself as a blonde missile leapt at him, her arms going around his neck as she kissed him harder than he had ever been kissed. Her legs were locked around his waist, as she sent such feelings of love, devotion, pride and excitement down the Bond that he could hardly stand, and he stumbled back against the wall.

He could feel her hands move into his hair as she peppered his face with kisses. "That was unbelievable," she crowed. "Malfoy didn't even come close to you, and you made him look like a complete idiot in front of the world, especially after his comments this morning. It looked like a training match out there, and some of the moves you pulled off were brilliant, spectacular." She stopped speaking as she kissed him as hard as she could again.

When breathing became an issue and she reluctantly broke the kiss, he heard Oliver say, "What do I have to do to get a kiss like that?"

Harry blushed and buried his face in her neck.

"Find a nice girl and commit to her," Gabrielle said, moving out of his arms, sitting him down on a bench and sitting herself firmly on his lap. "You have no idea how sexy Harry looks on a broom."

"We *are* female, Gabrielle," Angelina said dryly. "We have a very good idea."

"Hey," the protest came from all four males in the room.

There was a round of laughter. "The press is outside waiting for you; by the end of the match, Lee was begging the England selectors to pick all of you. He started off suggesting it halfway through, and by the end, the crowd was agreeing as well. They English fans were chanting 'Gryffindor for England!'. Mama and Papa are very proud of how you played the game and how you all represented Beauxbatons and France, although Papa has been using it to play his politics," she finished, with a small moue of dissatisfaction.

Harry raised his hand and cast several privacy spells around the room, locking the door firmly.

"Katie, Angelina, Alicia, when do your contracts end?"

"This summer as well," Katie said before the others could. "We all signed our last contracts at the same time, and three years is the standard. We're all about to start renegotiating for next season."

Harry took a very deep breath and looked at his friends. "To ask a hypothetical question, what does a Quidditch Team need?"

"A rich backer, a stadium, a good general manager, a trainer, and players," Katie replied.

"Harry," Fred said softly, his voice containing a quiver no one had ever heard from him before. "Are you seriously suggesting this?"

"Please say that you are," George begged, his own voice the same. "This isn't a prank, is it, please, Harry?"

"Oh, Merlin," Oliver said reverently. "This *is* an insane idea."

"I have money," Harry said quietly, "and a corporate sponsor."

"Damn right," Fred and George said.

"We have a core team right here, I own enough land in enough places around the country that we could have our pick of places to build a stadium,

and I know someone who could do the general manager stuff.”

“Who?” Alicia asked; there was a raw note of hope in her voice.

“Gabrielle.” He could hear her squeak against him. “Let me finish. A manager needs to be intelligent, speak a couple of languages, be able to charm both the press and the other managers and owners, have fantastic organisational skills and be able to negotiate. Gabrielle has all those attributes and more. You’ve all seen her in action; what do you think?”

“How do you propose arranging this?” Angelina asked, ignoring his question.

“Like a business,” Harry said. “You will put in what you can, and I’ll put up the rest. We’ll split the club on a percentage basis. I’ll be the majority owner by necessity when we start, but you can buy percentages from me as we go on to even out the ownership. We will all form the club’s board – that way, if we argue, we don’t do anything stupid because we all own a part of it. We’ll all take the same salary, and share the profits – the other players we’ll need will be treated right.”

“Own our own club,” Oliver said reverently. “Instead of playing for some fat git to get rich, we can do it ourselves, and instead of having to have to do something ridiculous because the owner lost a bet, we’ll be in charge of our own destinies. No longer will we go on tours just for money. We could go the places where the fans want to see us, and the teams don’t normally go.”

“We wouldn’t be selling out anymore,” Katie added. “We’d be the masters of our own future. And I’d get to play with the people I enjoy most of all – and recruiting the others that we’d need wouldn’t be a problem; a club headed by Harry Potter? Talk about star power.”

“Fred, George, what about you two? How do you feel about the idea of turning professional?”

“We’d still have the summer to invent, right? And be able to do it as long as it didn’t interrupt Quidditch?”

Harry nodded and grinned at the irrepressible pair. “As if I could stop you.”

“And we could sponsor the team, which would get us more publicity that we could ever dream of, and allow us to hire even more of the best and the brightest?”

Harry nodded again.

The twins looked at each other and smiled broadly. “We’re in.”

“Oliver?” Harry asked.

“No doubts on my part,” he said clearly. “The girls are better than our Chasers, and I’d trust the twins to get up to speed quickly.”

“Katie?”

“Yes.”

“Angelina?”

“I think we’re insane, and we’ll have a load of legal stuff to go through, but hell, yes! We’re going to argue, we’re going to fight, but we’re family, and this will be the best experience of our lives. People don’t get this sort of chance – ever. There’s not been a new Quidditch team in a hundred and forty years.”

“Alicia?”

“Absolutely,” she said simply.

“Gabby?” Harry asked last.

“Are you sure?” she asked, a slightly scared look on her face. “I am only sixteen and this is one of the most important jobs in the world. I’ll have all your futures in my hands.”

“I can’t speak for the others,” Oliver said. “But Harry was right; you have everything we need, and your Veela power will help you even further, but even without it, you’re already damn charming, Gabrielle. You’re dedicated to whatever you try to do, and whatever you don’t know, you will know by the time it’s needed, not to mention that you’re totally loyal to Harry, so we know we can trust you as well.”

“I’m with Ollie,” Katie said firmly. “In a way, I do feel a little guilty about it, though. You could be doing something more socially responsible than managing a sports club, because you have such amazing potential. But you did want a job where you could have the same schedule as Harry, and this would provide that.”

“And,” Gabrielle said softly, “I can still study in my spare time, and by the time Harry’s ready to retire, I should have a system that will ensure the club lasts forever, and by then I should have my doctorate, and have plenty of time to do whatever I decide.”

“And I’ll be happy then to go where *you* need to,” Harry said seriously. “So please, Gabby, be our manager?”

She smiled brilliantly at everyone, “As long as you don’t mind the gratuitous public displays of affection.”

"Then all that is left," Angelina said thoughtfully, "is to come up with a name."

"That's the easy part," Harry said with a slight smile. "I've got something much harder to do."

"Oh?" Fred asked.

"Telling your brother that I'm quitting the Cannons!"

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Harry slid out of bed carefully, trying hard not to disturb his sleeping Mate, and pulled on his jeans. He really needed to get some more clothes here. He was using his London apartment as a place for them to spend the night in private, but they hadn't really planned it in advance, so they were changing in their own rooms at Beauxbatons.

He walked into the kitchen and looked in his fridge. Keep-Fresh charms ensured that he at least had something for breakfast for the two of them.

He pulled a frying pan off one of the hooks and placed it on the hob, putting the gas flame on high under it, and added a large knob of butter.

In a separate bowl, he cracked six eggs, added some salt and pepper, and whisked them enthusiastically. There was a spell to do this, but when cooking, he preferred to do it himself. He didn't often make breakfast for anyone, and he wanted to ensure that Gabrielle had at least one good meal before her duel at two o'clock, as he doubted that she would want to eat lunch.

The butter had melted and was starting to turn brown, indicating that it was time for him to add the eggs. He poured the eggs into the frying pan and stirred it with the flat side of the fork, and as the sides started to set, he lifted the side and pulled it into the centre, repeating until half of the eggs were set. He spooned three tablespoons of double cream onto the eggs, then liberally sprinkled it with some good gruyère cheese and put it under the grill. He popped a couple of pieces of bread in the toaster.

"That smells wonderful," Gabrielle said, as she perched herself on a stool at the counter. He smiled at her, and not for the first time, thought to himself just how lucky he was. She hadn't bothered to put any more clothes on, and was just in his practice top that she seemed to like to sleep in most.

Her toes wiggled cutely as she placed them on the cold metal of the stool, and he ran his eyes up her amazing legs, over the jersey that looked far better on her than it ever had on him, before he reached her face.

She was smiling at him, not concerned in the slightest about his long look, not that she had a reason to be. Her hair was still slightly sleep ruffled, and hung down loosely around her face, falling in light waves. Her eyes looked both relaxed and happy, and her face was serene.

He shook his head softly, a little awed by how beautiful she was, and pulled the omelette out of the grill, easing it onto a plate and cutting it in half. As the toaster popped, he grabbed the bread and spread some butter over the pieces, cutting them in half and adding them to the plate.

"I'm not sure I can eat all this," Gabrielle said as he placed the plate in front of her and sat next to her.

"You'll need your energy," Harry said softly. "So eat up."

"Six eggs, cream, and cheese?" she laughed softly, "Are you trying to fatten me up?"

"You're going to use a lot of energy later, and you should never go into physical activity on an empty stomach. The last thing you need is to be distracted by hunger pangs.

She nodded and started to eat. "Oh, this is good! I have not had Omelette Comtoise in a very long time. I thought you said you couldn't cook."

"I can't; well, I can do a few breakfasts," Harry agreed, digging into his own plate. "Bachelors either spend a lot of time around their friends or live on fast food and restaurants. All I ever cooked for the Dursleys was really unhealthy, and as most restaurants around here aren't open in the morning, I had to learn to do something. Luckily, I could always go to the Cannons' stadium for breakfast if I was really desperate."

Gabrielle nodded, and they ate in comfortable silence for a few minutes.

"Harry?" she asked quietly, as she finished.

"Yes?"

She looked up at him with a touch of fear in her eyes. "I am going to be all right, am I not?" Her voice betrayed her nervousness.

"Gabby," Harry said seriously, reaching over to hold her hand in his. "I swear to you that I am not going to let him hurt you."

He could almost feel her relax. "Thank you."

He looked at his watch. "It's about time for us to make our appearance at Beauxbatons."

"I do not want to," she pouted. "I want to spend Sunday alone with you, read the Muggle papers, go for a walk later, have a good meal for dinner, and then retire to bed where I can show just how much I love you, again and again."

Harry thought for a second and whispered, "I can't think of a better way I'd rather spend the day today. And soon, that will be what we do."

She smiled and leant forward to hug him. "I love you," she said softly.

"I know," he whispered into her hair. "I know."

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"What shall I wear?" Gabrielle asked as she looked around her room. Olympe, Jean and Aimée were in there with them.

"I'd wear shorts and trainers under your robes," Harry advised. "You want to be able to move as freely as possible later."

Gabrielle nodded and walked into her bedroom, returning a minute later dressed in powder-blue shorts that hugged her rear, white ankle socks, white trainers and a tight blue t-shirt.

Harry groaned under his breath.

"Problem?" Gabrielle asked.

"Not if you don't take your robes off in public," Harry said. "I'm only one man, and even I might have trouble defending you against the massed ranks of males who would want to get close to you when you're looking like that."

Gabrielle grinned cheerfully at him. "They can look, but you are the only one who will ever get to touch."

Jean coughed.

"Sorry, Papa," Gabrielle laughed. Then she went serious. "Flirting with Harry makes my nerves go away."

Jean nodded slowly and looked at his watch. "It is almost time," he said, before walking over to her. He kissed her on the cheek, "Stay safe, ma chérie," he whispered.

"I will, Papa, Harry will not let me get hurt."

Jean nodded and stood to the side.

"Remember your lessons," Aimée said firmly. "You are not going out there to show off, but to help your own future."

"I will not forget, Mama," Gabrielle promised.

The two nodded at Harry and walked out, leaving the three of them.

"You know what you have to do?" Harry asked.

Gabrielle nodded. "I'll follow your plan," she promised. "The spell is all ready, all I have to do is release it."

Harry smiled proudly. "One more thing, Gabby."

She looked at him.

He bent down and kissed her softly. "Do not get hurt!" He could almost see the affect his order had on her magic, and the smile she gave him in return emphasised it.

"Look after her, Olympe," he said, as he walked out of the room. He hated leaving her at this time, but he needed to be seen to be in the stands with the others, watching the duel from a distance. Now that he'd realised he was in love with his Mate, he was finding his own restrictions chafing, not least the love making part.

If it wasn't so important, he would have happily have slept with her properly by now. They both understood why they didn't, but that didn't make it any easier on them. He'd never been in bed with anyone so responsive and enthusiastic, and that didn't mention how quick she was to learn.

He ruthlessly shoved those thoughts to the back of his mind and Apparated into the stands.

He arrived next to Ron and Hermione, and found that he was in the middle of a lot of his old friends.

"Hey, Harry," Hermione said. "I've just been hearing some rather interesting stories."

"Oh?" he asked.

"Yes," she said, glaring at Neville, who was nearest. "It seems that you have a bit of a club."

"So I've heard," he agreed.

"And you didn't see fit to tell me?" she asked archly.

"Not my secret to tell," he said with a grin. "I'm just an official figurehead, and didn't even know myself until a few weeks ago."

Hermione pouted at him.

Harry," Fred called as he clambered up the steps. "You're appearing far too calm."

"Oh?" he asked.

"One of your students, someone we know you like, is fighting a Death Eater," George said.

Harry looked around at the people near him. "Gabrielle can use my magic," he said simply.

"How will that leave you?" George asked.

"A little powerless," he admitted.

"Right," Fred said, a decisive expression on his face. "George, go and make the bets. Neville, I want you and Susan in front of Harry. Ron, to the left; I'll be to the right. Anyone that even points a wand in our direction gets cursed first, questioned later, okay?"

"Fred being serious," Neville sighed lightly. "What has the world come to?"

Fred grinned, "Can I offer you some popcorn for the duel?" he asked.

"Err, no," Neville replied cheerfully. "It's good to see you again, Harry."

"You too, Nev and Susan," Harry replied.

"You wouldn't believe who I got a call from the other day," Neville continued, as he moved in to the row in front of Harry.

"Oh?"

"A professor from Beauxbatons," he said. "It seems that someone told him what I do for a living these days, and he was impressed enough to offer me a contract."

"Good," Harry grinned.

"Thanks."

"I wouldn't have said it if I didn't think you could do it," Harry said warmly.

"Even so," Neville said seriously. "Thank you. It's the fact that everyone knows that you only give recommendations when they are justified that makes it more worthwhile."

Harry smiled and touched his glasses, using them to focus down on the platform. The professional duelling platform was larger and provided a lot more space to move than the one he'd practised on in his second year, but it was still limiting. "Did you know that Malfoy wanted Snape to referee?"

"You're kidding," Ron said in disbelief.

"Yeah," Harry shook his head. "Flitwick put that idea where it belonged, pointing out that as a Duelling Master, he was the only professor fully qualified, unless Olympe objected – and she didn't, on my advice."

"Good," Neville snorted.

"I can't believe what's happened to my old school," Susan sighed. "But I do feel a little responsible."

"Why?" Harry asked.

"Because we all did the same thing – took several years to recover from the war, and during that time, Malfoy and Snape moved in and got their positions entrenched."

"I guess," Harry said with a sigh. "But isn't that what students are supposed to do? We go off and start our lives. We're not supposed to have to look after the school. That's Albus' job. He allowed it and at the end of the day, he'll have to pay the piper."

"Taken up bagpipes?" George asked as he rejoined them.

"We're just discussing what has happened to Hogwarts," Susan said. "The difference is, Harry, that we were never normal students, and those rules don't really apply to us. I blame Snape for what has happened, not Dumbledore. With everything Neville, Hermione, and Ron have told me, I think it's him that is responsible for whatever has happened to Dumbledore."

Harry frowned, "That would explain why Snape is so confident," he allowed. He turned to George, "how did the betting go?"

"Most of the bookies are backing Malfoy," George replied cheerfully. "I got some excellent odds. You want the winnings sent to your favourite charity?"

Harry nodded.

"That's generous," Susan said.

“Not really,” Fred sighed. “My brother and I are afflicted with a nasty conscience. It would be immoral to keep money won on a dead certainty.”

Neville frowned, and then pulled out his wand and cast a silencing spell. “So,” he said as he turned fully in his chair. “Care to explain just how you can share magic with a Veela? There’s only one way I know of, and that raises some *really* interesting questions.”

Harry groaned. “I swear this is the most open secret in the world. Nev, Susan, I’ll need a magical oath, and then Hermione can tell you what is going on – I’m a little more concerned about Gabrielle at the moment – she’ll explain why.”

Neville and Susan shrugged and cast the spells, and then looked at Hermione.

Harry drifted out as Hermione started to explain, in a lot more detail than he would have, exactly what had happened.

He half-closed his eyes and sent a wave of confidence and pride down the Bond, and smiled as he felt Gabrielle respond with a feeling of love.

He was jerked out of his reverie as Lee Jordan’s voice echoed around the stadium. Neville looked apologetically at Harry as he put his wand away, having just cancelled the Silencing Spell.

“And welcome to the first official duel seen at Hogwarts since 1958,” Lee said. “I’m Lee Jordan, your host for this fascinating contest. On one side we have an ex-Death Eater who only escaped prison by allegedly bribing all the judges claiming he was under the Imperius Curse, and on the other side, we have the gorgeous Gabrielle Delacour, daughter of the French war hero Jean-Sebastian Delacour, and sister to the Tri-Wizard champion from Beauxbatons, Fleur Delacour. Gabrielle is also Beauxbatons’ Head Girl, and their Quidditch Seeker and Captain, and all this despite being a year younger than her peers.

“It’s sickening that Hogwarts has sanctioned this event, and worse that the Ministry used one of those ridiculous laws they passed in one of their blundered attempts to help the war effort to make this official. I understand that even the Muggles gave up on trial by combat centuries ago. Yet again, I find myself disgusted with my country of origin and I hope all you good English people will agree with me.

“And to read the Daily Prophet this morning, you’d think that Draco Malfoy had spent the final battle duelling Voldemort himself, and not been knocked unconscious by Harry Potter after Malfoy put Hermione Granger, one of the Light side’s best and brightest, under the Cruciatus Curse.”

“I’ve detected some slight bias in Lee’s commentary recently,” Harry said idly.

“That’s my fault,” Percy announced, as he joined the group. “I’ve got him working against the Ministry Mouthpiece for me. I’m protecting him and ensuring that he gets the same freedoms that the Mouthpiece has. They hate it, but Lee’s a popular commentator, and he’s more than willing to help.”

“I’ll have to say thanks later,” Harry said with a nod. He tuned out the rest of Lee’s colourful commentary.

“What’s with the seating arrangements?” Percy asked.

“Harry’s going to be a little powerless when the match starts,” Neville agreed. “We’re on bodyguard duty.”

“Damn,” Percy whispered, frowning. “It would look far too suspicious if I were to bring the Aurors up here personally and Kingsley is on duty anyway.”

There was a moment of silence as they all silently remembered the other Auror they could trust, and how she had died along with Remus, when Cho Chang had betrayed them.

“If anything really bad happens,” Percy said, “I’ll grab Harry and use the Emergency Ministry Portkey to get us both out of here.”

“Good idea,” Neville said. “We don’t want Gabrielle left powerless until we can get to her – and anything else will give the game away.”

Harry nodded reluctantly. “Thanks, guys.”

“Well, while I have you trapped here,” Percy said, “can we talk politics for a few minutes?”

“Since I can’t escape, sure,” Harry said curiously, with a faint smile.

“We need your help,” Percy said. “We’ve got a candidate we trust to take over Minister Of Magic, but we need backing. We need you to endorse him.”

“Any of you not trust him?” Harry asked.

The others all shook their heads.

“Okay, I’ll do it. I’m going to help Jean get elected as French Minister, so I may as well help out at home as well.”

“Don’t you want to know who he is?” Percy asked, a surprised look on his face.

“It doesn’t matter,” Harry shrugged. “If everyone here trusts him, then he’s probably the right candidate. I’ll meet him first, of course. We’ll discuss strategy, and then do what we can to work around the Mouthpiece.”

“Thank you,” Percy said with a relieved look. “Even if we don’t win, we’ll be able to take enough to the Wizengamot to ensure that we win next time.

Sometimes you have to play the long game.”

“Quite,” Harry agreed.

“They’re coming out,” Ron said excitedly. “Flitwick looks really small from here.”

Harry focused on the platform as Gabrielle walked out. Her hands were in the sleeves of her robes, crossed in front of her, and she looked totally serene.

Malfoy looked eager, a nasty smirk on his face as he stared at Harry’s Mate.

“We’ll go over now to our referee for this duel, Duel-Master Filius Flitwick.”

The voice changed, as Filius’ more high-pitched voice said, “I want a good, clean duel, no use of the Unforgivables, and that includes your Veela power, Miss Delacour. You will start on my mark. Ready?”

Both combatants nodded. Gabrielle bowed formally to Malfoy, who sneered back at her – to jeers from the crowd at his unsporting behaviour.

They walked to the ends of the duelling platform and turned. Malfoy moved into a standard duelling form, but Gabrielle didn’t move, not even to pull her hands out of her sleeves.

Harry took a deep breath, feeling nervous as he watched his Mate prepare to fight.

“Begin,” Filius said, and Malfoy moved first.

“*Expelliarmus*,” he yelled, his wand slashing down toward Gabrielle.

“He’s improved,” Neville muttered.

Gabrielle moved smoothly, pulling her wand out. “*Protego*,” she said calmly. In front of her a glimmering barrier of silver appeared, causing the Slytherin’s spell to divert.

Neville whistled under his breath, “Now that’s a shield spell,” he said. “Draco will have to work a bit to get through that.”

Malfoy growled and launched a series of bone-breaking curses at the shield.

“*Reverso*,” Gabrielle said, still without moving. Instead of deflecting the spells, it bounced them off, flying back toward Malfoy, who had to take evasive action by diving to the floor.

There was an amused sound from the crowd, which caused Malfoy to jump back to his feet and glare at them.

The blond Death Eater started to cast a series of spells as he moved from side to side. Gabrielle simply turned with him, keeping him in sight at all times.

Malfoy launched a powerful Blasting curse at Gabrielle. Almost simultaneously, he drew a dagger from a concealed sheath and threw it directly at her.

Gabrielle waved her wand, diverting the Blasting curse before it could hit her shields, and then swayed to one side and snatched the knife from midair. With a disdainful look at Malfoy, she glanced at it briefly, then pocketed it.

The crowd laughed this time, and around Harry, he could almost hear the smirks his friends were wearing.

“Nice plan,” Neville said. “Make Malfoy look like an idiot – again – and make him lose his patience.”

“Yeah,” Harry said. “That’s part of it, anyway. I just hope he reacts properly.”

“Properly?” Percy asked. “Do I want to know?”

“You’ll see,” Harry replied, checking to see how Gabrielle was feeling. She was calm and confident.

“Fight back,” Malfoy yelled, as he sent another barrage of curses toward Gabrielle.

Some of them she blocked, some of them she let hit her shield, and the others she simply dodged, all the time looking as if she was out for a stroll.

“*Riddikulus*,” she chanted with a smirk – the spell exploding out of her wand like it was fired from a cannon.

The audience didn’t hold back their laughter this time, as Malfoy was now wearing a pale blue sundress and his hair was long and curly. Neville’s eyes bulged out. “I didn’t know you *could* use that on something other than a boggart. That’s a brilliant way to distract an opponent!”

Malfoy was almost spitting mad as he cancelled the spell. “*Serpensortia*,” he yelled. A giant boa constrictor appeared out of his wand and slithered toward Gabrielle.

“He’s hoping that Gabby will use Parseltongue,” Harry said calmly.



"Will she?"

The snake approached Gabrielle and reared up. Unafraid, Gabrielle leant forward and gently kissed the snake. She held out her hands and the snake slithered around her arms and draped itself over her neck, before hissing at Malfoy.

"Would you do me a favour?" Gabrielle asked in English, in a whisper that was amplified by the spells on the platform. "Attack the irritating one at the other end."

The snake hissed merrily and launched itself off of Gabrielle and toward Malfoy who took a step backward in shock, slipped, and ended up on his arse.

The crowd roared with laughter as Malfoy got back to his feet and cancelled the spell. "How did you do that?" he demanded.

"I am naturally charming, Death Eater," Gabrielle replied, not taking her eyes from him.

"I'm not a Death Eater," Malfoy roared.

"Not any more," Gabrielle taunted. "But only because Voldemort is dead." She sent off a stinging hex, finally taking the offensive, as she continued, "How many people did you bribe again? Fourteen, wasn't it? And even then, you barely got away with it. Pathetic really, you should have died with your father as an honourable man."

"Bitch!" Malfoy yelled and ran forward, casting spells that were distinctly dark in nature.

Gabrielle danced to one side gracefully, and actually ran toward Malfoy for a few steps, and vaulted over the older man, avoiding all the spells. She landed gently, whirled and pointed at her wand at Malfoy, who was spinning to face her, off balance. "*Rictusempra*," she cast quietly.

Malfoy dived to one side, avoiding the spell. He rolled to his feet and kept up his barrage of spells at Gabrielle. They had now changed places at the opposite ends of the platform.

"He's starting to get really frustrated," Neville said, as Gabrielle dodged again. "He's not getting close to her, and she's playing with him."

The crowd were starting to get into the duel as well, shouting "Ole!" each time one of Malfoy's spells missed.

"And she's making him look like a right idiot. The worst thing for Malfoy is people laughing at him."

"*Fidelius*!" Gabrielle shouted, and there was a wave of magic as she seemed to vanish in front of their eyes.

"Now that's a unique strategy," Neville commented, sounding highly impressed.

"We prepared the spell this morning," Harry explained. "It took us an hour, but all she had to do was say the word and release the spell."

Directly above Malfoy's head a sign appeared. 'Gabrielle Delacour is on the duelling platform'. The crowd cheered loudly as everyone could see the young French witch again.

Playing to the crowd, Gabrielle pantomimed a sneak behind Malfoy and tripped him up.

The sign above Malfoy's head changed to, 'Transvestite For Hire!'

Malfoy growled as the laughter intensified, looking up, he spotted the sign and destroyed it with a violent slash of his wand.

Gabrielle turned to the crowd and pouted, before sneaking up behind him and kicking him in the rear.

Malfoy jumped and turned around, casting spells wildly. It was obvious he had no idea where she was.

"Look at Snape," Percy said. "He's fuming."

They all turned to look at the Potions Master, who was in the front row of the staff box. His lips were drawn back from his uneven yellow teeth, and spots of red burned on his cheekbones, obvious against the pallor of his face. "If he moves, curse him," Harry said quietly, and several wands were unobtrusively pointed at Snape.

Snape tried to jump out of his chair as Malfoy fell again, this time tripping over his own feet, but McGonagall clamped down on his arm. She said something – possibly reminding him that if he interfered, Malfoy would be declared the loser – and Snape slumped back down, staring hatefully across at Harry.

Harry met his eyes and saluted mockingly before returning his attention to the duel.

Gabrielle yawned hugely and cancelled the *Fidelius* charm. "Prepared to admit that you wanted to rape me, Death Eater?"

"Die!" Malfoy screamed, casting some cutting hexes at her.

Gabrielle dodged them all, making it look easy, but Harry could feel how tired she was getting. He sent her a feeling of pride and confidence.

"He's losing it," Neville said. "He's embarrassed, frustrated and humiliated."

I hope so,” Harry muttered. “Come on, Ferret, revert to form.”

“Wait,” Hermione said. “You want him to cast the Cruciatus?”

Harry smirked. “Yep.”

“And Gabby will block it, right?”

“Nope.”

“No?” Neville demanded, twisting in his chair. “She’s going to let it hit her to prove that he’s scum?”

“Kinda, yes.”

“What do you mean by ‘kinda’, Harry James Potter?” Hermione demanded, her hands on her hips – which, as she was sitting down, didn’t look as imposing as she might have wished.

“I swore to Gabrielle that I wouldn’t let him hurt her,” he explained.

“And?”

“And, when the curse hits her, she’s going to act hurt.”

“And?” Hermione asked warily.

“Gabrielle thinks that the magic will stop the spell.”

“Harry, getting answers out of you is like pulling teeth from a mule! Will you please tell us what is going on?”

“Magic will ensure that she doesn’t feel the spell,” Harry admitted. “As I’ll be using it to divert it to me. No one touches Gabby, she’s mine!”

As a new set of spells from Malfoy was blocked by Gabrielle’s shield, she turned and blew kisses to the crowd, dismissing the blond contemptuously.

“There he goes. This is gonna hurt,” Harry whispered, bracing himself.

“Take my hand,” Neville ordered, turning and facing Harry.

“*Crucio*!” Malfoy yelled.

The laughter from the crowd died as Gabrielle crumpled to the floor.

Harry grabbed onto Neville’s hand tightly, fighting the pain as it lanced through his body, he blocked off everything he was feeling from the Bond, and shuddered.

“*Expelliarmus*!” The spell came from Filius Flitwick and blew the unsuspecting Malfoy off the platform. “Draco Malfoy, by casting an Unforgivable you have forfeited the duel and have been found guilty. Aurors,” he demanded, “arrest that man.”

Malfoy looked around and snarled. “I’ll get you all for this!” he yelled, as he activated a hidden Portkey and vanished.

Harry took a deep breath, easing his shoulders. “Thanks, Neville,” he said as he released the now slightly squashed hand.

“You’re welcome,” Neville said, and smiled as he theatrically shook his hand out.

“Well,” Harry said cheerfully, “that went well.” He frowned, “I should have guessed he’d have an emergency escape route, though. Still, he’s a fugitive now. With any luck, the Aurors will get him soon.”

Next to him, Ron started to snigger, and the others soon joined in. Around them, the cheers of the audience rang as Flitwick and Madam Pomfrey checked Gabrielle to ensure that she was all right. Harry could have told them not to bother. His Mate was just fine.

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Sybill Trelawney looked down from her tower and shook her head in contempt. She had hoped for something a little more adult from Snape and Malfoy, but no, they had to act like spoilt children. They had spent too long without any serious opposition and had paid the price for forgetting how to win through intelligence and subtlety.

It was obviously going to be down to her to gain some revenge on Potter. And she had just the right thing to do it.

She looked down at the pictures in front of her. She had foreseen that Potter would take the little minx to New York and had planned accordingly. No one who saw these pictures would ever doubt that Potter and the little Veela were in love. The relaxed look in his eyes, the loving look in hers made it obvious.

When she gave these to the Prophet, and told Rita some calculated lies, Potter’s reputation would be ruined.

She whistled cheerfully to herself. If you want something dreadful done, it’s always better to do it yourself.



## Hope 10 - Antwerp

Harry watched Gabrielle from across the Hall at Beauxbatons as she gave interviews to the press, and started to have some serious thoughts about pushing to marry her sooner than he'd originally planned.

It was killing him to watch his Mate from a distance, especially when he could feel that all she wanted was a hug, a touch, his kiss.

Even now, a few days later, he could pinpoint the exact moment when his desire to go slow had vanished. The moment Draco Malfoy touched her, the very thought of *him*, of all people, touching Gabrielle triggered a reaction so incredibly strong that he had to acknowledge it.

The idea of going slow seemed silly now, now that he *knew* that Gabrielle loved him. He no longer cared if it was the magic or the girl; he suspected it was the girl, because he was feeling the same thing.

"You are doing a lot of this," Aimée said from his shoulder.

"Making cow-eyes at Gabrielle?"

She laughed softly. "Oh no, your face is expressionless. You do not give away your secrets that easily to everyone. To me, on the other hand..."

He smiled slightly at her. "I think she's going to be a while yet."

"Jean will be staying with her as she deals with the press. In the future, that will be your job."

"Yeah," Harry agreed with a sigh. "I need to do something to stop myself from brooding. Fancy a trip?"

"Where to?"

Harry grinned, took Aimée's arm and Apparated them away from Hogwarts and halfway across Europe. They appeared in a small dark alleyway, and he led her out into the courtyard.

"The Cathedral of Our Lady," Aimée whispered in wonder. "That is what international Apparition is like?"

He nodded. "Welcome to Antwerp."

She tilted her head. "This is the diamond capital of Europe, is it not?"

"If I'm going to get Gabby a ring, it's got to be the best."

"You do not want to use a family heirloom?"

Harry shook his head. "I've looked, and none of them are right for Gabby – my family has a habit of marrying brunettes and red-heads. Besides, they all have charms on them, and it would be irritating to remove them."

"Why would you want to remove them?" Aimée asked.

"Because I can do *better* charms. I'll spend some time with Filius, and we'll make sure the rings are the most powerful since Merlin gave his to Morgana. Of course, Merlin made a mistake with his ring and it started to corrupt her, leading to her eventual betrayal. But, he knew what mistake he made and how to fix it. Besides, he never had a bond to Morgana – she was just a very beautiful brunette with a wicked right hook."

Aimée looked at him with an arched eyebrow.

"They were in Arthur's palace once when Lancelot, having been rebuffed by Gwenhwyfar, tried to chat her up – thinking that as Merlin looked like an old man, she would be open to his charms.

"She punched him, and then kneed him in the stomach, then punched him again, before kicking him and breaking his nose. Merlin healed Lancelot and then took Morgana back home, and they weren't seen for a week."

He sighed and smiled.

"*That* was a true love. It was Merlin's biggest regret and nightmare that he had a hand in her downfall.

"It had a happy ending of sorts. Morgana eventually managed to fight off the effects of the ring, and they destroyed it together, and were reunited – but the battle took too much out of her, and she died a few years later.

"I truly think that was one of the reasons Merlin died when he did. First he lost his love, and then his dream for a utopian society was ruined. He still had the guilt of what had happened with Morgana, and I think he no longer wanted to live."

He stopped and looked at Aimée, who had an awed expression her face.

"Aimée?"

She took his hand silently and led him over to a small coffee shop. She ordered tea for them and sat down on one of the tables on the terrace, staring at him curiously.

"What?" he asked, feeling a little uncomfortable under her piercing gaze.

"I think," she said slowly, "that I have just discovered exactly why my daughter loves you more than her own life."

Harry flushed and looked away.

"You have depth, Harry. I was concerned that you were, well, just a sportsman and a fighter. Jean has often described you as a Chevalier, but I wasn't sure. A Chevalier is not just a knight; he is a gentle and chivalrous man. He does not just fight with honour, he thinks as well.

"Tell me, how exactly do you know so much about a legend? A legend that contradicts what I know about the events of the past."

"I have Merlin's diaries," Harry admitted quietly. "So I've read what really happened, and not what Muggles turned into a great story. And I'd ask that you please don't let anyone know."

She nodded. "You could sell them for a fortune."

Harry smiled faintly. "I wouldn't sell these if I was homeless and starving. These are worth more than anything anyone could ever give me. They're my link to a past that I can only dream of." He paused, "And to be honest, I doubt they'd be much use to most wizards."

"Why?"

"Because you need *power* to pull off the spells that Merlin put in his diaries. *Real* power. It was Merlin who taught me how to bend the boundaries of magic that allowed Beauxbatons to slip through the ancient wards of Hogwarts." He lifted his cup and took a long sip.

"Harry," Aimée said after a few moments of silence.

He looked at her.

"You have my blessing."

"But..."

"You had my *permission* to marry Gabrielle before, but only because it needed to be done to rectify her silly mistake. You can have no idea the fear I have felt for so many years, that you would turn out to be a normal man, one who would give in to the temptation of having a beautiful slave. Even though Jean reassured me, I never truly believed.

"I found you an honourable man from the start, but now that I know you, I am reassured. All my daughter needs is your affection, but that is not enough for me. I want my daughter to have everything, and I now believe that you can give her that. She would have settled for so little, but I would never have been happy.

"Tell me, what did you do on your date?" Aimée asked.

"I took her to Tintagel and showed her Merlin's final resting place."

Aimée swallowed her tea. "Is there anything you *don't* know?"

He laughed under his breath. "There's a whole universe out there. Merlin knew a fraction of what there is to be learned, and I know a fraction of what he knew. Some time in the future, I'd like to try some of his experimental spells."

"Oh?"

He nodded. "When we're older, we'll go through them together, and we'll see how we can rock the world. We'll see if Merlin was truly as great as I think he is."

"And you think he was?"

Harry nodded. "I think his legend is underplayed, if anything. He was a man who invented more magic in his one hundred and sixty years than most *countries* have done since the dawn of time. Magic was natural to him, like breathing, and he revelled in it. If he hadn't had more important things to worry about in the last third of his life, there were no bounds to what he might have done."

"He is your hero," Aimée said without a trace of irony.

Harry nodded eagerly. "And my role model. He never settled for mediocrity, not when he could achieve excellence. And that's what I have to do."

He smiled faintly. "It'll take me another fifty years before I'm even close to understanding some of what he wrote, but with Gabrielle's help, we will make it together." He paused and looked at her directly. "I didn't have an easy time of it growing up. After Voldemort was defeated I was lost. My friends went on with their lives, but I was alone. I pushed myself into Quidditch and studying, but then after my injury at the World Cup, I lost Quidditch and I felt like I wasn't getting anywhere with my studying, and I let myself be distracted by the hole my life was in.

"Then Gabrielle slipped into my life. Her innocence shone through from the start, and I found that I couldn't be morose in her company. But then I found that I was being manipulated."

Aimée winced.

"I had a choice. I thought I'd made up my mind – I was going to break the bond. But then Gabrielle begged me for a chance. That's all she wanted, and I couldn't deny her.

"If she had used an erg of Veela power, I would have broken the Bond, but she didn't. She sat in front of the one man with the power of God over her, she knew that a misstep would send her into madness, yet she pulled back and asked that I make a decision, not in anger, but after consideration.

"Her courage was outrageous."

Aimée moved her hand and lightly covered his. "I will not tell anyone, even Jean, what you have said today, Harry, but I thank you."

Harry smiled at her. "You're the only person who's been normal in all of this, and you're going to be my mother-in-law. I feel like you, more than anyone, deserve to know more about who I am, and not who I play at being most of the time."

"What sort of relationship do you desire with me, Harry?"

"I'm not sure what you mean."

"I have heard stories from Fleur about how Molly Weasley treats you. I find myself wanting to have as good a relationship with you as I can, but I do not want to make you uncomfortable."

Harry sighed, "I *do* like Molly and Arthur, but Molly is just a little bit overbearing – and in her heart she still thinks that Ginny and I will get together. I tend to only see them at family events, and that's not very often."

Aimée nodded. "I do not want to lose my daughter, Harry, nor do I want to lose you. And rather than risk doing something by accident, I want to know what you will accept from me."

He looked at her for a very long moment, then smiled slowly. "I think, Aimée, that I will accept anything that you want to give."

She looked a little surprised. "I did not expect that response."

"No, you probably didn't. My biggest issue with Molly is that she does not, and will not, accept that I am now an adult. You have treated me like an adult from the start, and just now, you asked me for my preference, like an adult. I want a very good relationship with you, Aimée. I do want someone I can talk to who is a little older, is a little more mature, and can perhaps understand me better than my friends – who, as much as they try, can't understand the pressure of being young, rich and famous."

Aimée nodded and smiled at him. "You have always acted like an adult, Harry, so there is no reason for me not to treat you as such. Even in the face of extreme provocation, you have kept your honour and your dignity." She paused, and then changed the subject completely. "How many people know about Merlin's diaries?"

"Two, now: you and Gabrielle."

"Not even Hermione?"

Harry shook his head. "This has always been *my* secret. The one thing that was mine alone, that I didn't have to share. But let me ask you a question. What do you do?"

"You mean professionally?"

Harry nodded. "Yeah, I mean, I've seen you reading the Financial Times, but you don't seem to have an office or a job."

Aimée sighed. "I was, until last year, a director for one of the largest cosmetic companies in France."

"What happened?"

"I reached the mandatory retirement age of sixty five and was forced to retire. I'd been using make-up to make myself look older, so that the Muggles would not be suspicious of an older woman who seemed to have stopped aging at forty, but they have rules and I fell foul of them. Now, I putter around while I try to decide exactly what I want to do next."

She finished her tea.

"Come, let us find my daughter a ring that will show her that she is luckiest girl on the face of the planet."

I think I'm the lucky one," Harry muttered, trying to control his blush.

Aimée reached into her purse and placed a few Euros on the table, before she took Harry's arm and walked with him into a small shop with only two counters. An elderly man looked up at them with a slight sneer on his face.

Aimée took one look at him and sniffed. She turned abruptly and walked out.

"Aimée?" Harry asked as he followed her.

"One so blind cannot be of assistance to us," she replied coldly.

"Oh?"

"We might be dressed casually, but your watch is worth more than half his shop, as are my earrings. We both carry ourselves differently than your average shopper, and if he was not paying attention, then he does not deserve our patronage."

Harry laughed. "The wood behind him was also slightly dusty – shows a lack of care. Probably a tourist trap."

"We will try this one," Aimée decided, and they walked together into another shop. This one was slightly bigger, with a series of mahogany cases taking up most of the floor space.

"Welcome," the man behind the counter said cheerfully in French. "I am Tomas. May I help you find anything?"

Aimée looked at him thoughtfully, before she glanced briefly at the displays. "Do you have anything of real quality?"

An amused look flickered across his face. "I presume that a lady who wears such earrings would not be impressed by my normal fare. What are you seeking?"

"I need an engagement ring," Harry replied. "Nothing too gaudy. It needs to be elegant and restrained."

Tomas looked at him for a brief moment. "Like your watch," he said with a nod. "Please wait here. I will be back shortly." He vanished out of the room.

"Happy?" Harry asked.

Aimée smiled. "I am, indeed, as I am amused that he brought up the clues I mentioned. Of course, normally I dress for shopping, but today, I did not want to distract from my daughter. And you did not give me time to change."

"The day you look anything other than beautiful is a very long way away," Harry replied. "You look barely old enough to be Gabby's mother, never mind Fleur's."

Aimée smiled at him. "Flattery will get you everywhere."

"It's not flattery," Harry grinned. "I was the recipient of many jealous looks when we stopped for tea. It was quite an experience for me to be the *younger* partner."

"You did not mind then?" Aimée asked, a playfully flirting expression on her face.

"Mind? A thousand poets could struggle for a year to capture a tenth of your beauty and elegance, and a decade to describe the looks of hatred and envy I received for having you on my arm."

Aimée's laugh echoed around the room. "You smooth-talking rogue! This is an aspect of your personality I have not seen before."

"Not many have," he agreed. "All little boys grow up, it's just that some of us have to hide who we become."

"Why hide it, Harry?"

He smiled faintly. "I have enough trouble walking some places in England without getting assaulted by overly amorous fan-girls, and that's with my reputation for being cold and aloof. I shudder to think how bad it would be if I was truly myself."

"I am a private person. As long as my friends know me, I'm happy."

Aimée nodded. "Has my daughter seen you flirt yet?"

"Not seriously. Until recently, I didn't think it was a good idea."

"You should. It will make her smile, and Gabrielle is often far too serious."

Tomas returned with a polite cough. "Should I ask if price is going to be an issue?" he asked delicately.

"No," Harry replied with finality.

Tomas nodded and placed a small walnut casket on the counter. He opened it slowly. "These represent some of my best work," he said reverently.

Harry looked at them; there were eighteen different rings in the box, some with huge diamonds as their focus.

"That one," Harry said, pointing to one on the far left. "That's the one."

Aimée smiled.

Tomas pulled the ring out gently and handed it to him. The platinum ring was a little heavier than expected. The platinum criss-crossed all around the ring, with each strand being surrounded by small cut diamonds. From a distance it looked restrained, but when it caught the light it sparkled and shone.

"I have a matching wedding ring," Tomas continued. "When worn together, the patterns match, and the effect increases."

"Do you have a matching wedding ring for me?"

"I do."

"I'll take the engagement ring," Harry decided. "And I'll bring Gabrielle back with me to look at your wedding rings."

"You are a wise man," Tomas said approvingly. "A man may choose an engagement ring, but it is a foolish man who chooses the wedding bands alone."

"What do you think?" Harry asked Aimée.

"I think that you do not truly need my advice," she responded with a smile. "You know my daughter well."

"Do you need the ring sized?"

Aimée moved forward and took the ring from Harry, slipping it onto her finger. "No," she said. "My daughter's hands are the same size as mine."

Tomas looked a little surprised, but didn't say anything as she handed him the ring back. He pulled out a small leather box and carefully placed the ring inside it. Harry pulled out his wallet and handed him his credit card.

Tomas turned and pulled out a surprisingly modern terminal. "I was forced to upgrade to the PIN technologies," he explained with a sigh. "In the old days, a man's word was his bond, and a simple cheque did the business. Now, most of my customers are Americans, and they do not even care that the jewellery they buy is merely adequate. Still, a shop owner must provide what the clientele desire. Please enter your number," he finished, handing the terminal back to Harry.

Harry tapped in the number, smiling faintly at the price. Despite being five digits, it was still a long way from two months of his salary. But, he was very aware that to spend *that* much would require a diamond the size of an egg, which would not look right on Gabrielle's hand.

"Thank you," Harry said, as he took possession of the ring.

"No, Mr Black, thank *you*," Tomas replied. "I do hope to see you again."

"You will."

"And if, later, you happen to run across the owner of the shop two doors down from yours, you might want to remind him of the power of first impressions," Aimée added.

Tomas' eyes lit up. "Gauthier is not the most observant man. He does make some good rings – not as good as mine, of course – but good all the same. I shall tease him tonight."

They walked out of the shop and into the sunlight. "How about some lunch?" Harry suggested. "Gabrielle is safe with Jean, and the press will probably keep them another hour or more."

"I would be delighted, Harry. You can tell me more about Merlin, and how you plan to emulate his work."

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"That was a most frustrating day," Gabrielle complained as she threw her robes onto her bed.

"Gabrielle," Aimée sighed reproachfully as she picked up the robes.

"I was going to do that, Mama."

"Of course you were, my dear," Aimée murmured.

"I wanted to be with Harry, not with Papa facing those horrible vultures," Gabrielle continued. "But at least Papa was there to stop them getting out of hand. Ron was good as well."

"I know that Harry wanted to be with you."

"Where did you go?" Gabrielle asked, as she deposited her shorts and top on the dresser and tried to decide what to wear.



Wear the black muslin blouse and skirt," Aimée suggested. "You are eating with Ron and Hermione, so you want to appear formal, but comfortable as well."

"Yes, Mama," Gabrielle replied as she pulled out the patterned black blouse and the matching skirt. She quickly changed into a black bra before pulling the blouse on and doing up the buttons. She slid the knee length tulip skirt up her legs and stepped into the patent black leather sandals her mother had placed on the floor for her.

"You look lovely," Aimée said with a smile.

"Thank you, Mama," Gabrielle replied and looked at her watch. "So, where *did* you go with Harry today?"

"He took me to Europe," Aimée replied. "We had a very nice German lunch." She paused. "Sit down, Gabrielle."

Gabrielle did as she was told, sitting down formally.

"I gave Harry my blessing today," Aimée said. "I hope you realise just how extremely lucky you have been."

"I do."

Aimée nodded. "I am proud of the woman you have become, Gabrielle. There are times when we have argued, and times when we have fought. But I have always loved you, my dear, and I have always been proud of how you have fought to acquire what you wanted."

"Mama..."

"Do not interrupt," Aimée said gently. "It was your courage that has led you to this point, and despite my misgivings, you have everything I ever wanted for you. I am sorry for doubting you, Gabrielle. You have proved me wrong, all these years, and for that I owe you this apology."

"Mama," Gabrielle said, as she burst into tears. She threw herself off the chair and into her mother's arms, and hugged her mother tightly. "I always knew that you loved me," she declared fervently. "And that all you wanted was for me to be happy. What I did eight years ago was foolish, and I have been incredibly lucky that my Mate has accepted me. You were right, Mama."

Aimée tightened her arms around her daughter, and they stayed like that for a little while.

"Mama," Gabrielle said in a small voice.

"Yes, dear?"

"Thank you."

"You are welcome."

"Not just for this," Gabrielle continued, "but for everything you have done for me, for backing me up, even when you disagreed with me. That was how I knew, you know? I knew that you would always be there for me, no matter what."

"And I always will," Aimée added. "And now, for Harry as well."

"He has won you over then?"

Aimée nodded. "He told me about the diaries. Has he talked to you about his long term plans?"

Gabrielle shook her head negatively.

"Then I suggest that you ask him about them."

"They include me, then?"

Aimée laughed softly. "My dear, he will push you further and harder than you can dream, but enough – I will not divulge his secrets to you, or to anyone. Now, fix your face."

Gabrielle nodded and leaned back. She concentrated for the briefest of seconds, letting her Veela power fix her tear-stained face, before she smiled brightly at her mother. "I am excited," she said. "This is the first time that I have been let into his life like this."

"You will be fine," Aimée said firmly. "You are a Delacour."

Gabrielle smiled and kissed her mother gently on the cheek. "I love you, Mama."

"I know you do, child."

Gabrielle stood and smoothed down her skirt. She looked at her watch, and right on time, the Floo activated and Harry appeared.

"You look lovely," he said, as he walked over and kissed her.

"You are looking very handsome yourself," Gabrielle replied. Harry's dress sense was always simple, but the clothes always fit him perfectly, and showed off his slim and powerful figure.

Harry walked over and kissed Aimée gently on the cheek, before he took Gabrielle’s hand. “Ready?”

“I will see you both tomorrow morning,” Aimée said. “You need to spend some time talking this evening as well.”

“We will, Mama,” Gabrielle replied, before Harry Apparated them away.

They arrived in a fairly modern living room. Black leather sofas matched a dark mahogany wooden floor. The walls were painted in cream, and were filled with bookcases.

“Welcome,” Ron said cheerfully as he walked in, a bottle of wine in one hand and a bottle opener in another. “As always, you’re bang on time – which means that Hermione is still a few minutes away from being ready.”

“In France,” Harry said with a grin, “it’s polite to turn up late, I suspect, for this very reason.”

Ron nodded. “So Jean was telling me. Of course, if we just told to you to arrive at the real time, we’d have avoided a lot of these problems.” He expertly opened the bottle of wine, moved over to the table, and poured four glasses. “Spending time with Jean has taught me as much about wine as politics.”

“Papa is a little obsessed,” Gabrielle said fondly. “But everyone should be allowed their own little foibles.”

“And it’s much better than the Chudley Cannons,” Hermione said as she entered the living room. She was wearing a slim black dress with a pearl necklace. “Ron buying decent wine is something I can appreciate – the desire to paint our bedroom *orange* is not.”

Gabrielle and Harry laughed, while Ron pouted playfully.

“I love your dress,” Gabrielle said to Hermione, as Ron and Harry moved into the kitchen.

“It’s not bad,” Hermione agreed. “It’s not, however, an Yves St Laurent original outfit.”

Gabrielle shrugged daintily. “Mama has always been into fashion. It is like my father and his wine. It is her current hobby as well. She enjoys buying me new outfits, and Harry certainly appreciates them. But I am just as comfortable in jeans and a t-shirt.” She smiled slightly, “Although these clothes do make me feel, well, a little sexy, and I like it.”

Hermione nodded. “I know exactly what you mean. Sometimes it’s nice to dress up, if only to remind *certain* people that we can look beautiful and elegant,” she continued with a teasing grin aimed at the kitchen. “I can’t *believe* how long the press conference went on for today.”

Gabrielle groaned. “All I wanted to do was get a hug from Harry,” she complained. “They kept asking the most inane questions.”

“You gave them what they wanted,” Hermione said. “You mentioned the work that Harry and Viktor put into training you. You were calm and collected, and gave full answers in three different languages.”

Gabrielle nodded. “There will be a time, soon I hope, that it will be Harry next to me, not Papa, and this was good practice in vermin handling. Even so, I did not expect it to finish so late.”

“I saw Harry disappear with your mother shortly after it started?”

“They went to Germany, where Harry managed to charm Mama. They had a lot of fun.”

Hermione smiled. “I know that you’ve been studying Harry, so if I get his permission, will you tell me how his magic works? I’ve been trying to work it out since I saw him make holes in Hogwarts’ wards.” She paused and smiled in a self-deprecating manner, “Of course, actually seeing him Apparate within Hogwarts was a bigger shock.”

“Apparating through wards is like wading through treacle,” Gabrielle said thoughtfully. “It is harder, but you just have to keep going.”

“You have done it as well?”

“I borrowed Harry’s magic to get us some breakfast one morning.”

Hermione laughed. “A perfectly good reason to use that sort of power.”

Gabrielle smiled in agreement. “At least as good as protecting myself with his power earlier. I was amazed that I did not feel a single thing when Malfoy cast the Cruciatus curse at me.”

Hermione’s eyes flashed. “So will you?” she asked, following up on her prior question.

“If Harry gives his permission, then of course I will.” She paused a moment. “Do not be upset if he does not, however. And as I have not told him yet, please do not ask until I’ve discussed it with him.”

“I won’t,” Hermione promised. “What did you think of his London flat?”

“It will be fine when we have a few pictures, a few more clothes, and we add some new lights.”

Hermione laughed under her breath. “You think *that* will warm the place up?”

Gabrielle grinned. “That, or when we make love on that balcony. Either way, he will like the place a lot more once I am there.”

“You’ve come a long way, Gabrielle.”

“And we still have a long way to go,” she agreed. “But at least I can see the end now; when I started, that seemed so very far away.”

“I hope you’re hungry,” Ron called from the kitchen. “If you two can sit down, we’ll bring the food out.”

Gabrielle walked over to the glass table and sat next to Hermione, so that Harry would be sitting opposite her. Harry walked out of the kitchen, carrying two plates, and put one in front of her and the other in front of Hermione.

Ron appeared next with two more plates, while Harry fetched the open bottle of wine, and his and Ron’s glasses. “Don’t stand to attention,” Ron said cheerfully. “It’s duck spring rolls to start with.”

Gabrielle daintily cut a small bit off, and took a bite. “Wow,” she said in surprise. “This is really good.”

“Thank you,” Ron beamed proudly.

“The way to my hero’s heart is to praise his food,” Hermione said in a stage whisper.

“Shush, you,” Ron commanded.

Hermione grinned unrepentantly.

“It is good, Ron,” Harry agreed. “Are you two going to tell me what’s up yet?”

Ron and Hermione looked at each other.

“Something is up?” Gabrielle asked, concentrating on her food. She hadn’t eaten since the large breakfast Harry had made her that morning, and the first bite had awakened her appetite. The duck spring rolls had a nice plum sauce accompaniment, along with some cucumber slices.

Harry nodded. “Mr and Mrs Subtlety are being far too formal, which normally means that something is up, and they’re trying to hide it.”

“Damn it, Harry,” Ron sighed. “Couldn’t you have waited until *after* we’ve eaten?”

“Not if I want to enjoy the food,” Harry countered. “And I do – the smell in the kitchen was fabulous.”

“So it should be,” Ron said grumpily. “It’s been cooking for eighteen hours. Hermione, why not tell His Perceptiveness, then we can get on with having a good time.”

“One day we’ll learn,” Hermione admitted with a deep sigh. “I wanted to give you a proper apology for my behaviour this summer, so I worked on, and found, a way to suspend the Bond you two have. It doesn’t break it, nor will it send Gabrielle mad, but it will allow you both to see what life is like without it, and perhaps be reassured that what you feel is genuine – or not. I’ve not done anything with it; I just wanted to give you the option.”

Harry nodded and smiled at her. “See, that wasn’t hard, was it? Thank you for doing it, but it’s not needed.”

“Harry,” Gabrielle said quietly. “I think we should do it.”

“You do?” he asked in surprise.

“I know that I love you more than any mere Mating could force me to,” she said with complete confidence. “I’d like you to know it as well.”

“I do,” he said softly, his green eyes seeming to burn into her soul. “I have no doubts.”

“You *do* have doubts,” she contradicted gently, ignoring the slight protest from her magic as she argued with her Mate. It was easier with the firm knowledge that he *wanted* her to argue. “I think it would set your mind at rest.”

He shook his head, but agreed. “All right. We’ll do it, but it is not needed.” He paused, “Now, can we talk about something more fun?”

“Definitely,” Ron agreed. “When are you going back to the Cannons? They’re hardly winning without you.”

“Quidditch, Ron?” Hermione groaned.

“Now that you mention it,” Harry said softly. “I’m quitting the Cannons.”

Hermione dropped her fork. “You’re doing what!?”

Harry looked at Gabrielle and smiled.

“Harry is quitting the Cannons,” Gabrielle repeated, “because he has agreed to form a new team with Ollie, Katie, Angelina, Alicia, Fred and George. I will be managing it.”

“I hate you, Potter,” Ron groaned. “All these years of support, two years of glory, and now you’ve gone and pinched the best players from three

clubs and offered something even better.”

“Are you sure about this, Harry?” Hermione asked. “It’s a big gamble.”

“So is life,” Harry said with a shrug. “I’ve got the money to finance it, we’ll have no trouble getting a crowd, and while we might have to spend a season in the second division, that won’t be a problem, as it will allow us to start before the stadium is fully built. The whole point is to allow us to have fun playing Quidditch, and not be at the beck and call of our current teams’ owners, who like to treat us like well-paid, well-trained dogs.”

“I think it is a good idea,” Hermione said after a few moments’ reflection. She finished her starter and settled back with a glass in hand. “Where are you planning on being based?”

“Durham. I’ve got enough land there to build the best stadium in the country.”

Gabrielle smiled suddenly as the reason for Durham sprang to her mind. “The Durham Dogstars?” she asked.

Harry smiled bashfully and nodded.

“A good name to honour Sirius,” Ron said quietly. “Are you going to name any of the stands for Tonks and Remus?”

“I hadn’t thought of that, but it would be a good way to honour some of the people who fell.”

There was an awkward silence for a few seconds. “What are we having next?” Gabrielle asked.

Ron seemed to perk up instantly. “A French dish,” he said proudly. “Braised Ox cheek with potatoes au gratin.”

“I can feel the pounds settling around my hips,” Hermione said with a smile. “But boy, is it worth it.”

“How is it that you can cook, Ron, but Harry cannot?”

“After we left Hogwarts, Harry was too busy being famous and fighting dark lords,” Ron explained. “I went home to Mum.”

“And then went on a four week cooking vacation,” Hermione added. “It was his twenty-first birthday present from Harry and me.”

“Well, yeah,” Ron said, “but that’s not important.” He stood and started to gather the plates, Harry helping him.

“Ron’s had a lifelong love affair with food, and wouldn’t want anything to disrupt that,”

Hermione said as the two men walked back into the kitchen. “When we were preparing for the final fight with Voldemort, we were living on anything that was easy – we opened a lot of boxes and cans – sometimes even ate directly from them. It was the first time that Ron didn’t have anyone to cook real food for him, and he decided that he would learn so that we would never be in that situation again.

Gabrielle laughed. “I am looking forward to finding out all of Harry’s peculiarities.”

“What makes you think I have any?” Harry called from the kitchen.

She winked at Hermione. “You are male, are you not?”

Hermione sniggered.

“I am,” Harry responded. “And one of my peculiarities is being permanently surprised by the blonde who’s insinuated herself into my life.”

Harry walked back in with four plates and a blue cast iron oven dish floating next to him. Ron followed with a matching casserole dish and a third bottle of wine. Harry gave everyone a plate, and then opened the wine with a snap of his fingers.

“I’ve always wanted to be able to do that,” Ron said, as Harry filled everyone’s empty glasses.

“All it takes is a bit of practice,” Harry said with a shrug. “And only using your wand for show.”

“Only,” Ron mumbled. “Serve your girlfriend, Harry. She’d only give me a polite answer if I asked her how much she wanted.”

Gabrielle felt herself blush and stuck her tongue out at Ron.

“No, that’s not an invitation to you,” Harry said, before Ron could say anything. “Yes, it was for me, and yes, I will be taking it up later.”

She could actually feel her face heat up. Harry walked around and placed a very full plate in front of her. He leaned in and gently kissed her, “We’re only teasing,” he whispered.

Gabrielle took his hand briefly and smiled at him.

“That’s almost Ron sized,” Hermione pointed out. “I take it you’ve not eaten today?”

“Not since Harry made me a wonderful breakfast. I wasn’t quite aware how much using Harry’s magic would take out of me. It was like,” she paused, as she tried to translate an analogy that would make sense in English. “It was like being attached to a giant power supply. My magic did the control, while his magic provided the power. The control was difficult, because Harry’s magic just wanted to swat Malfoy.”

Harry smiled at her. “And all the gymnastics had nothing to do with me,” he added. “They were pure Gabrielle.”

“I was impressed,” Hermione said.

“Many years of ballet and dancing lessons growing up,” Gabrielle explained, in between bites of the gorgeous food. The general conversation became a little fractured as they all concentrated more on eating than on talking.

Harry cast a spell on the wine bottle that kept everyone’s glasses full, and as they neared the end, the conversation picked up again.

“I always think that Ron cooks far too much,” Hermione said as she leaned back, her wine glass held casually between two fingers, “but then I see how much is left, and I am glad he did.”

“If there’s one thing I know, it is that you always cook more,” Ron said. “If there’s any left over, it makes for a great second meal, and if not, it means that everyone really enjoyed the food.”

“That I did,” Harry agreed, “and as always, I’m going to have to hit the gym twice as hard tomorrow.”

“You and me both,” Ron agreed. “Worth it, though.”

“Absolutely.” Harry absently waved his hands, and the plates and pan floated toward the kitchen, and the sound of washing was heard shortly afterward.

“I keep expecting to see thousands of miniature broom sticks come chasing after you when you do that,” Hermione said.

“You think I should add a little music?”

“Please, no,” Hermione groaned. “I’ll be humming *L’apprenti sorcier* all evening as it is.”

“I am confused,” Gabrielle said. “What does a French composer, Monsieur Dukas, setting to music a tale told by Goethe, have to do with the Wizarding world?”

“You really are well educated, aren’t you,” Hermione said admiringly. “Well, this English girl first heard the music from that French composer as it was used in a Muggle film called *Fantasia*, and was accompanied by images of a magician doing some housework.”

“I come from a long line of very educated women,” Gabrielle replied. “We can trace our maternal tree back many, many centuries.”

“Do you have any famous people in there?”

“Mainly Muggle – there was less concern about mixing then – but yes.”

“Marie Antoinette?”

Gabrielle wrinkled her nose. “I did say *educated*,” she said reproachfully, “not notorious. The most famous and accomplished of my ancestors would be Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson; she was always my hero growing up. Fleur is the first of our maternal line to have Veela power, so Jeanne was purely human.”

“Sorry,” Hermione apologised. “My French historical knowledge isn’t what it should be, and I didn’t actually think about Marie Antoinette’s life before I suggested her.”

“Who is this Poisson lady?” Ron asked. “Doesn’t *poisson* mean fish?”

“She was the most powerful woman never to rule France,” Harry said softly. As Gabrielle and Hermione looked at him in surprise, he shrugged. “She was nicknamed Reinette, or ‘little princess,’ and was one of the most beautiful women in the world. She totally entranced Louis XV, and was his mistress for many years. She was a musician, an interior designer and an amazing conversationalist.” Gabrielle could feel Harry’s eyes digging into hers; the look he was giving her was flooding her with emotion and keeping her under his spell. “She died at the age of forty two, and her enemies tried to sully her name by blaming her for the Seven Year War. She was a very remarkable and determined woman who managed to cram so much life into so very few years.”

There was a silence around the table for a few seconds.

“Since when did *you* get into history?” Ron asked.

At that moment, Gabrielle could have cheerfully stabbed Ron for breaking the intimate mood.

“Ron,” Hermione said softly, “why do you insist on leaving your well-honed political instincts at work?”

“Erm, whoops?” Ron said apologetically. “But my question stands. Since when are you an expert on anything historic?”

“Ron, even *you* must have heard of Madam de Pompadour,” Harry said.

Ron shook his head.

“Hermione?” Harry asked.

“Remember, Harry, that the Hogwarts education system was limited. If it didn’t relate to magic, they didn’t teach it. But I’ll admit to being curious about the same thing.”

Harry shrugged. “I don’t sleep much – I don’t need to. I asked Olympe for a few decent history books, and one of the ones she provided was a biography of Jeanne-Antoinette. As I knew a little about her anyway, I read that one first.” He paused and looked at Gabrielle again. “I thought it was one of her more *subtle* moves,” he added.

She felt herself blushing again.

“Well, why don’t we move to somewhere a little more comfortable?” Hermione suggested. “I’m not going to be able to eat dessert until this has settled a bit.”

Harry nodded, and they all stood, and moved over to the leather couches. Harry dropped into one corner, and Gabrielle sat down against him, as Hermione curled up next to Ron.

“So how does this way of blocking the Bond work?” Harry asked.

“It’s a spell that blocks the connection. The Mating Bond works vaguely like Legilimency, but at a much lower and gentler power. It’s very subtle. My spell mimics the effect of Occlumency, but incorporates a loop-back device, so Gabrielle’s magic will think that it is still in place.”

“Do you want to do it now?” Harry asked her.

Gabrielle nodded. She didn’t want to do it at all, but knew that it was the best way to convince him.

Hermione climbed up and walked through one of the other doors. She returned with her wand. Gabrielle shifted so that she was facing Harry and took his hand reassuringly.

“Ready?” he asked her.

She nodded and smiled at him.

“Do it, Hermione.”

Hermione started to cast the spell, a series of words that sounded Latin.

Suddenly it was gone.

The Bond was gone.

And with it, the focus of her life for the past eight years.

She burst into tears. It felt like her heart had been ripped out. She couldn’t feel her Mate; it was as if he was dead to her.

“Stop the spell,” Harry growled. She could see that his wand was pointing directly at Hermione, and that his hand was glowing.

The spell stopped and she could feel him again.

“Gabby.”

She looked up and could see tear tracks down his face. His hand was no longer glowing.

“We’ll be back in a minute,” he mumbled, before he Apparated them both away.

They landed next to his bed in his cottage in the Lake District. She pushed him so that he was sitting on the bed, and ripped at his shirt, before struggling to remove her own. She could feel his hands on her waist, as he slid her skirt up.

She managed to get her top off and throw it haphazardly away, before removing her bra with the same haste. She couldn’t wait any longer and kissed him hard; trying to get inside him, at the same time wrapped her legs around him, sitting on his lap.

His kiss was equally as fervent as he crushed her to him, his hands roaming over her back and rear, ensuring that no gap existed between them. She broke the frantic kiss and buried her face in his neck, breathing him in and shaking deeply.

She didn’t know what was happening; she just knew that she had to be close to him, *closer* to him.

“I love you,” Harry said softly.

She froze.

“Harry?” she whispered.

“I love you,” he repeated, a bit louder this time.

She reached into the Bond, searching.

"You love me," she whispered again.

"You love me."

He held her, silently for a while, before he started to take some very deep breaths. "I *never* want to feel that way again," he said firmly.

She nodded in complete and total agreement. "I could feel that I loved you, but you weren't there. It was like you were dead."

He nodded.

"That was it exactly," Harry replied. "You were still in my heart and I could see you right in front of me, but it was like I was looking at a ghost."

She inhaled deeply. "You love me?"

He laughed softly.

"Yes, I do."

She burst into tears again, but this time through sheer relief. After everything that had happened over the last eight minutes, and the last eight years, she could *finally* relax. Everything else would come in its time, but right now, she had her Mate. She felt his hands running all over her back and slowly regained her self-control.

She kissed his neck softly, before pulling back. "I guess we should get back to Ron and Hermione?"

He sighed and nodded, then reached up and lightly stroked her hair away from her eyes. "When the Quidditch match is over, we'll announce it to the world," he said. "I don't want to take away from you and the others winning."

Gabrielle smiled and nodded. She looked around the room. "We made a bit of a mess."

"We needed the skin contact," Harry said, and caressed her before continuing. "Next time, we won't stop at the top half."

She smiled happily and climbed off him, before picking up her bra from the corner. Harry stood and picked up his shirt. He looked at the rips where buttons used to be and smiled.

"Sorry," she apologised as she pulled her own shirt back on and wiggled back into her skirt. "How do I look?"

"Beautiful, sexy, and slightly debauched."

"And that is a good look for me?"

"Only if I'm the only person to see it," he said with a smile. He opened his closet and pulled out a clean shirt. "Come on, love, let's get back and explain what's going on."

Gabrielle shivered with pleasure. That was a term of endearment she could get *very* used to hearing. She quickly fixed her appearance with her Veela power and moved into his arms.

They arrived back at Ron and Hermione's to find the couple on the other couch. Hermione looked like she had been crying.

"What happened?" she cried. "I didn't meant to hurt you, I just..."

"Hermione," Harry's voice cracked through her slightly hysterical apology. "It is not your fault!"

She took a deep breath and nodded.

"And I apologise for pointing my wand at you. When you cast the spell, it blocked the connection Gabby and I share. What we didn't realise was just how much we've come to rely on that connection. It felt like someone had killed Gabrielle, and that I was alone again."

Hermione paled.

"What we feel is true, and you know, it doesn't matter if it was caused by a spell, or caused by the magic of eyes meeting across a crowded room. What matters is that I have all the love you have for Ron, but I have a cast iron guarantee on top of it."

She nodded slowly. "Are you sure, though?"

"I want you two to look at each other," Harry said, his voice was soft, but the command was absolute. Ron and Hermione looked at each. Harry whispered something under his breath.

Gabrielle reached into the Bond to try to see what he was doing, taking his hand at the same time.

A minute later, he broke the spell.

"That is what you feel?" Ron asked.

Harry nodded.

“I am not going to rest until I work out how to duplicate that,” Hermione stated softly. She turned to face them. “I believe you,” she whispered. “And I envy your surety and passion.”

Harry moved off the couch and hugged Hermione, and then Ron as well. “Sometimes magic can be a wonderful thing,” he said. “And Hermione, if you found how to block it, it shouldn’t be hard to mimic bits of it.”

She nodded. “It’s unlikely that we’ll ever be able to get the full deal that you two have, but a tenth would be better than nothing.”

“Yeah,” Ron agreed as he looked at Hermione. “Harry, old friend, old pal, do you think you could make that last for an evening?”

Harry blinked and then nodded.

“Please?”

He nodded again and cast the spell, but pulled back this time. He gently pulled Gabrielle to her feet and hugged her. The next thing she knew, they were in his flat in London.

“Why here?” she asked.

“The further I am from them the better,” he said with a slight shudder. “I’ve got to keep part of my mind on keeping them linked together, without paying any attention to what is going on.”

“What *is* going on?”

He looked at her, eyebrow raised and then she slowly blushed.

“Oh, *ooooohhhh* .”

“Exactly,” he agreed. “I think we’re going to need to talk until they’ve finished. What my best friends get up to in bed is not the sort of thing that I need to know – ever.”

Gabrielle nodded. “Has this fireplace ever seen a fire?” she asked.

He shook his head.

“Then we shall make a fire and sit in front of it.”

He raised his hand, but she lightly grabbed it. “Let us do it the Muggle way.”

He nodded and walked over to the piles of wood. “There are some matches in the drawers in the kitchen, and we may as well use the Prophet for kindling.”

She smiled and danced into the kitchen to get what they needed. She returned and handed him the matches and paper, and then looked around. She wanted to be on the floor in front of the fire, but she couldn’t see a single comfortable looking rug, so she dashed upstairs into the bedroom area and picked up the duvet.

When she pulled it back downstairs, Harry already had the fire going, and was in the kitchen.

She stretched the duvet out and kneeled in front of the fire. It didn’t seem fair that they couldn’t make love this evening just because of the connection that Harry was having to maintain with his friends. They, after all, had been married for years.

Harry returned with a bottle of red wine and two glasses. He passed her one and filled it, before he sat down, and leaned back. She smiled faintly and sat cross-legged in front of him. Her mind flashing back to the summer’s day many months ago when she wished she had been wearing a skirt as they had sat on the grass.

“Harry,” she said, after a long silence. “What happened today?”

“What part?”

“I was talking to Hermione about how your magic took away the Cruciatus pain, and her eyes flashed. What really happened?”

He sighed and moved so that he was flat on his back. He turned his head so that he was looking up at her. “I took the pain.”

She furrowed her brow slightly. “You took the pain where?”

He smiled faintly. “No, Gabby, *I* took the pain – away from you and into me.”

The answer was not a big a surprise as it might have once been.

“Why?”

“Because I knew that he’d do it and because I promised you that you wouldn’t be hurt.”



But what about *your* pain?"

"My pain, in this case, was negligible. I've been under the Cruciatus many times in my life, and it's something that I can accept. You have not, and what's more, I will not let you feel that pain. It changes you, deep inside."

She nodded slowly before leaning over and kissing him. "Thank you."

He looked slightly surprised.

"You are wondering why I am not upset?" she guessed.

He nodded.

"It is because I have accepted who you are, Harry. You would never let anyone else suffer if you could prevent it. It will be up to me to make sure that the situation does not happen again. I do not like you in pain, any pain, especially not pain that you took for me, but I accept your reason, and I thank you for protecting me."

He reached up and gently caressed her face. "I'll be protecting you for the rest of our lives," he promised fervently.

"As I will do everything I can to protect you," she promised. "Mama said that you have some long term plans for us that you haven't mentioned yet?"

"Do you remember when we worked together to float the small model of Beauxbatons?"

"But of course," she said with a soft smile.

"That's what we'll be doing. There's a long way to go before we can get there, forty or fifty years, but we will decipher and understand how Merlin's greatest spells work – and we will cast them."

"What are the spells?" she asked quietly.

"There are so many. The first I want to try is making something float for eternity – like a castle, so that we can live in the sky. The trick is to change the structure of the castle, rather than use magic to float it – that way it will last."

"How would you even start to do that?"

"Carefully," he said with a grin. "Merlin left his notes, but the theory behind them is immensely complicated. That's where the studying comes in. We'll need to be able to understand magic on a completely new level."

"And I can help because I can use yours," she said slowly. "What other ideas did he have?"

"A replacement for the Floo system, that will allow instant travel anywhere in the world, without having to use a Portkey or Apparating."

"And before we are ready, we can play our Quidditch, and have fun with our lives?"

"Yeah," he agreed, as he shifted so that he was on his side.

She moved so that she was lying down with him, and moved into his arms. "Is it wrong of me to resent that *they* are making love, when we have yet to do so?"

"No," he said with a sigh. "I'm trying to be a good sport and console myself with the fact that we have many nights ahead of us, but it's not really working."

"No, it is not," she agreed as she shimmied forward so that she was against him. "I do not want to talk anymore; I just want to *be* with you. Today has been full of highs, and I just want to relax."

"I love you," he whispered. "You can relax Gabby. I have you, and I'll never let you go."

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Sybill Trelawney walked slowly down Diagon Alley. She was wearing a plain grey cloak over her plainest robes. She did not want to be noticed this morning.

She opened the door to the Daily Prophet building and made her way up to Rita Skeeter's office. She was there long before Skeeter normally started working, but it was the only way to avoid being seen.

She settled down and waited, idly looking through the photographs one more time.

Skeeter bustled in an hour later. "Who are you and what are you doing in my office?"

Trelawney sneered. "I have a scoop for you."

"That only answered half of my question. Lower your hood."

Trelawney did as she was told.

"Sybill," Skeeter sighed. "What is this 'scoop' that has you out of your belfry at this time of the morning?"

She smirked and handed over the pictures. "Potter, in a relationship with a student."

"Gabrielle Delacour," Skeeter said absently. "Daughter of the next Minister for Magic in France, talented Seeker, and yesterday she beat the snot out of Draco Malfoy. What, exactly, are you expecting me to do with these pictures?"

"Ruin Potter's reputation like you did before."

Skeeter sighed and settled down. She raised her wand and whispered a spell. The door behind Trelawney slammed shut. "You were a nutcase at school, Sybill, and you're still barmy now. Let me try and bring some reality into this for you."

"For the past few years, the press have been playing games with Potter. We print everything we can find about him, up to a point, because it sells newspapers by the bucket load."

"We irritate him, and push him as far as we know we can go safely, because we know who we're dealing with. It's like poking a tiger with a feather. He bats it away irritably, because we're really not worth his attention, and we're filling a need that he understands to exist."

"It's a kind of stalemate between us." She paused. "So, let me try and read the future here. I'm sure you'll be amazed at how I can practice divination."

"We print these pictures and the gloves come off. Potter counterattacks. Potter wins. We end up in the gutter, begging for Sickles."

"Now, I'm sure you're wondering just how Potter can win when we are the press, and to some extent, we control people's general opinions. Let me break it down for you into simple terms."

"First, he is Harry Potter, defeater of Voldemort. For most of the population, he could go on a murderous rampage and he would still be treated like a god."

"Second, he is Harry Potter, star Seeker for the Chudley Cannons and England. Every single sports fan would be behind him, because along with Oliver Wood and Viktor Krum, he is one of the three best players in the world."

"Third, he is Harry Potter-Black, the heir to two of the oldest and most prestigious families in the Wizarding World, and has more power and resources than most people can dream of. He's tried to go against us a few times, but never seriously."

"Fourth, he is Harry Potter, the most powerful wizard since Merlin himself. You might have missed it, but he created a hole in Hogwarts wards to allow Beauxbatons – using a spell he devised – to drop into place, something everyone in the Wizarding world would have said was impossible."

"If we print these pictures, we stop poking a tiger with a feather, and start poking with a very big stick, and the tiger will quite definitely poke back. He will use his money, his power, his resources and his fame, and he will wipe us out quicker than you can sneeze. He won't rest until every single person connected with this stupidity is out on the street."

"And this is before Delacour himself gets involved. He's not known as the most feared diplomat in France for a joke. He controls France's Auror force."

"And finally," Skeeter was almost yelling at this point, "I will not be made a bloody fool of again. These pictures of yours show Potter and the youngest Delacour having a bloody coffee! They're not in bed, they're not even kissing, they're having breakfast the bloody morning after the whole mess with the idiot Malfoy blew up. Delacour was proven innocent yesterday, so it is easily within the bounds of realism that Potter was just trying to cheer her up after an attempted rape."

"Even if there is something going on, this is Harry bloody Potter we're dealing with. There will be a reason for it, and that reason will be honest and noble, and he'll come out of it smelling like roses and my reputation will once more be in the gutter. Well, I'm not having that again, Sybill. Where did you get these bloody photos?"

"I foresaw..."

"You couldn't foresee your way out of a paper bag, you old fraud," Rita yelled indignantly. "The truth!"

"A friend of mind stumbled across them on holiday," Trelawney mumbled, thoroughly cowed. "She's Salem's divination professor. She sent them to me."

"Exactly why are you trying to ruin his reputation?" she demanded.

"Because he treated Madame Prévoyez with scandalous disrespect!"

"You mean after she tried to test him, and he smacked her down like the stupid puppy she was?" Rita sneered.

"He has never respected us! He deserves to be ruined like he has ruined us!"

"Why the bloody hell should he respect you? All you ever do is predict his death. Face it, he's not going to die until he feels like it, and that won't be for decades yet! And he hasn't ruined you. Your own bloody incompetence has ruined your career for you!"

"But - " Sybill whined.

“I’m going to do you a favour, Sybill, for old times’ sake,” Rita interrupted her. “If you don’t listen, then I promise you I’ll say a few nice words about you at your funeral.”

“What?”

“Your funeral. You continue to play in games far above your capacity, and you will be killed. Not by Potter, but by the people who need him, and who will merely find you aggravating and annoying. You are outclassed at every level here, Sybill. Are these the only copies of the photographs?”

“Yes,” Sybill replied before she could even think.

“Good. *Incendio* .” The photos burnt slowly to a crisp.

“Go back to your tower, Sybill. Live the rest of your life showing kids how to read tea leaves. Stop trying to play with the adults.”

Sybill nodded jerkily and stood; she turned and walked out silently, all thoughts of revenge against Harry gone.

She shuddered, feeling death pass, closely, by her side.

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Skeeter watched her go and smirked to herself. She turned to the Floo. “Percy Weasley,” she called.

“Skeeter,” Percy greeted her, his face and his eyes completely blank “To what do I owe the honour this morning?”

Skeeter held up the single picture she’d palmed and hadn’t burned. “I just had Trelawney come in with a bunch of pictures with Potter and the half-Veela girl.”

“Oh?” Percy asked quietly, his face not giving any indication of real interest.

Rita nodded. She liked Percy. He was honest, but he played games in the real world, and was a useful ally. “I sent her packing with a bee in her bonnet – she won’t try anything against Potter again – but I want the first interview.”

“The story is buried?” Percy asked.

She nodded. “No one else knows it existed. I know that something is going on between the two of them – I’ve never seen Potter that open with anyone. When it hits the press, I want exclusivity.”

Percy looked at her for a long moment. “That’s not the sort of thing that the Prophet usually deals with.”

“I know,” she agreed, “but the Prophet is on its last legs. The owner is too set in his ways and can’t see how the wind is turning. This interview will get me a better job at the Quibbler or somewhere, and I’ll be set.”

“You have a deal,” Percy said. “I’ll get Harry and Gabrielle to ensure that you get the first official exclusive interview when they’re ready to make the relationship public.”

Skeeter smiled. “A pleasure doing business with you.”

“I didn’t think I’d say this, but you did a good thing today, Rita. Thank you.”

She closed the Floo and smiled slightly. Today was definitely a good day. She’d secured her future, got an exclusive with the first genuine royalty seen in a few centuries, and Percy now owed her a favour – and all because she was covering her own rear.

She opened up today’s Prophet and almost laughed. Potter was going to be livid when he read this – and she was now safe from his wrath.

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Gabrielle stretched luxuriously and snuggled deeper into Harry.

“Morning,” he whispered softly.

She murmured something, she wasn’t sure what, as she reluctantly opened her eyes. They were still on the floor from the night before. The fire had burnt itself out, and they were wrapped in the duvet.

“I haven’t slept on the floor in a very long time,” he said, an amused tone in his voice.

“I do not think that I have *ever* slept on the floor,” she replied. “It was fun.”

“That from the person who decided she wasn’t comfortable during the night and slithered on top of me.”

She nodded in agreement. “Do we have to go back to school today?”

“Yeah,” he sighed. “I’ve got a class to teach at nine, and you have lessons.”

“The sooner I can just take my exams and leave school the better,” she sighed. “But, at least when this Quidditch match is over, I will be able to spend all my free time with you.”

“What do you fancy for breakfast?”

She placed her hands on his chest and pushed herself up into a stretch. “Something light,” she decided. “I am still full from the meal that Ron made last night.”

Harry smiled up at her. “You know, you really are beautiful.”

She smiled back and lowered herself so that she could kiss him. She climbed off him and looked down at herself. “My clothes were definitely not designed to be slept in,” she said with a laugh. She tried to straighten the skirt that had twisted around her legs, but gave up after noticing the deep creases.

Harry stood and removed his own shirt. “Leave the clothes in the corner, I have a service that will get them dry cleaned.”

She nodded and casually stripped to her underwear, then she wandered to the bathroom to use the facilities.

A few minutes later, feeling a lot more awake and a lot cleaner, she walked over to his drawers and used one of his t-shirts as a makeshift dress. This was one of the drawbacks of being a lot shorter than he was – none of his clothes would fit her.

She joined him in the kitchen. He was still only wearing his trousers from the day before, and she sighed softly, just admiring the flow of his muscles as he moved around the kitchen. He placed some cereal in front of her and leaned against one of the cabinets as he ate his.

She smiled at him and let her mind drift as she ate automatically. She had all her homework done for the week, and was on top of her senior project, so there was nothing really pressing for her to be concerned about. A scraping at the window made her look up. “Cici,” she smiled as she opened the window. “My parents’ owl.” She took the package from the owl and stroked her head a few times. “Good girl,” she praised.

Cici hooted and took off, flying back out the window. Gabrielle opened the package and looked at the enclosed note. “It’s this morning’s Prophet,” she told Harry. “My parents would like to meet us in my room when we’ve read it.”

He nodded.

She placed the paper next to her bowl and turned to the marked page. “Listen to this,” she said, as she read the garbage printed.

### **French Veela Shows Her True Colours**

Yesterday, the most eagerly awaited duel since Barnaby the Second duelled Horace Hable for the title of Grand Master in the seventeenth century ended in controversy.

Draco Malfoy, scion of the Malfoy dynasty, was expected to prove his innocence easily against the scurrilous charges levelled against him by known coquette and Veela, Gabrielle Delacour.

The blatantly false charges of attempted rape by Delacour – an experienced strumpet rumoured to be available for a fixed price – were to be dealt with in the time honoured way of trial by combat, where Malfoy, well-known war hero, would successfully regain his sullied honour.

As anyone who attended this travesty can tell you, that was not what happened.

Proving that the steps our beloved Ministry has taken to protect us and control the behaviour of these predatory dark creatures were both needed and very welcome, Miss Delacour showed all present, and the rest of the Wizarding World through this newspaper, that she is a monster wrapped in the guise of a girl. Not content with taunting the poor Hogwarts Professor, the half-breed showed knowledge of spells and magic well beyond what any human could be expected to be exposed to. Her use of spells of questionable origin and dubious intent were far beyond anything that should have been allowed in an officially sanctioned duel.

Professor Malfoy, his grey eyes revealing the depth of his betrayal, did everything humanly possible to counter these shadow arts and gallantly remained within the bounds of duelling etiquette.

After being pushed to the limit by the questionable and dishonourable tactics employed by the Veela, the brave combatant was forced to flee for his very life, as no one present, not even the supposed ‘hero’ of the recent war, Harry Potter, saw fit to attempt to control the non-human’s unsavoury conduct.

We at the Daily Prophet extend our deepest sympathies to Mr Malfoy, as well as our hope that he will remain safe from retribution from the foreigners currently occupying space at Hogwarts until the Ministry and the Wizengamot can reverse this decision and Mr Malfoy can resume his humanitarian teaching at Hogwarts.

“It’s un-attributed,” she finished softly. “It’s an opinion piece on page two.” She looked up, but Harry’s face was a blank mask.

“How do you feel?”

She felt like this was some sort of test, so she didn’t use the Bond. She opened her mouth to respond, but then stopped and thought about it for a second. She slowly started to smile; she couldn’t help herself and started to laugh.

“Is this it?” she asked, “A few dark-creature remarks and complete sycophancy to Malfoy? Is *this* supposed to hurt me? It’s such an obvious fabrication, and anyone who was there yesterday will know it.” She paused thoughtfully. “And if this is bad, just wait until they find out that I’m completely in love with Harry Potter – and he is completely in love with me!”

He slowly smiled at her, but before she could react, he moved, lifting her out of the chair. Before she could even breathe, her back was against one of the glass windows, and he was kissing her as if he wanted to consume her soul.

She moaned against his mouth and squirmed so that she could wrap her legs around him. This was definitely the sort of behaviour that she wanted to encourage as much as she could. She let her hands fly into his hair and held him against her as he deepened the kiss.

I'm proud of you," he whispered as he broke the kiss.

She smiled brightly at him as she luxuriated in the feelings coursing through the Bond; they were intoxicating.

"I was worried about how you would react the first time the press attacked you," he said intently. "About the last thing that I expected was amusement."

"How do you feel?" she asked.

"Bloody furious," he admitted. "But I think I'm going to give this one to Jean to handle."

"You are?"

He nodded. "I had to deal with Malfoy; it's only fair that he gets to take on the Prophet."

She kissed him. "We need to hurry if we're going to meet my parents before class."

"True," he sighed. He reluctantly lowered her to the ground and then patted her on the rear. "Finish your breakfast while I use the bathroom and change."

"Am I a coquette?" she asked shyly, looking up at him through her eye lashes as she leaned back slightly and pulled the front of her borrowed shirt down so that he had a good view of her cleavage.

"For me, definitely," he said with a cross between an amused look and a sigh. He tore himself away from her and walked over toward the bathroom.

She smiled happily and finished her breakfast quickly, then used her Veela power to fix her face and hair. She watched as he walked up to his bedroom to get changed, and looked around his kitchen.

She jumped up onto one of the counters and posed on her side, holding her head up with one hand and pulling her t-shirt up so that her knickers were on display. She smiled as sexily as she could, and waited for him.

He walked downstairs and looked at her. He stopped dead in his stride. "Are you *trying* to kill me, woman?" he groaned.

She sat up as slowly as she could, and removed her t-shirt, shaking her hair loose dramatically. She put her hands above her head and stretched back, thrusting her chest forward. "I am trying to break through your self-control," she whispered. "I love you, and now I know that you love me. You will no longer regret waking up next to me – and besides, you know you enjoy the teasing, so I am going to tease you as much as I can until you can not stand it anymore, and you make love to me."

He walked over so that he was standing between her legs. His hands dropped to brush lightly against her thighs. "You're right, I am looking forward to sleeping with you properly, and I'm looking forward to making you pass out in pleasure." He gently kissed her. "But right now, you need to put your shirt back on so I can take you back to the school and you can get dressed properly."

She pouted cutely at him, but did as she was told. He pulled her into a hug and Apparated them both back to her rooms at Beauxbatons. Jean and Aimée were enjoying a morning coffee as they waited for them.

"Morning," Harry said casually as he released her. She smiled at her parents and walked into her room to get dressed. Her mother had thoughtfully laid out her uniform, so she was able to dress in a matter of seconds.

She walked back out, settled herself down firmly on Harry's lap, and beamed at her parents.

"You are looking cheerful," Aimée noted.

She nodded eagerly. "Last night, Harry told me about the work we will do to make Merlin's dreams come true," she said. "Oh, and he told me that he loved me," she finished as brightly as she could.

Aimée smiled, while Jean sighed deeply. "I take it you've read what we sent you?" Jean asked.

She nodded. "It was good to start the morning with a laugh."

"You are not upset?" Jean asked in surprise.

"Papa, I am a Veela who is Mated to the most powerful and influential man in the country, possibly the world. I will be called a whore and a slut just because I fell in love with Harry – a few dark-creature remarks and the sycophancy is just amusing."

"You're impossible," Jean sighed. "Harry, what do you think?"

"I think that Gabrielle's right," he said. "But that doesn't mean we have to accept it. I had Malfoy, so the Prophet's yours to destroy."

"Really?" he asked in pleased surprise.

"Fair is fair," Harry said. "It was libellous at the very least." He paused, "We're going to announce our relationship after the final Quidditch match is over. I really don't want my personal life to overshadow the work that Gabrielle and the others have put in."

Jean nodded. “I’ll get a hold of my lawyers this morning. We’ll have an injunction against the Prophet by lunch time.”

“Don’t forget to talk to Percy and Ron,” Harry suggested. “Especially Percy. He’ll probably know more details about them than anyone else.”

“I won’t.”

Harry looked at his watch. “You need to get to class,” he said to Gabrielle.

“I could skip,” she suggested playfully.

Aimée gasped in shock. “Gabrielle, willing to skip class?”

She pouted at her mother. “It is just this once.”

“I have to go to class as well,” he pointed out. “Aimée, what are your plans for today?”

“I have nothing planned, apart from watching Jean tear the Prophet apart.”

“Then why don’t you spend the day with me?” Harry suggested. “I could use an assistant.”

“I think I will,” Aimée replied. “Thank you.”

Gabrielle climbed to her feet and gave Harry a long kiss – she was planning on getting in as many as she could over the next few decades, given that she was about eight years behind – and bade her parents farewell, then trotted off to class.

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“Something changed last night,” Aimée said as Gabrielle left.

“It did,” Harry agreed. “Hermione found a way to block the Bond so that we could see what it was like without it. I tried to persuade Gabrielle that we didn’t need it, but she was determined.”

Aimée laughed softly. “My daughter, determined?”

Harry sighed. “It was horrific. It was like she was dead. We seem to be defining our lives through life-changing moments – that was definitely one of them.”

“You did not propose then?”

“The ring wasn’t ready. I talked to Filius yesterday afternoon, and he’s willing to help this afternoon.”

“Harry,” Jean said, “have you thought about how bad the press is going to be? You’re going to have to talk about the Mating to keep your reputation, and the press will crucify Gabrielle.”

“No, they won’t. You’re going to set an example with the Prophet today about what happens if they talk badly about Gabby, and I’ll make it very clear that this is my choice.”

Jean nodded and looked at his watch. “Well, with the time difference, my lawyers should be wide-awake and fully caffeinated by now. It’s time they earned their keep.” He kissed Aimée lightly and took the Floo out of the room.

“May I watch you cast the spells on Gabrielle’s ring?” Aimée asked.

“As my assistant, you can do what ever you like,” Harry replied with a teasing smile.

“You do know that this is the happiest and most carefree that I have seen my daughter in a very long time?”

“She’s planning on driving me insane today. I can say one thing about this without any form of doubt. I will never be bored with her. She’s so incredibly natural in what she does.”

“Have you thought, Harry, that it is the fact that you desire a Mate like that, that is the cause?”

“I did, and then I discarded it. Gabrielle is far too strong willed to be anything more than guided by the Bond. She is her own person, right up to the moment when I call on the Bond. If I do, then she follows the dictates it places on her, but otherwise she is definitely her own person.”

“But Harry,” Aimée said with a soft smile, “that is what you want.”

Harry smiled.

“You admit that your daughter is stubborn? She is, and she has beaten the magic into submission. I honestly believe that it wouldn’t have been the spell that would have driven her mad if she had failed, but her own disappointment.”

“You sound like a man in love, Harry – and I will admit that if anyone is able to find out how my daughter thinks, it is you.”

“Aimée, can we talk about this for a few minutes?”

She nodded solemnly, the teasing smile dropping from her face.

"The first time I kissed Gabrielle, she scratched my back, and was then very surprised and apologetic that she had done it."

"Go on."

"Now, if her Veela power had told her that I wanted it, then she would not have been apologetic, as she would have been reacting to what I wanted."

"I see," Aimée said softly. "You think that her passion overrode the constraints that Mating has placed on her?"

He nodded. "There are other examples, when she does what she wants regardless of what her magic might dictate. It's difficult to explain, because most of the time she enjoys the magic involved and willingly follows it."

Aimée nodded. "I can see that you have given this some thought, and you may indeed be right. Some of the things that she has done growing up have been impossible, yet she never let that stand in her way. She is truly unique."

"Veela do not normally Mate, and very rarely at such a young age. The times in the past were the equivalent of an arranged marriage to cement alliances – some of the age differences were truly obscene. However, they all had one thing in common. The Veela was instantly with her Mate."

"With you, Gabrielle had eight years alone to contemplate what she wanted from life, and perhaps you are right, the constraints of magic are not as firm as they should be. They are still there, as was shown clearly by the way she reacted to your direct order."

He nodded and smiled cheerfully. "I've got a long time to work out exactly what makes Gabrielle Delacour tick."

"Was there anything else?" Aimée asked.

"Yeah," Harry admitted, trying hard not to blush. "I..."

"Want to know how you should deflower my daughter?" she asked in the same dry technical tone she used when ever the conversation turned to something like this.

"Yeah," Harry said again, scratching the back of his neck in embarrassment. "I keep expecting that Gabrielle will be more..."

"Human?" Aimée offered.

"Yeah, exactly. You know, the whole rose petals on a bed thing."

"And you are confused because she does not seem to care what, how, or why, as long as it is you?"

He nodded.

"Harry, you must accept that Gabrielle is telling you the truth. If you want to be romantic, do so, and she will love it. If you want to get carried away in passion, do so, and she will love it."

He exhaled softly. "It's hard, at times," he confessed, "to think of all this power I have over a truly beautiful woman."

"Is it any different from the power you have in your every day life? The power of the money you have, the power of the magic you have?"

Harry looked surprised. "You know, I don't think it is," he eventually said. "So, basically, I should get my head out of my arse and just enjoy what I'm lucky enough to have?"

Aimée laughed. "Indeed, Harry. But enough of this idle chatter, we have a lesson, do we not?"

Harry nodded and stood, he walked over to Aimée and took her hand, Apparating her to the Quidditch pitch of Hogwarts in an instant.

The noise that they appeared in the midst of was incredible.

"Quiet!" Harry roared – even without a *Sonorus* spell, he managed to silence everyone. To one side, he could see Minerva with a smirk on her face.

"Professor McGonagall?" he asked, his tone clearly questioning.

"As our flying professor is currently being hunted for attempted rape and use of an Unforgivable," she said smoothly, "it was decided that we would merge the Beauxbatons and Hogwarts classes."

"And we decided dat Durmstrang shut participate as vell," Viktor announced from behind him.

"Which," Minerva continued, "snowballed into an open house for the top three years who don't have a class."

Next to him, he could hear Aimée laughing softly.

"Just remember that you agreed to help," Harry told her with a sigh. He turned back to the students. "Okay, I want you all organised by year groups – everyone start moving. Seventh years on the left, then in descending order to the right." He repeated the instructions in French and German.

As the students started to move, he took a few steps back. "Viktor, Minerva, are you staying to help?"

"I can not," Viktor said apologetically. "I haff meetink."

Harry nodded. "I'll see you later?"

Viktor nodded and pounded Harry on the back, then walked off.

"Minerva?"

"Consider this my revenge for what happened to my lessons," she whispered. "But yes, I am here to help if you need me."

"So it's a challenge, is it?"

She nodded.

"Right, go and take a seat. We'll show you how we do things, Beauxbatons style."

Minerva laughed and did as she was told.

"Can you fly?" he asked as he turned to Aimée.

"Of course," Aimée replied. "What do you have planned?"

"I think we'll do an obstacle course."

She nodded. Harry smiled and snapped his fingers, pulling two brooms out of the thin air. The first was his specialised Seeker broom; the second was the normal broom that he used in lessons. He passed that to Aimée.

"Right, everyone into the air!" he yelled, then repeated it in German, as Aimée translated it into French. He jumped, swung the broom between his legs and rocketed into the air, as Aimée flew up more sedately with the students.

Harry worked as fast as he could to create an obstacle course. Most of the material he summoned from Beauxbatons, and allowed it to float in the air. The course would be static for the first round; the second round would start to have things moving, which would get progressively faster. The top level used Bludger simulators – so that they wouldn't hurt if they hit someone – to make it even harder. There were also floating flags to show how to get around each obstacle. When he had finished, he looked at the number of students in the combined class, and duplicated the course.

He flew next to Aimée and hovered. Everyone was looking at him. "What you see before you is a version of the training course that we use at the Cannons. To make it fun, we're going to have a competition. The winner gets an award at dinner tonight." As before, he worked with Aimée to ensure that everyone understood. It was easier than repeating himself in all three languages.

The students cheered loudly.

"What you're going to do is fly through the obstacle course, and if you clear it without touching anything, then you get to take part in round two. Round two will be harder, and we'll keep going until there is a clear winner.

"If you're eliminated, fly down to Professor McGonagall, pick your favourites, and start cheering." He looked at Aimée. "This is my assistant, Madame Delacour. She'll be watching the second course for me. Now, are there any questions?"

The students shook their heads. "Professor Potter," Aimée called.

Harry raised an eyebrow at her.

"It would be fair if the students get to see the course in action first. Otherwise, the students who go first would have a disadvantage. Why don't you demonstrate?"

He laughed and nodded. "Okay, I'm going to do it pretty slowly, so you can see what to expect." He swivelled his broom and dashed over to the start of the course. It was actually harder for him to dodge, duck and dive at a slow speed through the course than it would have been to take it at full speed.

At the other end, he looped around and zoomed back to the start. "Aimée, if you'll get in position, we'll start."

She smiled and gracefully flew to the other start.

"Right," Harry called, "You and you, go." He chose two students at random. The course didn't care about age – it was all about talent and ability.

Some of the students started to cheer. It was pretty much along school lines, as they cheered for their friends.

What soon became clear was that Beauxbatons and Durmstrang had much better flyers. The Hogwarts players seemed to rely too much on strength over technique, which was useless against the obstacle course.

He could see some Slytherins drop to the ground in disgust as they failed the course, and they were soon joined by other students from Hogwarts. After a gruelling hour, the race was down to a Beauxbatons sixth year named Marie and a Durmstrang student he didn't know by name.



"This is the last round," he yelled. "If you both clear it, the winner will be the person who finishes first. Ready? Set, go!"

The two players took off. The cheers from the ground were deafening. As more students seemed to have joined the crowd, Harry glanced down. He could feel that Gabrielle had joined the other students, and was helping keep them in line. Even the Hogwarts students were cheering.

Both racers dodged expertly, avoiding closing cushioned pads before they dived through a circle that was opening and closing. The Bludgers chased after the flyers. It was tight, but the German just managed to come out on top.

"Congratulations," Harry said to him in German. "Well done."

"Thank you," he replied with a huge smile on his face as he floated down to his friends. Harry flew over to Marie, who looked devastated.

"Hey," he said, switching to French, "you did incredibly well."

"But I didn't win."

"Marie, winning isn't everything. At the start of the year, did you think that you would do so well on a broom? Did you think that you would beat so many students from three different schools?"

She shook her head slowly.

"So you didn't win – what you did do is give it everything you had, and you've come so far, I'm very proud of you."

She slowly started to smile. "Now," Harry continued, "get down there and join your schoolmates. They are pleased with you as well."

"Thank you, Professor Potter," she said gratefully, as she dove down to meet her cheering friends.

Harry smiled and floated down. To the right, Marcus Flint was surrounded by most of the Hogwarts team, and he was looked angry. The kids were avoiding his gaze.

"Can you all be quiet please?" Gabrielle's voice, enhanced by a *Sonorus* spell floated over the students. She repeated her request in French and German. "I think," she continued, "that the competition we have just seen was outstanding, but we do have the very rare opportunity of having two professional Quidditch players with us. I know that I would like to see this course done by Professor Potter and Professor Flint. Do you all agree?" As fast as she could, she translated her little speech into the other two languages, having to shout as the students began to cheer. The noise got louder and louder; he looked over at Aimée and Minerva, who were both nodding encouragingly.

He raised his hands. "Okay," he said simply. The roar of approval nearly blew him up to the correct height. "Marcus?"

Flint sneered at him and barked to a student, who sprinted away to fetch his broom.

"I'm going to make it a little more interesting," Harry shouted, he could hear Gabrielle translating for him below. "I'm going to put it into professional mode. The difference is that there is an extra Bludger, and all the obstacles move faster."

The student returned carrying Flint's broom. Flint flew into the air near Harry and scowled at him. "I'll show you," he sneered.

"You'll show me what?" he asked. "That Lee was right, and that Malfoy has ruined these kids' chances of ever going pro?"

"That you aren't as good as you say."

"I've never claimed anything; it's others who say that I'm one of the three best in the world," Harry replied coolly. "But we'll see, won't we?"

Aimée flew up between them. She cast a *Sonorus* spell, "On three, Mr Potter, Mr Flint. One, two, three!"

Harry shot off as fast as he could, but not at full speed – full speed would have made it impossible to get around the course. The first obstacles were simply blocks that he had to swerve over and under. He followed the course, hardly paying attention to it. The next set of blocks were moving, so he had to time the flying just right. He absently spun around the axis of his broom, avoiding a couple of Bludgers, and then pushed forward.

There was a way of doing the course much faster, if you had the skill. The timing was the same at eighty as it was at forty, so he hugged his broom and rocketed forward, floating up and down as he avoided the horizontal barriers. He squeezed through the first closing obstacle, narrowly missing the vertically swinging barriers. Then he dived down, inverting so that he could skim closer to the next obstacle, and rotated ninety degrees so he could squeeze through the horizontal barriers.

He was now flying on instinct alone – nothing else would do – as he shot through an opening barely big enough for his shoulders, and powered on. The Bludgers were left far behind; they were charmed for normal speed, not the suicidal pace he was setting.

With a stomach-turning roll, he burst through the last gap and crossed the line. As he slowed, the familiar roar of an approving crowd met his ears. He turned to look at Flint, who was only halfway through the course. Flint bellowed in disgust and dropped out; he swooped down and stormed toward Hogwarts.

Harry floated down slowly. The first person to meet him was the Hogwarts Head Girl. He looked at her curiously.

"Professor Potter," she said formally, ignoring the noise around them. "I wonder if I might have a minute of your time?"

Aimée, can you finish off for me?” he called in French.

She nodded and smiled at him, before turning and shouting in English, followed by French. Gabrielle moved next to her and translated into German. It took a lot of his willpower for him not to spend a few minutes watching his Mate.

“How may I help you?” he asked, as he turned his broom sideways, placed one hand to control it, and rested his hips against it, as if he was leaning against a bench.

She smiled at him, and tilted her head, then slid her long brown hair behind her ear. “I’m Natalie Jenkins,” she introduced herself, “although my friends call me Nat.”

He nodded, amused.

“Anyway, I was wondering if you’d be able to help me out and Hogwarts, too.”

“Natalie, what are you doing?” a new voice shouted.

Natalie sighed as the Hogwarts Head Boy stormed over to them. “What do you want, John?”

“I want to know what you’re doing,” John snarled.

“You will adjust your tone and talk politely,” Harry said softly. “I do not tolerate this sort of behaviour at Beauxbatons, and I won’t tolerate it here either.”

John looked at Harry, who hadn’t moved from his casual pose, and turned his back to Harry.

Harry looked vaguely amused and waved his hand. John vanished.

Natalie blinked. “Where did you send him?”

“The Head Boy’s room,” he said with a shrug. “He can cool off there for the next few hours.”

“You’ve locked him in?”

Harry nodded. “Anyway, you were about to ask me something?”

“Oh, yes, sorry. John and I disagree about this – but then, he’s a Slytherin and been a devotee in the cult of Snape and Malfoy for the past seven years. Hogwarts Quidditch is in a mess. You saw them today, all strength and no sophistication. You helped Beauxbatons humiliate them. But now we have a chance to do something about it. When this is over, Professor Flint will leave, and we’ll need a new professor.”

Harry nodded.

“Anyway, everyone knows that you’re Harry Potter, and that you’re the best – I was hoping that you’d be able to help us pick someone who’d actually be able to teach us properly.”

“Professor Dumbledore and I don’t really get on anymore,” Harry said quietly. “But I’ll happily suggest someone to Professor McGonagall, and have a word with a few of the other Professors to see what we can do. The person I’m thinking of is an extremely good flying coach, and he might be able to sort out the mess that Malfoy’s incompetence has put the players in.”

Natalie smiled at him, tilting her head a little and looking up through her lashes, “I don’t suppose we could persuade you to come back to your own school, could we?”

He shook his head. “Once this school year is out, I’ll be back playing Quidditch. Technically, I should be back after Christmas, but I’ve signed a contract with Beauxbatons, and I will honour it.”

She nodded, casually running her hands from her front to her back – which managed to pull the robes a little tighter around her, showing off her figure. “If you ever need a guide to show you how Hogwarts has changed in the last four years, I’d be happy to help.”

“Thank you,” Harry said evenly. “I’ll talk to Professor McGonagall later today, and we’ll see where it goes from there.”

Natalie nodded and gave him another smile before she turned and walked off, her hips moving in a slightly exaggerated manner.

Harry shook his head, shifted so that he was back on his broom, and went to dismantle the obstacle course.

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“And so the Prophet offered us a thousand galleons,” Jean said. “I laughed at them, and told them that the only way that we’d lift the injunction is if they guaranteed a full front page retraction tomorrow and gave ten thousand galleons to the Equality League. Tiberius, the owner, refused, and called me a few names. The judge then decided he was in contempt of court, and ordered him arrested. In the meantime, there will be no Prophet published tomorrow. Their lawyers have filed an appeal, but that won’t be looked at until tomorrow afternoon.”

“How did you manage all of this, dear?” Aimée asked.

Jean smiled. “Percy,” he said quietly. “He pointed to a few little-known laws, and managed to arrange for an open-minded judge to hear our case.

Basically, because Gabrielle is not under-age, as she is a creature, not a human, but the law is very clear. It states any female under the age of eighteen is classified as being underage, regardless of species.”

“They tried to argue that Gabrielle is not under-age, as she is a creature, not a human, but the law is very clear. It states any female under the age of eighteen is classified as being underage, regardless of species.”

“So will we get the apology?” Harry asked.

Jean nodded. “Oh, yes. The money is irrelevant, and I think that is what has thrown them the most. They are used to simply throwing money at the people that they have libelled. The fact that we don’t need money, and more, are quite prepared to outspend them, leaves them with the courts as their only option, and we have the law on our side.”

“Good work,” Harry praised.

Aimée leaned in closer to Harry and whispered, “I’ve told everyone that Gabrielle is not feeling well. She is waiting for you in her room.”

“Thanks,” Harry replied. “In that case, I’ll say what I have to and get out of here.”

“And leave us to face this food alone?” Jean demanded playfully.

“Damn right,” Harry agreed. “May I have your attention, please,” he said, quickly repeating his request in German and French. He moved into the centre of the expanded Great Hall, and ignored the looks he was getting from Snape.

To his surprise, Simone and Gunther moved next to him. “You do the English; we’ll translate for you,” Simone said.

“Thanks,” he replied. Speaking with pauses for his translators, he continued. “This morning, we held an informal tournament of Quidditch skills to see who the best flyers were. Today’s winner was Stephan, from Durmstrang!”

There was a huge cheer as a blushing Stephan came forward. Harry handed him a small envelope. “Those are tickets to the next World Cup final,” he said. Stephan looked stunned, then his face broke out in a wide smile.

Harry waited until the noise quietened down a little. “Now, I am aware that not everyone got to play today, so I’ve had a talk with Professor Krum, and with Professor McGonagall, in Malfoy’s stead, and we’ve agreed that I will hold seven more sessions like today’s. The top ten students from each year will get tickets to a professional Quidditch match of their choice, and they will go forward to a grand final – where the winner will get an executive box at the next World Cup, and will get to meet the team of their choice beforehand.”

There was another explosion of noise as all three schools cheered in unison.

“I’ll start with the first, second and third years tomorrow, so I’ll see you on the field at four!”

There was another resounding cheer. “Thank you both,” Harry said to his translators, who both grinned back. With a wave, he Disapparated home to get changed, then Apparated again to Gabrielle’s room.

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Gabrielle placed her quill down and turned to face the corner. A micro-second later, Harry arrived. She smiled at him.

“Did you have fun today?” she asked as she ran her eyes over him, and the smart suit he was wearing. It emphasised his trim waist and powerful shoulders. She loved it when he dressed formally; he gave off the subconscious impression that he was the most important man in the world.

“It was kinda fun beating Flint,” he admitted.

“I thought you would enjoy that,” she replied. “And did you enjoy the attentions of the Hogwarts Head Girl?”

Harry rolled his eye playfully. “I did my best to ignore her – I didn’t want to tell her she had no chance.”

Gabrielle nodded. “I could feel that you were being nice.” She paused and smiled at him teasingly, “Not tempted by a tall brunette with big breasts?”

“It depends,” he teased back. “Are you planning on colouring your hair and wearing high heels?”

She laughed and tidied away her parchment. “What are we going to do this evening?” she purred as she deliberately slunk her way over to him.

He opened his arms. “I think we’ll have a meal somewhere nice, and see where the evening takes us.”

“So I should get changed?” she asked, as she gave him a quick, but intense, hug.

“If you’re still in your school uniform under your robes, then yes. We’ll be eating in the Muggle world.”

“And you do not want a school-girl clinging over you?” she asked teasingly.

“Only in bed, love,” Harry responded, and she had to fight a blush.

"So you quite like the uniform?"

"On you, yes," he said, before adding, "and off you, as well."

"Last year's uniform was cuter," she responded, as she moved into the bedroom and quickly stripped down to her underwear. She liked that he was now more than happy to flirt with her. She already had her sexiest lingerie on – just in case, so she didn't change that. "And it is a little tighter in places, and the skirt barely covers my bum now – I shortened it a bit," she called as she looked through her wardrobe. She pulled out a black silk voile dress and shimmied into it quickly. It was almost floor length, but had a slit that went all the way up to her thigh. Some three-inch black pumps finished off the outfit.

"You did? Why?"

She pulled her hair out of her ponytail. "Because it looks really sexy, and you will love it when I wear it," she replied. She concentrated, using her Veela power to style it quickly into a slightly more sophisticated look. Her blonde hair curled slightly as it cascaded down her back and over her shoulders. "So, do I look good enough for you to eat?"

"Yes," he replied, after looking her up and down slowly. "However, I'm going to need real sustenance beforehand."

"Then let us go," she said, moving into his arms. She could not remember ever being this happy.

She snuggled into his arms, inhaling deeply. When she looked up, they had moved, and were outside an impressive looking hotel with a wide flight of steps. Harry indicated for her to precede him, so she walked carefully up the steps and into the hotel.

Harry walked over to the desk and had a low voiced conversation with the concierge. His already formal pose seemed to stiffen as Harry introduced himself. A slight handshake – where she was pretty sure he had passed some money – and the concierge walked over with Harry.

"This way, please, sir, ma'am," the concierge said, and led them into a beautiful large dining room, styled in a warm golden colour with red-backed chairs. They walked slowly through the restaurant, and she carefully allowed a small amount of her Veela powers come out to play. Tonight, she wanted to prove one last thing to Harry – that she could accompany him anywhere his career and his power might take him.

The concierge almost tripped as he pulled out a chair for Gabrielle and then for Harry.

"Thank you," Harry said, as he settled down. The concierge reluctantly moved away, trying to keep her in his line of vision.

"Order for me," she said, without looking at the menu.

He raised an eyebrow quizzically at her, but she just smiled mysteriously back at him.

"I can't decide which of us is the most hated at the moment," he said, an amused smile playing around the edges of his mouth.

"Oh?" she asked.

"The men hate me for my luck, bringing the most beautiful woman they have ever seen to this restaurant. And the women hate you because you have the audacity to make one of the most expensive hotels in the world look parochial in comparison."

She smiled. "I think, Harry, that the men do not hate you, they envy you, and they would like to know you, to find out just how you have managed to find me."

He laughed softly. "Another point proved, Gabrielle."

"Do you mind me having fun like this?"

"Not if you're enjoying it."

"For so many years I have hidden," she said softly, "hidden and waited for when I would grow up and be able to be everything to my Mate. Tonight, I am secure, I have your love, and that is more than I ever dared wish for. Tonight, I want to be the centre of attention. Tonight, I want everyone to envy you as I show the world how much I love you. Tomorrow, I will hide again, and be happy doing it, but tonight I feel free, and I will enjoy the feeling."

He reached out and lightly stroked his hand over her cheek, the gentle and tender caress reverberating through her soul.

There was a polite cough next to them.

Without looking up, Harry said, "We'll have the confit of organic salmon, followed by the roasted rack of Cornish lamb. Please ask the sommelier to suggest the best wine for each course."

"Of course, sir."

After he had left, Harry smiled faintly. "I've eaten here a few times - the discretion is worth it - but this is the first time I've been served so fast."

She shook her head and smiled at him.

"I'm looking forward to spending the rest of my life finding out just who you are, Gabrielle Delacour."

"What do you mean?" she asked in surprise. "I am not complicated."

"You are a girl who is just as at home in jeans as she is in exclusive designer clothing. You are a girl who can tease me about wearing her old school uniform one moment, and look five years older the next. You are a girl who can talk about classical music with the same depth of knowledge that you can talk about Quidditch. You are a girl who can ignore her surroundings, whether they be a nightclub or a school, and then decide to captivate everyone to make me look good."

"And that is a good thing?"

"You are the best, Gabby," he whispered.

Another uniformed man appeared, this one carrying a bottle in the crook of his arm. He opened it with a well-practiced movement and poured a small amount into Harry's glass.

Harry's eyes never moved from her as he tasted the wine, each movement so familiar to her, and yet so different from her father. "Thank you," he said softly, as the sommelier filled both of their glasses and placed the wine on the table.

He raised his glass as she raised hers. "To us."

"To us," she echoed, as a burst of pleasure and pride shot through her.

They were an 'us' now – a fact that blazed within her.

Afterwards, she would never remember what they talked about, or what the food tasted like. She just did everything she could to absorb the feelings that she was getting from him.

With the last plate removed, he invited, "Would you like to dance?"

"I would like nothing more," she replied.

He stood and moved her over to the dance floor. There were a few other couples dancing off their food.

She moved into his arm and slowly her slight feeling of introspection faded. The music was a slow paced waltz and she wrinkled her nose.

"You don't like the music?"

"It is fine for a funeral," she replied, "but I want to *dance* now."

"Wait here," he ordered.

She shivered slightly and stood in the same position. No longer did she worry that he wouldn't return to her. Now, she just enjoyed the feeling of her own magic reacting to the order she was obeying.

Harry walked over to the four-piece band and whispered something to lead guitarist. Another subtle handshake, and Harry turned, a slight smile on his face. As the music picked up, he made a small gesture that freed her, and she glided over to him. "This is more appropriate," she agreed as she twirled in his arms. "Do not hold back."

"Hold back?"

"Tonight Harry Potter does not exist, nor does Gabrielle Delacour," she said with a laugh, letting herself lean back in his arms so that she had to look up at him. "Tonight, we are unknown, two people in love dancing before our peers. There are no responsibilities, no press. It is just us."

He flashed her a boyish grin, then he took her hand and pulled her back up. He paused, waiting for the right beat, and started to dance with her, a brisk paced tango. She laughed happily, as much at the look on his face, before she had to concentrate on the dance. She had danced the tango a thousand times before, but never with such intimacy, never with the feeling of her Mate pressed against her body, and never with such freedom.

The dance floor was their domain, the other dancers ignored as they let themselves go into the dance. She could feel how he would lead just before he did so, so she was able to follow him as if they had danced together for eternity.

Always in the past she had danced with her sister, with her mother, with her father, with her female dance instructor. She had thought that dancing with Harry would be somewhat like dancing with her father, but it wasn't. It wasn't just the fact that one was her father, one her future love; it was more that Harry was a professional sportsman and had an incredible amount of power and presence that her father could not match through personality alone.

He wasn't even breathing hard as they stopped with the music. The sound of polite applause drifted over them as they waited for the music to start again.

A fast samba beat filled the air and she smiled at him, challenging him deliberately.

His answering smile accepted her challenge, and before she could take a breath, she was whirled away and she had to concentrate to keep up with him as he pushed her to match his bouncing steps.

One dance merged seamlessly into the next and the number of people watching them had grown. Some of them were drawn by her looks, she had

no doubt of that, but more drawn by their passionate dancing, and by the way that her Mate was not outshone by her. She was convinced that any other male in the world would have faded into the background, next to a Veela using just a fraction of her power. Not Harry. His personality and self-belief allowed him to radiate as much as she could.

As the last dance ended, and a fresh round of applause erupted, he grinned at her, and she knew she had done the right thing.

He took her hand and led her off the dance floor, the crowd parting before them. As soon as they were outside, Harry quickly led her to a private spot, away from casual view. From there, they Disapparated and landed on the balcony of his London apartment. Before them was the wonderful panoramic view of London at night, the dark sky setting a wonderful background to the way the city was lit up.

He opened the door with a wave of his hand, and then cast a warming charm over the whole balcony, before he led her over to a bench. One of the benefits of being in love with Harry was that she was never cold – he always looked after her.

She sat, curiously watching him.

“I’ve had a lot of time to think recently, Gabrielle, and I’ve been thinking about our situation, and everything else involved.”

She nodded.

That opening would have terrified her, even a week ago.

“And I’ve been thinking a lot about what I want from my partner. And I’ve come to the conclusion that you are what I want, because you are everything I thought I wanted, and million times more.”

She smiled brightly at him.

He moved from next to her and knelt in front of her, lightly taking her hand. “I have your love, Gabrielle, I have this Bond that tells me that you’ll love me forever, but that isn’t enough.”

She blinked; what else could she give him? He already had her mind, her body, her heart and her soul.

He reached into his pocket and pulled out a small leather box. “Gabrielle Delacour, will you marry me?”

Everything seemed to stop. All she could see was the ring as it sparkled in the light, and the look on Harry’s face.

“You don’t have to do this,” she whispered.

“You are the woman I want to wake up next to for the rest of my life, Gabrielle.”

“Yes,” she whispered, “oh, yes, please, Harry.”

He smiled and took her hand, placing the ring on her finger. She closed her eyes as a rush of pleasure flew through her, then a second rush of power quickly followed it.

“Harry?”

“You’re mine, Gabrielle,” he whispered, not moving from the floor. “That ring will protect you, even when I can’t.”

This wasn’t how she had expected this evening to end. She was engaged to be married to her Mate.

Marriage.

She had never really thought about marriage. All of her thoughts had been about being with her Mate any way that she could. Marriage hadn’t seemed necessary; the only commitment she needed from him was for him to take her to bed.

The idea that some day, somehow, he might take another in marriage crept into her nightmares, only to be banished quickly on awakening, when she would redouble her efforts to study him, to ensure that she alone would be enough for him.

This was his commitment to her, that he would never take another, would never leave her, and would always be there for her. She felt herself start to cry as she slid off the bench and hugged him tightly, burying her face in his neck.

“Thank you,” she whispered.

His hands stoked up and down her back. “Gabrielle?”

“I never dreamed, never dared truly hope that you would marry me,” she mumbled. “Why would you need to? I am a silly girl who made a mistake. I do not need such consideration.”

“You are never just a silly girl; you are Gabrielle, my Gabrielle.”

“Forever,” she promised. “Forever.”

She took a deep breath and then used her Veela power to clear her face. Now was the right time. All evening she had been waiting for this moment, and she wasn’t going to wait any longer.

She slowly stood and took his hand, helping him off his knees, and led him indoors. The weight of the ring on her hand was a constant reminder that he had proposed to her.

He had made a commitment to her that she hadn't expected. She knew her Mate, better than anyone else in the world, and she knew what this ring represented. Before taking this step, he would have asked her parents, and her mother's words about her blessing him now made more sense.

Next to his bed, she turned and faced him, her hands moving up his shirt, undoing the buttons.

"Gabby?"

She shook her head, lightly touching his lips. She didn't want words anymore, she didn't need words. The ring on her finger said everything. She eased his shirt off his back, and then reached for his belt. She knelt before him and eased his trousers down, and removing his socks and shoes as he moved to help her. She reached back up and pulled his shorts down, trying hard not to get sidetracked by the overwhelming urge she had in this position.

The time for that would be later, not now. She stood and gently pushed him back on to the bed. He moved as directed, on his back in the centre of the bed. She stood back and undid her zipper, shrugging the dress off so that it pooled by her feet. She stepped out of her heels and crawled onto the bed, kneeling by his feet, just out of reach.

He was looking at her hungrily, his desire obvious. She opened the front-catch of her bra and removed it slowly, enjoying the sharp intake of his breath. She moved her hands back to her waist and dropped to her side so that she could slowly remove her knickers. When she had pulled her lingerie on earlier, she had enjoyed visions of sexily stripping for him, dancing for him in the lingerie. She would do that later, but not now, not when he had just managed to give her more than her dreams.

He wanted her. He loved her, and as she searched his eyes she saw there was no hint of doubt, no hint of disbelief and no hint of worry.

Her Mate wanted her, without a single string attached.

She slowly crawled up his body, brushing herself against him as she moved up, until she was hovering, her lips a millimetre from his. "I love you," she whispered, and gently kissed him.

He returned the kiss and his hands moved around her, crushing her to his chest, and then the kiss turned serious.

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Gabrielle stretched luxuriously and smiled. Two things were immediately clear to her: she still had the ring on her finger, and she was sore in places she'd never been sore before.

"Sleep well?"

She looked up at her future husband. "Better than ever," she whispered, as she tilted her head and stretched to kiss him gently.

"How do you feel?"

"Slightly sore," she confessed, "but it was worth it!"

Harry chuckled. "That wasn't what I meant. Have you checked the Bond?"

"Why?" she asked, before it hit her. "Oh, I forgot about that," she gasped. "I can't believe I—"

She checked and gasped again. Always before, the Bond had been lightly tethered to her, thin tendrils of magic attached to her heart and her mind. It had been annoyingly fragile; sometimes appearing that a summer breeze could tear it away. The strands were barbed, and if their magic had been torn out, either by it breaking, or by an external source, they would have destroyed everything they touched.

Now the Bond was solid, a giant oak compared to a seedling. There seemed no way that it would ever break.

"I am safe," she whispered in shock. "I will not go insane."

"Damn right," Harry agreed.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you," she whispered as she kissed his face again and again. "For so long I've tried to forget this, not just for me, but so that you would not feel me worrying about it as well," she explained, "but it has been there, a constant pressure in my life for so long, that for it to suddenly be gone is unbelievable."

His hand was playing with her hair, lightly stroking it, and the Bond was giving her such strong messages of love, satisfaction and contentment. Last night had been the single most amazing night of her existence. He had played her body, forcing her to go to places she had never imagined existed, never dared dream that she might reach.

The final consummation of their relationship had been more controlled. It had been important to her that she had lowered all her barriers, that he was able to take her mind as he took her body. What she hadn't expected was for him to reciprocate; he had turned off his magical protections and lowered his mental protections, so that he was as vulnerable as she was.

"What time is it?" she asked.

“Five in the morning.”

She smiled happily, a quick burst of her Veela power taking away any last remaining soreness, and she climbed on top of him. Last night had been amazing, it had been gentle and loving, but now it was time for fun.

He looked at her curiously.

She kissed him intently, her hair draping down around her face. “I have been dreaming about you for eight years,” she whispered, a smile on her face. “You have a lot of catching up to do.”

Harry smiled against her lips.

“Challenge accepted,” he responded with equal intensity.



## Hope 11 - Sydney

Gabrielle walked toward her first class of the morning, a Defence lesson, fully aware of the smile on her face. Harry had accepted her challenge with the same sort of commitment that he bought to every aspect of his life, and they had been forced to eat on the go as they scrambled to get to Hogwarts in time.

She opened the door and was about to step in, when Simone looked up and then groaned theatrically. "Professor Bayard, I think I'm going to be sick."

The professor blinked as Simone immediately rushed out, saying, "Gabrielle can take me to the nurse."

As soon as the door shut, Simone stood up straighter, took Gabrielle's hand and marched her straight back to Gabrielle's room.

"Simone?"

"You slept with Professor Potter last night, didn't you?"

Gabrielle blinked in surprise.

"You're glowing, *literally glowing*, like a torch! I had to get you out of there quickly," Simone said by way of explanation. "It's going to be obvious to anyone looking at you that you had your brains screwed out last night."

"Simone!" Gabrielle protested.

"So, was it good?"

Gabrielle blushed.

"That good, eh, from a Veela?"

"Wait..." Gabrielle tried.

"Oh, yeah, my crush on him," Simone continued, "you're lucky that Gunther's pretty hot."

Gabrielle sat down suddenly. "Right, stop, sit."

Simone sat.

"Try that again, please, at normal speed. And this time, please try and make sense."

"Okay," Simone agreed. "I was sitting in class, wondering where you were, when you opened the door. You were lucky that no one else could see you, because everyone would have known something is up instantly. You're always beautiful – hell, you're a Veela, but in this case, you were *literally* glowing. You also have this inhuman air of contentment about you. So, I got you out of there fast, and here we are."

"Thank you," Gabrielle said softly. "And what is this about Gunther?"

"We are an item, as of last week, actually."

"Congratulations," Gabrielle said with a relieved sigh. She stood abruptly and walked into the bedroom, looking into a mirror. "I really *am* glowing," she said in surprise. "I'm pretty sure that I was not doing that this morning."

"So things went very well last night then?"

Gabrielle nodded and removed the charm that was hiding her ring.

"Sweet Merlin on a bike!" Simone almost screamed in surprise. "He proposed? That is one incredible ring!"

Gabrielle smiled and nodded. "We're not going to make it public until after the final Quidditch match."

Simone nodded and whistled under her breath. "You are so very lucky, Gabrielle."

Gabrielle nodded and walked over to her fireplace. "Fleur?" she called.

"I thought you had classes this morning?"

"I am having a small problem, Fleur. Can you come through?"

"Hello Simone," Fleur said, as she appeared from the fireplace. "Do *you* know what is going on?"

"I stopped her from walking into a class full of boys like that," Simone replied with a small smirk, indicating Gabrielle.

"I didn't know I was glowing," Gabrielle protested.

Fleur looked at her sister closely, and shook her head in disbelief. She walked over to Gabrielle's desk and dashed off two quick notes, addressing them and using her wand to create a pulse of magic. Fleur's owl appeared in the window shortly afterward. "Take this to Mama, the second to William," she commanded, attaching them to the owl.

The owl hooted and flew away.

"Fleur?" Gabrielle asked softly.

"Let's wait until Mama gets here, as *I'm* without a clue," Fleur suggested gently. "Make me a coffee, dear?"

"Simone, would you like anything?" Gabrielle asked.

"Coffee, please," Simone replied.

Gabrielle did as she was told, smiling slightly as Harry sent her a mental reminder of one of the things they had done the night before.

She had just finished when there was a knock on the door and Aimée walked in.

"Hello, Simone," she said in surprise.

"Madame Delacour," Simone replied formally.

Gabrielle brought a tray out with four drinks.

"Ahh, I see," Aimée said softly. "I take it you do not know what is going on?"

Gabrielle shook her head. "I did not even know that I was *glowing*."

"Fleur?" Aimée asked.

"I'm lost," Fleur replied with an elegant shake of her shoulders.

Aimée looked at Gabrielle and smiled.

"Congratulations, my dear."

"Thank you, Mama."

Fleur sat up and looked at Gabrielle.

"He proposed?" she squealed in surprise. "Oh, Gabrielle!"

Gabrielle barely had time to put her tea to one side before she was swept up into a hug from her sister.

Fleur released her and grabbed her hand. "Nice," she whistled.

"From Antwerp," Aimée agreed. "Tomas has a matching wedding ring, if you like that one, Gabrielle."

"You knew, Mama?"

"Of course," Aimée smiled. "Harry asked me to come with him when he went ring shopping. I was delighted, and we had a wonderful time together."

Gabrielle smiled. "You lied to me."

"I *misdirected* you," Aimée corrected gently. "If I had mentioned Antwerp, you might have guessed, and I will not betray Harry's secrets." She paused to take a sip of tea. "Was last night everything you had dreamed of?"

Gabrielle blushed. "My dreams, even with my Veela power, even with my research, paled into insignificance. He was magnificent, and I didn't even think about how he was securing the Bond until he reminded me this morning. But more than the immense physical pleasure, the mental was a million times more explosive. We connected in a way that I never thought possible."

"But you were not glowing this morning?" Fleur asked.

She shook her head. "I am positive that Harry would have mentioned it."

"He would have," Aimée agreed. "Gabrielle, please cast a *Lumos* spell."

She reached for her wand and did exactly that. The spell caught them all by surprise as her wand exploded into life, flooding the room with a pure white light. She cancelled it immediately.

"As I thought," Aimée said softly, as she turned her head back. "Put your wand down, dear."

Gabrielle placed the wand on her desk.

"Fleur, curse your sister. Gabrielle, do not move."

"What?" Fleur demanded.

Aimée just looked at her, until Fleur sighed and throw a low powered cutting curse at Gabrielle. Before the curse could hit her, it smashed against a barrier that was briefly visible.

"What was that?" Simone asked softly.

"I did not do anything," Gabrielle replied, frowning in puzzlement.

"Yesterday afternoon, I watched Harry put charm after charm on that ring – so many that Filius and I were lost after thirty minutes. He worked endlessly to get it *just right*."

"That is why he desired real food, first," Gabrielle said to herself.

"Quite," Aimée agreed. "I believe the glowing is because you are not used to the extra magic that you are now carrying around. As we do not want to lower the effectiveness of the ring, we will have to lower your magic temporarily, Gabrielle. We will take the Floo back to our estate, and you will use magic until you are no longer glowing."

"Yes, Mama," Gabrielle agreed.

"Simone, you are welcome to join us."

"Thank you, Madame Delacour."

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"Harry."

"Bill," Harry said with a welcoming smile. "What brings you to Hogwarts at lunch time?"

"A summons from the Missus," Bill responded. "She asked me to have a chat with you."

"Oh?" Harry asked. "What about?"

"Want to fly? I don't want prying ears listening in."

"Sure, here." Harry chuckled a broom to him before jumping onto his, rocketing to the sky. A few hundred metres above the ground he levelled out, swung his feet forward, and shifted so that he could lie on his back and stare at the clouds, his hands behind his head and his feet crossed.

"Do I even want to know how you can control a broom like that?"

"Practice. When you spend your life on a broom, you start to get to know what it can really do. So what did you want to talk about?"

"Actually, I don't really want to talk about anything., Fleur just thought that you might want to talk to one of the few people who would understand."

"Understand what?"

"What it is like to sleep with a part-Veela who loves you."

"Remind me to do something nice for Fleur," Harry said with a laugh. "Last night did not go as I expected."

"Oh?"

"Well, the meal and the proposal part did."

"Congratulations, by the way."

"Cheers. Anyway, it was Gabrielle's first time, so I was expecting to carry her to bed, undress her, and take things from there."

"Let me guess, she suddenly got this determined look on her face, and before you know it, you've been dragged to bedroom, stripped with impressive efficiency, and your plans have been thrown out the window."

Harry laughed. "So it runs in the family, then?"

"That's what it sounds like, we're very lucky men, aren't we?" he reflected.

"Absolutely. She was like no one I've ever slept with before. It was like she'd been practising for a millennium, and yet I had proof this morning that I was her first and only."

"Don't think about that," Bill advised. "Just remember that she is not fully human – and believe me, I have to think that a lot – especially when she starts throwing vases."

Harry laughed again. "I've yet to experience that."

"I'm not surprised. Gabrielle's the calm one."

"Last night was something special. I lowered my shields – magically and mentally, and I could feel that Bond solidify between us, I could feel it bonding to my magic, bonding me to her, and it was incredible."

"Now you're going out of my experience," Bill said quietly.

"From the research I've done, it went further than it should have. I think we're out of everyone's experience. You know I'm powerful, right?"

Bill snorted.

"I got a power boost from it. I've been feeling it all day. It's like it's awakened something inside me, something that's been dormant, and now it's free. Or maybe, it's more that I've freed something. I woke up this morning as happy as I could remember. My loneliness was completely gone, my moods were completely gone, and the only cloud on my horizon is protecting Gabby when we announce to the world that we're engaged."

"You've always been an introspective moody git, Harry," Bill said cheerfully, "so it's not a surprise that you feel like you've got a boost out of this – you're probably no longer suppressing the thought that you're special, regardless of how you might want to be normal."

Harry watched a cloud formation that resembled a dragon chasing a large snail float above him as he contemplated Bill's words.

"Last night, Gabrielle said something to me. She told me not to hold back, that it didn't matter who I was, I should just be myself."

"And?"

Harry smiled. "And I am Harry James Potter, engaged to Gabrielle Delacour, heir to two immense fortunes, world class Quidditch player, and one of the most powerful wizards in nearly a millennium."

"You're also a nice, humble guy, most of the time."

Harry laughed. "Thanks."

"You're welcome. Remember, I'm a Weasley, closely related to Fred and George. Ego popping is our speciality. So, is the heavy part of this conversation over with?"

"Probably."

"Excellent. Why aren't you an Animagus?"

"What?"

"I've always wanted to ask you that."

"I didn't have time when I was at school..."

"And after Voldemort was defeated?"

Harry grinned. "Becoming an Animagus is the basic step in animal transformation. It limits you to one animal. I think there might be a way to be able to become any animal. I believe that all you have to do is merge the Metamorphmagus ability with the Animagus ability, and you end up with an Animorphmagus. Tonks always used to say you had to be born a Metamorphmagus, but I'm not sure that's true. I want to find out."

Bill sighed and reached over to prod Harry firmly. "You're such a git," he said with a slight grin. "I'm not sure I believe that. It's impossible."

"I daresay you haven't had much practice," said Harry. "When I was younger, I always did it for half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast." He paused introspectively. "A Muggle said that in a famous book. I always liked the idea, and now I feel like I can do it."

Bill turned to look at him. "You're serious, aren't you?"

"Absolutely," Harry replied. "I think that there's nothing I won't be able to do eventually."

"If anybody else said that, I'd think they were exaggerating. But since it's you, I'll just sit back and take notes." Bill glanced at his watch. "Well, it's been fun, but some of us have to get back to work."

“Thanks for this, I appreciate it.”

“It’s nice for me to actually get to be the older one for a change. Most of the time I feel like your little brother.”

Harry blushed.

“Anyway, I’ll catch you later.”

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“Hermione,” Gabrielle called as she dashed over to the older woman.

“Gabrielle,” Hermione said with a smile as she turned to face her.

“Are you doing anything now?”

“Ron and I don’t have anything planned, why?”

“I want to fix Harry’s eyes.”

Hermione blinked. “Okay,” she said slowly, although her eyes showed that she was thinking hard. “That sounds like something I should be there for.”

Gabrielle smiled brightly. “I do not think we will need you, but I did think you would be upset if I did not invite you.”

“You sound a lot more confident about this?” Hermione commented.

Gabrielle nodded. “I am.”

“Okay, I’ll go and get Ron, and we’ll meet in your parents’ rooms. We don’t want to make people suspicious.”

“Thanks, Hermione. I will see you in a few minutes.” She smiled at Hermione once more before she dashed off. She’d been full of energy all day, and while she was no longer glowing, she felt better than she ever had.

She had to restrain the urge to skip down the corridor and had to force herself to act like the Beauxbatons Head Girl. As far as she was concerned, though, she was now off duty. She’d been a good girl all afternoon, had helped Harry organise his Quidditch tournament, and had even helped organize the upcoming ball.

She knocked on the door to her parents’ room and waited. Aimée opened it and ushered her in.

As soon as the door closed she jumped forward twice and then pounced on her Mate, kissing him firmly. “Hi,” she said brightly, as she landed on his lap.

“Hi,” he responded, amusement obvious in his voice.

“Papa,” she greeted her father happily.

“Gabrielle,” Jean said with a sigh. “Do you *have* to do that?”

She nodded eagerly. “I Mated with Harry at two minutes to eleven on the 26th of February, 1995. It’s now the 30th of November, 2003. That’s three thousand two hundred and one days, or just under seventy seven thousand hours of hugs, kisses, and general affection that I’ve missed out.

“And,” she continued excitedly, “if we take last night as an example, remove twenty percent due to making the first time extra special, that means that I’ve missed over six and a half thousand hours of mak-blph.” The end to her statement was muffled due to Harry’s hand covering her mouth.

“Let’s not torment your father anymore,” Harry suggested.

Gabrielle pouted against his fingers.

“No, it is too late, I am already tormented,” Jean said mournfully. “My little Gabrielle has grown up.”

She lightly moved Harry’s hand away from her mouth. “I have, Papa,” she agreed with a slight sigh. “But I am happier than I ever thought possible, and is that not what you wanted?”

“Oh, yes, definitely. When you were thirty.”

“Pfft,” Gabrielle replied. “Anyway, Ron and Hermione are coming over shortly. I am going to fix Harry’s eyes.”

“You are?” Aimée asked.

Gabrielle nodded. “I need to use some of this magic that is swirling through me. I remember how much the shoulder took out of us, so this will be the perfect way of doing it.” She twisted to look at her Mate. “Did Mama tell you what happened today?”

Harry nodded. “The glowing. I didn’t expect that.”

“No one could have,” she replied. “It is a wonderful feeling, is it not?”

Harry smiled at her. “Have a look at how I’ve been feeling today.”

Gabrielle reached down the Bond without hesitation. She’d been receiving his cheerfulness and good mood all day, but had not been able to examine him in great detail. She closed her eyes and moaned under her breath.

“Take it, feel it,” Harry whispered, as he pushed his magic at her.

As she had when fighting with Draco, she pulled his magic under her command. Impossibly, it seemed more, much more than it had before. It felt freer, less restrained. “You are no longer holding back,” she whispered. “You have accepted who you are.”

She opened her eyes to see Harry’s eyes locked to her face. There was another knock on the door, but she didn’t look away.

“Is it me,” Ron’s voice said, “or is she literally glowing this time, as opposed to the metaphorical glow she normally has?”

“It’s a glow,” Aimée agreed with a sigh. “Harry just lent her his magic again, and combined with her ring, it is causing a glow to appear.”

Harry leaned in and gently kissed her. She immediately forgot about their audience and kissed him back, her hands going into his hair.

He sighed softly against her lips and gently broke the kiss. “Hermione, can I borrow your scarf?”

She heard some movement behind her, then a hand carrying a scarf came into view. She was aware that she was being a little rude, but she didn’t care. She watched as Harry folded the scarf in half, then in half again along its length. He reached up with it and covered her eyes. She smiled faintly as he tied it tightly, making a mental note to get a few scarves later.

“Can you see?”

She shook her head.

“Stand up.”

She stood.

“I want you to cast the location spell,” he said. “I’m going to vanish, and I want you to try and find me.”

She nodded and pulled her wand out, even though she didn’t need it. With Harry’s power, she could do the spell wandlessly, without any effort at all.

“Now,” Hermione said.

She cast the spell, releasing her wand, which spun around on her palm.

“You can take the blindfold off,” Harry said. She did as she was told. Harry was on the other side of the room, and her wand was pointing straight at him.

“I have my nullification field on – full power,” Harry explained.

“The spell should have failed,” Hermione added.

“Oh,” Gabrielle said. “Does that mean that my magic is now aligned with Harry’s, so it will not stop me?”

Hermione looked thoughtful. “I’d have to run some tests to make sure, but you could well be right. And to ask an obvious question, have you two…?”

“Yes,” Harry said. “So, shall we get this show on the road?”

Gabrielle smiled happily. “Give us a few minutes, Hermione,” she ordered as she pushed Harry into the spare room – there was no way she was going to do this on her parents’ bed. With a few efficient movements, she pulled off her robes, kicked off her shoes, undid her skirt and started on her blouse.

“Next time, I get to undress you,” Harry said firmly. “In fact, I insist.”

“Yes, Harry,” she agreed happily. “Do you want to finish now?”

“Yes, but I probably better not.”

She smiled brightly at him and removed her blouse, and then her bra. She left her knickers on, as she didn’t want to give Hermione a show.

“Put this on,” Harry said as he removed his shirt.

She took it and put it on, doing only the buttons she needed to keep it on. It was still warm and smelled of him. She closed her eyes for a second and enjoyed the feeling. “I’m still glowing,” she noted as she caught a glimpse of her reflection in the mirror.

“It’s *really* sexy,” Harry told her.

She reached up and kissed him gently before guiding him onto the bed and sitting on his stomach. With a conscious effort, she shoved the desire she had for him into a corner of her mind, and concentrated on what she was about to do.

“Don’t worry,” Harry said quietly.

“I am not,” she whispered back. “You trust me and now I trust me as well. I will never let you down.”

He reached up and cupped her face, his thumb lightly sliding across her lips. “I know.”

She smiled at him, and pulled up the blanket so that they were reasonably covered as there was a knock at the door. “Come in, Hermione.”

Hermione entered and immediately moved to a chair on the far side of the room, where she had a clear view of everything. Gabrielle nodded approvingly, and started to call all of Harry’s power to the foreground, so that she could feel it in her fingertips. He removed his glasses and smiled encouragingly at her.

She moved her hands forward, over his eyes, using her Veela power to find the defects in his eyes, the areas she need to correct. She closed her eyes and concentrated on the feelings she was getting. She could feel him everywhere they touched; the intimate nature of their position was helping her focus everything she had on him.

With a very deep breath, she started.

The pain was agonising.

It was worse than anything she had ever endured before. Her eyes felt as if they were literally melting, but she didn’t stop. Every second seemed to increase the pain, like a fire burning deep inside her soul. As she cried, it felt as if she were pushing shards of broken glass from her eyes.

This was for her Mate; she would do anything for her Mate, and she could do this.

She could do this.

She *would* do this.

She let the pain sweep over her, never once deviating from the course her magic told her to take.

And then it was over.

She exhaled softly and passed out.

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Hermione sat watching her best friend and his Mate, but something seemed wrong. Harry wasn’t making any movement, but Gabrielle was crying. Her eyes were closed and an expression of pure agony was on her face.

She wanted to go over to them, to see if she could help, but she remembered the warning from last time – and the frisson of fear she had felt when Harry had pointed his wand at her.

Gabrielle seemed to sigh before she collapsed onto Harry’s chest.

“Harry?” Hermione asked.

“Oh, Gabrielle,” Harry whispered.

He looked at Hermione, his eyes incredibly bright. “She took the pain.”

“Huh?”

Harry shook his head. “She took my pain. It didn’t hurt me a bit; it hurt her instead. Tell Jean and Aimée that I’m looking after her, and she’ll be fine.” He gathered Gabrielle in his arms and they vanished from the bed.

Hermione stumbled out of bedroom and back into the living room, where Ron offered her a glass of wine. She tried to take it, but her hands were shaking too much.

“Hermione?” Ron asked softly.

She slumped down into a chair, took a deep breath, and then grabbed the wine glass. She downed it in a second, and then as Ron filled it again, she downed the next one as well.

“What happened?” Ron asked.

“They deserve each other.”

“Huh?” Ron asked.

“You know that Harry took the pain of the Cruciatus curse when Malfoy cast it on her?”

Aimée and Jean nodded.

“Gabrielle obviously thought that was a good idea. She just took the pain of destroying Harry’s eyes.”

Jean’s glass cracked in his hand.

“Jean-Sebastian,” Aimée scolded. “You have wine everywhere.”

“Sorry, dear,” Jean replied apologetically. “I didn’t expect that.”

“I do not know why not,” Aimée sniffed. “It is exactly the sort of thing that Gabrielle would do.”

“Why don’t you start at the beginning?” Ron suggested quietly.

Hermione nodded and started on her third glass in as many minutes.

“It was the same as last time and yet completely different,” she began in a slightly hesitant voice.

“Last time it was obvious that Harry was the stronger partner. This time it was more a meeting of equals. Gabrielle was still glowing, but then she pulled up the magic as she did before. Back then it was like being in the same room as a tornado. This time I could feel the magic swamping over me. I had to raise a shield just to be in as close range as I was. Through the shield I could literally see the magic bending the air. It was beautiful, awe inspiring, perfect. But then Gabrielle focused it on Harry, and started to work.”

She shuddered as she recalled what she had just witnessed. “For a second I thought nothing was happening. I was looking at Harry’s face. He just had his eyes closed. Then I glanced at Gabrielle. She was crying, and each tear glowed bright silver as it dripped down her cheeks and onto his chest. She had this expression of agony and determination that cut right through me, but there was nothing I could do.

“She finished and then she passed out. Harry grabbed her, and he had an expression on his face I had never seen before. He has never seen anyone take pain for him before this – he knows his mother did, but he was a baby at the time – this is the first time that anyone has ever done something for him like this.

“All through his life, he has been the one putting himself forward. He has been the one taking the pain for us.” She took another smaller sip of the wine. “And then Harry gathered her up in his arms and did a horizontal dual Apparation.”

There was a silence in the room, only broken by Aimée casting a few spells to take away the wine stains and fix the glass.

“So, are Harry’s eyes fixed?” Aimée asked as she sat back down comfortably.

“I believe so,” Hermione whispered.

“Good.”

“How can you be so calm?” Jean demanded.

“Because my daughter will have planned this in advance. She knew exactly what she was going to do, and she did it. I am proud of her.”

“But the pain,” Ron started, but couldn’t seem to find anything to continue with.

“Harry will look after her,” Aimée said firmly. “And she will be fine – more than fine. She has helped her Mate, she has looked after him, and she managed to fix him without hurting him in any way. That will make her feel better than anything. And I’m sure that Harry will express his gratitude in a way that will appeal to her.”

“She did still hurt herself,” Hermione pointed out.

“That she did,” Aimée agreed. “Ask yourself this. What would you prefer? Temporary physical pain or the guilt that you hurt your partner?”

Jean sighed. “I knew I married you for a reason.”

“Because all your Veela girlfriends were butterflies that would have fainted at the first sign of trouble?” Aimée suggested with an innocent expression on her face.

“Something like that,” Jean agreed with a smile. “And because I really appreciate having someone who will tell me that I’m being an idiot when necessary.”

“I’ve always wanted to know why you chose Aimée,” Ron said. “From what I know, it’s not often that a male Veela chooses a non-Veela wife.”

Jean nodded. “Well, my mother was kind of the inspiration, really. When she was younger, she was married to another Veela, and although she tried to play the loyal wife, his attitude was more suitable to the Stone Age. Mama caused quite a storm by divorcing him, and taking most of his money. Divorce was simply not done back in those days. Some people tried to shun Mama, but she was far too strong to let that worry her.

“She then went out and found Papa, who was a much more enlightened man, who treated Mama like a princess, and who happened to be rich as well. They had one child – me, and I grew up in the Veela community.



Mama, on the back of a second scandal, decided that Veela as a race were effectively useless, so she took steps to ensure that I would be comfortable in the real world. At the age of seventeen, she packed my bag, gave me several thousand francs in cash, the keys to my inheritance, and told me not to come back for several years until I knew who I was."

He sighed softly. "I was a little scared, but I was determined to go and become a man. I enrolled in a Muggle university in France, but I kept in contact with Mama, and my girlfriend back in the Veela community."

Aimée sniffed disdainfully, but didn't interrupt.

"But the more I learnt, the less comfortable I felt with her, and we eventually broke up. I wanted someone who would challenge me."

Aimée snorted even more disdainfully.

"Okay," Jean said, raising his hand, "I didn't know that at the time, I just knew I wasn't getting what I needed. I tried dating a few Muggles, but it turned out that I was going for the same sort – the sort who saw a young and rich man and liked that. I even took a few home to see Mama and Papa, but Mama was not impressed, and told me so on many occasions. She pointed out that she sent me into the world to broaden my horizons, not to have a party. She wasn't impressed that I was studying poetry, either."

Ron laughed. "I really can't see you studying poetry."

Jean smiled. "I went back to University and changed so that I was studying politics instead, and took some English courses. In my second course, I fell completely in love with a witch who had decided to see what the Muggle world was like for herself. I asked her out as soon as I could."

"And she said, no," Aimée interrupted. "She wasn't about to let a smooth-talking charmer 'get into her knickers.'"

"But I was persistent," Jean continued. "I asked her for her help, begged her even, and she took pity on me. I studied as hard as I could, trying to impress her. I found out immediately that she didn't care about looks, she was more interested in someone with a future, who was going to do something with his life."

"Although it did help that he was good looking," Aimée admitted mischievously.

"I found myself getting top marks in English, and even higher marks in politics. I also found that, no matter what the question they gave me, I could take it to Aimée, and she would make me talk it through, until the answer was obvious."

"Well, in our last year, I spent a bit of time thinking."

"Brooding," Aimée corrected.

"In front of me I had two paths. One was a life as a rich drifter, never really achieving anything. The other was involved becoming a leader of men, someone who could influence people and make a difference. I did the only thing I could. I begged Aimée to marry me."

"I wasn't sure," Aimée continued. "I'd seen Jean make his way through most of the pretty girls at school, and although he had been a good boy since we started up, I still wasn't completely convinced that he was being genuine. But then he invited me to spend time with his parents. I thought about it, and agreed. When I arrived, his mother dismissed me as another beauty, and that is when I decided then that I would go out with Jean, as I knew that woman would not raise a cad."

"And we lived happily ever after," Jean agreed. "Mama and Papa received a bit of fuss about me not marrying a Veela as well, but by that time, people were used to Mama causing a scandal." He sighed. "Sadly, Papa passed away before Fleur was born. Mama was devastated, but she continued for a time. She wanted to see her grandchildren."

"Thank you," Ron said softly.

"Yes, thank you," Hermione agreed. She was feeling a lot more in control now.

"Anyway," Aimée said, "I would suggest that we do not dwell on today. As Ron has pointed out in the past, they are defining their own relationship at the moment. Harry, for all his experience, is as innocent as Gabrielle in some aspects, and that innocence carries them both forward, so that they do not bother to be tied down by anything as prosaic as the real world, like the rest of us."

Hermione smiled. "I'll never forget what happened in there. But you're right, they'll look after themselves. Now, let me tell you about the research I've done into duplicating their Bond."

"Why would you want to do that?" Jean asked.

"Because if you can remove the negative aspects, it gives you an amazing feeling of closeness."

"And the sex is brilliant," Ron added. He abruptly turned bright red as everyone looked at him and he realised what he had just blurted out.

---

Harry was on his back, still stripped to the waist as he reclined against the headboard. Gabrielle's head rested on his chest, and he was lightly stroking her hair, just enjoying the texture of it.

She was fast asleep, draped over him and occasionally making soft snuffling sounds. Every time she moved, it was to snuggle deeper against him, as if even in her sleep, she was trying to ensure that she was as close to him as she could be.

He smiled tenderly at her, a little surprised at just how much he loved her. He had enjoyed relationships in the past, but nothing that came close to being as all-consuming as this one.

And never with a girl who had managed to both understand him, and match him as well. He had been ready for the pain of having his eyes fixed. His shoulder had been bad enough, and he knew that his eyes would be worse.

But then she had simply used the same techniques he had, and pulled the pain onto herself. It had shocked him, but it had made him feel warm inside – that she cared about him the same way he did about her. There would have been none of her own magic guiding her to do it – it was purely her and her alone.

With a start, Gabrielle awoke. She pressed against his chest and looked up. “How are you?” she gasped.

“Shh,” Harry whispered, moving his right hand to her face. “I, my love, am fine – perfect in fact. How are you feeling?”

She blinked and considered the question for a moment. “I am fine,” she said finally.

“Gabrielle,” he whispered, lifting her up and moving her so that she was sitting over him. “My Gabrielle.”

“You are not mad at me?” she asked in a small voice.

“If I had expected it, I would have tried to stop you,” he said softly. “But how can I be mad at you for what you did? I can see without my glasses, and it was painless. I hate that it cost you so much, but I thank you for my gift.”

She smiled at him, and he almost felt his breath leave his body. She was glowing, but this time it was pure Gabrielle, no magic involved at all. Her hands moved across her chest, over the shirt he had given her to wear earlier, but she stopped and stared down at herself for a second in confusion.

“What?” he asked.

“Someone gave me a command earlier,” she pointed out. “This is the next time; and I cannot undress myself.”

“Oh, yes,” Harry said with a smile. “I did do that, didn’t I? Do you know what happens to beautiful girls who give such wonderful gifts?”

She shook her head and looked at him innocently.

Harry reached for the buttons. “They get thanked,” he purred.

---

Weak sunlight shining into the room slowly dragged her out of the deep sleep she had been enjoying. The first thing she noticed was the complete absence of her Mate. With a yawn, she rolled out of bed, grabbed his shirt, pulled on a pair of knickers, and wandered down toward the kitchen, absently doing up the buttons.

It was empty, but a smell of coffee pointed to the balcony. She followed the smell to find her Mate looking out at London, his cup on the table beside him. Without hesitation, she walked over to him, crawled into his lap, and nuzzled into him.

“Morning.”

“Mmm,” she mumbled back. “No sleep, no Mate. Sleep now.” She closed her eyes and started to breathe easily, drinking in his unique scent.

“Sorry,” he whispered, and cuddled her against his chest.

She half smiled as she drifted off. She would never be able to explain accurately the feeling of warmth and comfort that she got from him holding her. She would give up everything that mattered in her life as long as she still had him.

“Gabby,” Harry called.

“Hmm?”

“You’ve had thirty minutes, but it’s time to get moving.”

“Okay,” she sighed. “Can I have some of that coffee?”

“There’s some on the table for you.”

She reached out blindly, and turned away from him. “It is raining.”

“Out there, yeah. It started twenty minutes ago. I didn’t want to disturb you, so I diverted it.”

“Will the neighbours not notice?”

Harry laughed softly.

“What?” she asked suspiciously.

“Have a look around and you tell me.”

With a protesting groan she stretched, and then climbed off him. She stretched luxuriously again, smiled at him, and then wandered over to the edge of the balcony, her coffee in hand.

She turned, to find her Mate looking at her with a smile. She leaned over the edge and looked down, absently pulling her shirt up to ensure that he would have an unrestricted view. She turned and looked to both sides and then up, before she shook her head in disbelief. “Harry, did your apartment *originally* come with a balcony?”

He shook his head. “Nope, but I liked the idea, so I made one.”

She walked over and straddled his legs, sitting on his knees. “You made one?”

He nodded. “There’s nothing really advanced here. I had the balcony made the Muggle way, and I transported it here one night. A permanent sticking charm along with a weightless charm keeps it up. A notice-me-not charm means that no one sees it, or sees me on it, and I get a great uninterrupted view of London. After the first day, I added a few air freshening charms, and hey presto. I thought about adding warming charms and anti-rain charms, but I decided that I liked nature most of the time.”

She shook her head. “You are amazing,” she whispered. “And no one knows this exists?”

“Well, Ron and Hermione do, but they think it’s part of the building.” He grinned. “I had to create the illusion that every apartment had a balcony, so that Hermione wouldn’t lecture me about planning, permissions, and the risks involved.”

“So,” she said suggestively, “you think that we should christen it?”

He laughed softly. “You, my dear, are insatiable.”

“No, I am not,” she responded with a grin. “I was pretty sated earlier.”

“Maybe later,” he promised, “but again, we have to get back to school.”

She pouted and then blinked. She had spent so much time flirting and asleep against him that she hadn’t really looked at his eyes. She moved forward slightly and raised her hands to trace his face. She concentrated on his eyes; the green that she had always loved was both deeper and somehow brighter now. “Harry,” she said quietly, “bring up your magic.”

He did so and his eyes changed, the magic causing the darker parts to rotate slowly, giving them a hypnotic swirling effect. They seemed to be drawing her in, pulling her against him. “Wow,” she whispered.

“Do they twinkle?” he asked, sounding a little worried.

She shook her head. “No, nothing like Dumbledore at all. They twirl, Harry, and it is hypnotic.”

“Is that a good thing?”

“Yes.”

He laughed. “Breakfast?”

“I guess.” She stood and followed him into the kitchen, where he made her a bowl of cereal. “What are we wearing to the ball tonight?” she asked.

“I’ve been waiting for you to ask that for the past week,” he said with a teasing smile as he passed her the bowl. “You’re probably the only girl in all three schools who hasn’t been fretting about her costume.”

She shrugged carelessly. “You said you would take care of it.”

“Well, you remember what we said the other day, about the tall brunette?”

“You want me to go as *Natalie* ?” she asked.

“No,” he said, rolling his eyes. “I want you to go as Morgana La Fey.”

She blinked, then got it. “And you are going to go as Merlin?”

“That’s the plan. We’ll make you a few inches taller, and change your hair colour. I’ll be a few inches shorter, so we shouldn’t be recognised.”

She smiled happily. “See, I knew that you would take care of it. I have enough to worry about without worrying about things that you are taking care of.”

“What time do you finish today?”

“I have classes until three. Then I have a meeting with the other Head students and the Head teachers that will probably drag on.”

“Can you come and help me with the next tournament, afterward?”

“Of course.”

“After that, we’ll come back here and have something to eat, and then get changed and turn up for the seven thirty start. Olympe has ensured that I am not on duty tonight.”

She nodded and finished her breakfast. “Are you not eating?”

“Nah, I’ll grab something later.”

She frowned. “We really need to learn to cook.”

“Or hire one.”

“I would have to wear clothes, then.”

“In that case, we *really* need to learn to cook.”

She laughed and hugged him. “And we need to get my clothes here – so I can at least leave fully dressed. Fortunately, this time I can just Apparate back to my own room, but there might be occasions where the ‘boyfriend’ look is not appropriate.”

He wrinkled his nose. “Thinking about it, I’m going to show my face at breakfast at Hogwarts. I’ll see you later.” He reached onto the counter and grabbed his glasses. “I might not need them to see, but they are still extremely good sunglasses.”

He kissed her and Apparated out, leaving her alone. She smiled faintly and washed up the cups and her bowl before she walked back upstairs. The bed was a mess, so she straightened it the best she could, and had a look in his closets. They were pretty empty, making her wonder where all of his clothes were.

With a fond look at the bed, she Apparated to Hogwarts, barely even noticing the wards rippling at her passing as she borrowed just enough of his power to get through.

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“Harry,” Olympe called.

Harry floated down and hopped off his broom – which continued to float to one corner and stood itself up. The students he had just dismissed from his afternoon class looked at him enviously and put their brooms away themselves.

“What can I do for you?” Harry asked, mildly amused at the bemused way the Beauxbatons’ Headmistress was watching the broom instead of looking at him.

Olympe redirected her attention with a start. “Would you mind accompanying me to today’s meeting?” she asked.

“Any reason?”

“Severus was being irritating yesterday and I really don’t want to have to deal with him again.”

Harry shrugged. “Are you sure I won’t exacerbate the problem?”

“I can only assume that you will,” Olympe admitted cheerfully, “but at least Picup and I will be amused.”

Harry laughed. “When is it?”

“Now. We’ll be finished by five.”

“Then you’re in luck. I just happen to have a free period now. After you, my dear,” Harry said with a teasing expression on his face.

As they walked, Olympe turned and said in a low voice, “I have noticed that my Head Girl seems a lot more relaxed these days. It is like a load has been taken off her back.”

Harry smiled faintly. “Let’s just say that your years of hard work to improve Gabrielle’s mind will not be going to waste on her seventeenth birthday.” He looked at Olympe seriously. “What’s your policy about married students?”

Olympe slapped him on the back. “I’ve not got one, and I won’t have one. However, I’m sure I can come up with something just for the two of you. You *do* know silencing charms, don’t you?”

“Actually, we’ll probably not spend that many evenings at Beauxbatons. We’ll Apparate home after we’ve both finished for the day – that way you don’t have to worry about us setting a bad example.”

“That is a very good idea,” Olympe rumbled approvingly. “After you,” she said, indicating the stairs to Dumbledore’s office. “And please, feel free to say whatever you like.”

Harry straightened his shoulders as he walked into the room. The Head students were all sitting together – John was next to Natalie at the far end, a smug look on his face. Snape was sneering at the others, venting his spleen squarely at Gabrielle. For a second, Harry gave serious thought to blasting Snape into the wall and out the other side. He took a deep breath to regain his temper, and waited for the right moment. “...while you are

In our school," Snape continued whatever he had been saying in a smooth hiss.

"You will not be intimidated by sallow faced professors with appalling teeth and worse breath," Harry interrupted. He switched to German. "What was Snape saying?"

The German Head Boy smiled gratefully at Harry. "He was refusing our request that an independent official referee the Quidditch final. He wants to referee himself." Harry nodded and switched to French, asking the same question. Gabrielle gave the same response. Finally, he asked Natalie.

"We were asking that an independent referee be used for the final."

"They were," John sneered. "Including Nat, the trai..."

"If you sneer one more time at me, or any of the other students, I'll lock you in your room for a week," Harry snapped.

"You dare..." Snape started.

"Severus, shut the hell up," Harry growled. "I am really not in the mood to listen to you today."

"Now," Harry said, turning back to the students, "thank you for your concern, but the matter has already been decided. Madam Hooch has already informed me that she will not be refereeing. I've had a chat with the Quidditch League, and they have agreed, after witnessing the appalling tactics Hogwarts used recently, that a professional referee is the only way forward. As such, Trent Thomas, the referee for the Quidditch World Cup final, will be adjudicating."

"Headmaster!" Snape stuttered, turning to Dumbledore.

"Harry," Dumbledore started.

"And don't you start," Harry snapped. "You can, of course, refuse. It is your school, supposedly," he added with a sneer aimed at Snape.

"But if you do, then Beauxbatons and Durmstrang will leave this evening," he continued, "and you will have to explain to the world's press just why you were insisting that a juvenile professor with no Quidditch experience take on the most high profile match this school will ever have. You are already facing an investigation into just how a school that has previously produced some of the top players in the world has devolved into teaching abject thuggery."

"Now, unlike Snape, who seems to have endless time to put his beak where it's neither wanted nor needed, I have a real job to do. So, where's the Agenda for this meeting?"

"Here," Gabrielle said, as she passed him a piece of paper, she looked away, and sent him a burst of exactly what she was feeling. He carefully schooled his face, and sent her a mental poke back – finding out that she thought his tough-guy routine was incredibly sexy wasn't very helpful.

He scanned down the list of items and sighed. "Okay, let's start from the top. Nat, do you want to organise the ceremony for the leaving do?"

Natalie blinked and nodded.

"Make sure you talk to the elves. Persuade them to talk to some of the French and German cooks – that way everyone will be able to try some different dishes."

"Yes, Professor Potter."

"Excellent, right, number two. Julius, will you, Greta and the rest of Durmstrang work together for the award ceremony next Sunday? I'll be in charge of most of the prize giving. Come and see me tomorrow and we'll talk about the order. Olympe, will you talk to Minerva and Picup and get all the academic awards? I'll deal with Viktor and get the sporting ones." There were nods all around the table.

"Now, on to point three. Picup, how do you want to organise our leaving the following Monday?"

"I'd like to see you leave first, if you do not mind?"

"Not at all. So, Beauxbatons will leave first, Durmstrang afterward. Good, we're making real progress. Right, point four." Harry looked up as Severus tried to interrupt again. He reached up and pulled off his glasses, slamming them down on to the counter dramatically – they were charmed to withstand the impact. He pulled up his magic a little and glared at Snape. "Severus," he snarled, "if I hear one more complaint from you I'll presume that you were fully aware of what Malfoy was going to do, and publicly challenge you to a duel."

Snape's mouth shut and he managed to go even paler – a truly impressive feat.

"Harry..." Dumbledore started again.

"Does he know any other words?" Harry muttered in French under his breath. He didn't bother to respond to Dumbledore. "Right. Now, as I was saying, point four, the Quidditch final. We've already agreed the referee for the final. The English Ministry is in charge of the ticketing, and all the proceeds will be split evenly between English, French, and German charities. Kick off will be at three p.m. next Saturday. I think that's everything on the Agenda," he said, putting the document down on the table next to his glasses.

"By the way, it is very bad form to organise a meeting about something I am arranging and not invite me or Viktor," he pointed out, finally looking directly at Dumbledore.

“You are not a senior professor,” Albus explained.

“Just the only one who can get things done. I note that Snape is here – standing in as the Hogwarts coach, I assume? If seniority was at issue, Minerva would be here instead of him. But if he’s here as coach, I should have been invited as well.

“Tell me something,” Harry asked. “Why are you holding this meeting in English? You speak French and German, Albus, and Gabrielle speaks German, as does Olympe.” He pointedly did not mention what Snape spoke or didn’t speak.

“I don’t,” John said.

“Ahh, so we’re catering to the lowest denominator, then? And you wonder why Hogwarts is getting a bad reputation”

“Not from all of us,” Natalie said in hesitant German. “Some of us took the time to try and learn some of the language.”

Harry smiled approvingly at her. “At least there is some hope,” he replied in German. “Anyway,” he continued, switching back to English. “Is there any other business?”

No one said anything.

“Excellent. Olympe, Gabrielle, I’m going to need your help. Natalie, Greta, Julius, Picup, it was a pleasure as always.” He picked up his glasses and slid them back on before turning dramatically and walking out. He waved his hand irritably and the door jumped open, allowing him to leave without pausing.

He waited at the bottom of the stairs for Olympe and Gabrielle to catch up with him, and as soon as they did, he Apparated them both to Olympe’s office.

He could feel that Gabrielle was practically vibrating as she looked at him, but he was more concerned about Olympe’s reaction. She looked at him expressionlessly before she walked around the table and sank into her chair.

“Harry, will you please, please, *p/ease*, come to my next budget meeting?” she asked, before she broke into hysterical laughter. Tears were running down her face. “I have never seen anything as funny as the look on Snape’s face when you told him to shut up!”

Gabrielle started to laugh as well.

“And,” Olympe continued, “as for running through a two hour meeting in four minutes, that was just inspired.”

“I think I let my prejudices show,” Harry said, feeling a little embarrassed. “Snape was sneering at Gabrielle. I was feeling a little protective.”

“Would you do the same to the politicians if I pointed out that they always want to cut my budget, and that could affect her schooling?” she asked hopefully. “*Mon Dieu*, Harry, but you are magnificent when you are riled up. Fair and honest, egalitarian, and yet at the same time, so very dangerous.”

“Madame Maxime,” Gabrielle started.

“If you’re going to be my first married student, I think you can start calling me Olympe in private.”

“Thank you,” Gabrielle said, curtsying slightly. “I thought you enjoyed long meetings?”

“Oh, I do, normally, but I am fed up with Severus’ face. I talked to Picup, and we decided that we’d invite Harry to see if he’d shut him up for us – we’re both far too political to do it ourselves.”

“So you used Harry?” Gabrielle asked, a slight frown appearing on her face.

Harry almost smiled as he watched her prepare to defend him.

“No,” Olympe said, looking as if she had read the same danger signs. “We merely hoped he’d be able to allow us to get through the meeting without incident, and we recognised that talking about the final without him would be bad.”

Gabrielle nodded slowly.

“Are you two ready for tonight?”

“We are. Harry has come up with a wonderful idea that will allow us to dance together as much as we want.”

“Splendid.”

“Anyway,” Harry interrupted. “I think we should go and see if we can start the fifth years’ session a little early, since we all want to get out tonight.”

Olympe reached into her desk and passed two tickets to Harry. “All this evening’s tickets have been charmed to ensure anonymity. There are going to be a lot of Ministry personnel there tonight, from all three Ministries, not to mention reporters, parents and general hangers-on.”

“Thank you. We’ll see you there.”

Harry, for my own curiosity, who are you coming as?"

"Merlin and his wife," Harry replied.

Olympe smiled and then frowned. "Harry, what will you do if Albus sees through your disguise?"

Harry smiled coldly. "He won't. I've charmed the Great Hall. Tonight, Legilimency will not work, and people will be able to keep their privacy."

"Excellent," Olympe clapped her hands with approval. "Now, be off with you."

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"Okay, strip to your underwear," Harry said, "I'll be right back."

It was the work of a few seconds to strip down to her bra and knickers. She thought about it for a second and then removed her bra as well. She was still *technically* in her underwear, so she wasn't disobeying him; technically at least.

He returned with a pop, carrying two long clothing carriers. He looked at her and she felt a wave of desire across the Bond. She smiled slowly at him and tilted her head submissively, changing her posture slightly.

He groaned audibly. "You are bewitching."

"Thank you," she said, as she settled into a more normal posture.

Harry shook himself as if to clear his head.

"If only we had not promised all our friends that we would be there," Gabrielle sighed regretfully.

Harry draped the containers over the back of a chair and pulled out a red notebook. "Okay, trust me to let me try something I've never done before?"

She smiled at him, choosing to take that question as it wasn't intended. "Of course, would you like me bent over something?"

He flushed bright red.

"If I am being naughty, you could always punish me," she said suggestively, running her hands down her thighs as she turned away from him and then looked back over her shoulder at him.

Apparently there was a limit to even Harry Potter's self control.

The next few moments were the most intense in her life. She discovered that lovemaking could be just as good when it was rough and passionate as when it was gentle and loving. A couple of cleaning charms later, she was as before – although wearing a different pair of knickers, as the tattered remains of her previous pair were in the bin.

Harry looked a little more relaxed, even if his gaze was still hot against her skin. "Let's try this again," he said. "I'm going to cast a spell that will work a little like Polyjuice potion."

She nodded, aware that it might hurt.

He looked at her, and then summoned his wand. With a low voice he murmured several things that didn't seem to be any language she had ever heard before.

It was more uncomfortable than actually painful. She could feel herself grow, especially her legs. "May I see myself?"

He nodded, absently conjuring a full-length mirror.

She looked at herself and whistled softly. The woman staring back at her was familiar from portraits that simply did not do her justice; she was amazingly beautiful, with eyes the colour of burnished steel, and long, chestnut coloured, slightly curly hair.

Morgana's hips were slightly wider than hers and her breasts fuller. Gabrielle turned, to find that she was facing a legend. Harry was now Merlin. He was shorter and bulkier, his hair was much longer – she liked it enough to make a note to suggest that Harry grow his hair later – and he had a small pointed beard and a slightly Roman nose. His eyes were now a deep brown, and his skin colour was much darker.

"What do you think?" he asked. His voice was deeper now and carried an underlying tone of power that hadn't been there before.

"You are amazing," she said, to find that her own voice was deeper and smoother, and she had lost all traces of her French accent. "No one will recognise us like this."

He smiled. "And soon, we will not need disguises. But until then..."

She nodded. "So," she said suggestively, "can mine last all night?"

"Why?" he asked, a surprised tone in his voice.

"So you can make love to me like this."

Harry blinked at her. “But...”

“Oh,” she said dismissing what she knew he was about to say. “You will still be making love to me, but it will be exciting.”

“But...”

She placed her hands on her hips. “But I do not want to make love to you in that form,” she said, mimicking his voice.

“But...”

She smiled and walked over to him, lightly kissing him on the cheek. “But nothing. You are thinking of me as human again. Me in a different form is still me. I have promised myself that I will be every woman you will ever need. Perhaps to a human woman, that would mean the woman’s own form and she would be jealous if her man wanted her to look like someone else. But I am Veela. The fact that we can do this without the horrid taste of Polyjuice is just a bonus.”

“Gabrielle!” Harry finally interrupted. “What I was *going* to say is that sleeping with my hero’s wife would be far too weird for me.”

“Oh,” she said contritely.

“If you truly want to be someone else, we can try that – later, much later. At the moment, I want you, in your form – the form that you know is my dream girl.”

She felt herself blush. “I’m sorry,” she whispered.

He moved forward and hugged her. “I am learning more about you all the time, Gabrielle,” he whispered, “and that means that I do not forget who you are. Now cheer up, we’ve got a party to go to.” He walked over to one of the containers. “Close your eyes.”

She did as she was told, listening to the zip being opened, then the rustle of fabric. She felt the fabric fall over her head. She moved willingly as Harry placed her arms through the chiffon sleeves, and then his hands moved up her back, pulling the string that held the bodice together tight. “I had to get them to show me how to put one of these on,” he whispered in her ear softly. “As I’ve got no practical knowledge.” As he finished, she smiled slightly and moved her hands to adjust the built in bra that she was positive was a modern enhancement. Comfortable now, she let her hands drop to her sides.

“Okay, so they didn’t tell me how to do that,” he said, an amused tone in his voice. He fished the matching shoes out of the box and knelt in front of her. His hands touched her left ankle, raising it. She moved and then settled down into the two-inch heels, repeating with the other foot.

“Don’t open your eyes,” he repeated. She didn’t move as she listened to him dress – with a small degree of muttering. He moved to the side and wrapped one arm around her. “Open.”

She opened her eyes and gasped, seeing the two elegantly garbed strangers in the mirror. She didn’t know who to look at for the briefest of seconds; then every part of her being pointed out that she wanted to look at her Mate.

He was wearing a simple white tunic with silver Celtic patterns stitched into it. A matching Celtic pendant necklace hung around his neck. With his bulkier build, the design managed to emphasise his size and strength, without being showy.

She smiled and gasped as she looked at herself. She had been beautiful before, but in this dress she was beyond that. The skirt was sand-washed crepe silk with a silk chiffon ivory overskirt. The crushed velvet bodice seemed to change from deep purple to silver as she turned in the light. The bodice was boned and fitted with an on-the-shoulder neckline. Silver Celtic embroidery adorned it, each knot and figure glittering in the light.

Harry moved behind her and draped a crushed velvet cape, which matched her bodice, over her shoulders.

“Where did you get this?” she whispered.

“A Muggle shop. You can’t get this sort of thing in the Magical world. There are a huge number of people interested in legacy clothing. I went in with a sketch and Morgana’s measurements. It cost me a lot to get it done in a rush, but it was worth it.”

She nodded in complete agreement. “But why is your outfit so plain?”

“Because no one will outshine you tonight. I did order a different outfit for you as well, in dark blue, that will fit your usual form,” he admitted, smiling

“Really?” she said hopefully.

He nodded. “As pretty as you look like this, in your own form, you will look stunning.”

She reached up and kissed his cheek. “Maybe we can see if we can make this one fit me as well,” she suggested. “Mama is very good with clothing charms.”

“We’ll ask her later. Now, my dear Morgana, are you ready to rock the world?”

She curtsied gracefully. “My Lord,” she whispered.



My Lady.” He took her hand and Apparated them both to Hogwarts. They joined the back of a queue of people. She could see several of the Founders walking around, as well as other persons of note from history. A good number of people were wearing masks to hide their identities.

“Gabrielle,” Harry whispered into her ear.

She turned to look at him; his eyes, although brown, were still so familiar to her.

“Do not use your Veela power while you are in this form.”

The command was simple, and she felt her magic accept it immediately. “Yes, my Lord.”

He took her hand and bowed, kissing it dramatically.

“Oh, my Lady, your costume is fabulous.” The voice was familiar, even if she was wearing a mask that covered her eyes. The Hogwarts Head Girl was dressed as Rowena Ravenclaw, the outfit placing her natural assets prominently on display.

Gabrielle looked up and smiled. “Thank you,” she replied politely.

“So you’re English,” Natalie said with a cute pout. “I was sure that you’d be either French or German. Who are you?”

Harry smiled slightly. “One of the many guests from the Ministry,” he replied evasively. “This is a masked ball, after all. You would hardly expect me to be more specific.”

“True,” Natalie agreed. “You wouldn’t happen to know who Harry Potter is coming as, would you?”

“Is he coming?” Harry asked. “I hope I get to meet him.”

“Well, if you see him, please remind him that he owes me a dance.”

“I will,” Harry agreed, and handed over their tickets.

“Enjoy the dance,” Natalie called over her shoulder.

“I owe her a dance?” Harry whispered to Gabrielle.

“She was lying.” Gabrielle grinned suddenly and held up a long brown hair.

Harry raised his eyebrows at her.

“Just planning ahead,” she said and kissed him gently on the cheek, the hair vanishing into the bodice of her dress. “Now, let us show these people what dancing is.”

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“You’re looking pensive, brother mine.”

Fred was looking out over the dance floor, a worried frown on his face. He slowly turned and smiled at his twin. “Did you ever think there would be a day when we would have to rescue Harry Potter from a problem of his own making?”

George’s eyebrows almost hit his hairline. “Do explain, oh genius of a twin.”

“Look out there,” Fred said. “Which couple is Harry and Gabrielle?”

“It’s a costume ball. There’s no way we could tell,” George replied.

“Try again,” Fred suggested. “And try looking at what is in front of your nose.”

George looked out. It was a little unusual for him not to be on the same wavelength as his twin, and it wasn’t a feeling he was happy with. Down below, hundreds of couples were dancing. Some were even dancing well. Two people, however, were beyond that, one dressed as Merlin, the other Morgana La Fey – a prettier version than was usually portrayed in books, but recognizably Morgana. They were moving in perfect synchronicity as they glided around the dance floor, people moving out of their way automatically. They were giving off an air of grace and power that was totally in keeping with their characters.

He moved on, then stopped abruptly. “Fred, my dear brother.”

“Yes, George.”

“We’ve always been quicker than most, but this is outstanding.”

“I did the exact same thing you did,” Fred said modestly. “I was looking down, and you can’t help notice Merlin and Morgana, and how realistic they are – right down to the grace and power. And who is the only person alive with the balls and the ability to pull that off? And who is the only man you can rile up by making disparaging remarks about Morgana bearing Arthur’s children?”

“Harry James Potter,” George replied. “Which of course makes the gorgeous brunette our little Gabrielle.”

And," Fred continued, "if we've worked it out, it won't be long until the others do. And they don't want anyone to know about their relationship yet. We need to do something."

"Agreed. You go and try and get a hold of Charlie. I'll go and find Hermione and the girls."

"Why Charlie?"

George grinned. "Because he's the only one of us who can dance nearly as well as Harry. I think it's time that Harry Potter made an entrance."

"George, the best thing about being a twin is that we're never alone in our genius." The two grinned at each other and separated.

George looked over the balcony again, quickly located Ron, and dashed down to the dance floor. "Ron, Hermione, I need your help," he said earnestly.

"How did you know it was me?" Ron asked in surprise.

"Because the only other person who dances as badly as you do is dancing with a girl with incredible grace, and as pretty as Hermione is – when not in costume – she's not a Veela. Besides, Bill would never come dressed as a Seeker."

"What's the problem?" Hermione asked. She was dressed as a Muggle's idea of a witch, complete with warty nose.

"Not here," George replied, and gestured for them to follow him. As he walked, he pulled out a long rubbery coil. He spotted Angelina, Katie and Alicia by the punch bowls, and waved them over. They entered a classroom, and he dropped the coil. There was a flash of light. "Right, we can talk easily now. Did any of you notice Harry and Gabrielle?"

Hermione and Ron shook their heads. George sighed. "Okay, did any of you happen to notice a wizard who made your senses tingle who was dancing with a drop dead gorgeous witch?"

Hermione blinked. "Oh, Merlin."

"Exactly."

"What?" Ron asked, a confused expression on his face.

George rolled his eyes. "Merlin and Morgana."

Ron nodded, and then his eyes went wide. "Bloody hell," he muttered. "I thought their costumes were incredibly accurate."

"Indeed. My lesser half is fetching Charlie at the moment. Our mission is to make him look like Harry in disguise. That way, everyone will think that it's just a clever trick."

Hermione smiled slightly. "So we produce Charlie, playing Harry, playing someone else, and people won't recognise that Harry is really playing Merlin and dancing with Gabrielle, playing Morgana, who most people believe to be Merlin's enemy."

"While we're awaiting my dear brothers' arrival," George said, "have either of you ever mentioned anything about the whole King Arthur stuff to Harry?"

"Not really," Ron replied.

"I have," Katie replied. "He's fascinated with the legends – I'd often wake up to find him reading those books in bed."

There was a complete silence as everyone turned to Katie. "Katie, dear, is there something you've not told us?" Fred asked.

Katie went white, and then she started to blush.

"You little tramp," Angelina said admiringly. "You managed to bag Potter and keep it a secret!"

"Can we just forget I said that?" Katie asked. "It's in the past, Harry and Gabrielle are the present, and I'm happy with that."

"Are you?" Alicia asked softly.

"No," Katie admitted, "but he is. I had my chance with Harry, I screwed up our relationship, and we're friends now. There are memories I'd rather not live through again."

"One question then," Angelina said. "Was he as good as we thought he would be when we were in Hogwarts?"

"Let's just say that Gabrielle's probably the luckiest girl in the world." She shook herself. "So, let's get back to the point. Harry's reaction to King Arthur and Camelot and the like."

"Right," George suggested. "There is something going on there, and it makes my nose twitch."

The door opened and Fred and Charlie walked in. Charlie was in full dragon riding gear, including a helmet that covered his hair.

"Perfect," George said. "One costume all ready made."

“That’s what I thought,” Fred agreed. “So, how do we make our hero here look like a real hero?”

“Hey,” Charlie protested.

“The first thing we do is make Charlie’s tattoos look more fake and eliminate the freckles,” Hermione decided. “We’ll also have to do something about the hair, shape of the jaw – make all his features like Harry’s but not too like. The scar, of course – and then I’ll put some Muggle concealer over it so anybody that really looks for it can ‘see’ it. He’s the same height as Harry, so that’s taken care of. Charlie, walk to the other end of the room and back.”

Charlie did as he was told.

“Now, I want you to do that again, but this time, I’m going to cast a charm to try and make you walk like Harry.”

“How does Harry walk?” Charlie asked.

“Like he’s the most powerful person in the world, but doesn’t consciously admit it,” Katie replied. “Unconsciously powerful, until he gets riled up, then he prowls like a giant cat.”

“And your charm will do this for me?”

Hermione nodded.

“Thank Merlin,” Charlie whistled. “I’d hurt myself if I tried to do it myself.” He started to walk, and as Hermione hit him with the charm, his gait seemed to smooth itself out.

“Perfect,” Angelina announced. “What next?”

“It’s the aura,” Hermione said. “How on earth do we duplicate Harry’s aura?” She sighed, “I wish we could ask Gabrielle.”

“Well, if we can’t do that,” Ron said, “we should do the next best thing.”

“Fleur?” George asked.

Ron rolled his eyes. “Aimée. I’ll go and get her.” He jogged out the door and Hermione turned to Charlie. “While we’re waiting, let’s see what we can do with your tattoos.”

“This will be reversible, right? Getting these things was painful, and I have no wish to go through that again.”

“It will,” Hermione agreed. “I’m just glamouring them. The same thing we use to make Muggles think a unicorn is a goat,” she explained as she started to cast some charms.

A few minutes later, Ron returned with Jean and Aimée, who were dressed as French nobility – panniered skirts, powdered hair, beauty patches and all.

“Has Ron told you what’s going on?” Hermione asked.

“No,” Aimée replied, “but I am presuming that I am not the only one to notice that my daughter and her Mate are currently managing to bewitch the Great Hall with their dancing.”

“How did you work it out?” Fred asked.

Aimée smiled. “I would recognise Gabrielle anywhere. She might look different, but the pull on my heart is still the same, as it is with Harry.”

“And I am feeling blind again,” Jean said with a slight smile.

“And that, my dear,” Aimée said, “should teach you not to look overlong at the chests of young ladies. It may be *your* daughter you are leering at.”

Jean paled.

“I object,” he protested. “I was *not* leering.”

“Of course you weren’t dear,” Aimée sniffed dismissively. “So, what is the issue?”

“We have the look and Harry’s walk down, but we don’t know how to fake the aura of power that Harry controls. Without it, no one will really believe that Charlie is Harry,” Katie explained.

“Harry’s suppressing it completely at the moment, right?” George asked. “That’s why it’s not blatantly obvious that he’s playing Merlin.”

“Correct,” Hermione agreed.

“Hold out your hands,” Aimée instructed Charlie.

Charlie did as he was told, and Aimée frowned. “No rings?”

"I don't wear jewellery. It can get caught on dragon scales."

"Jean, take off your ring."

"Yes, dear."

"I watched Harry charm a ring the other day, and that ring had a very positive effect on Gabrielle."

"The glowing?" Ron asked.

"Indeed. So, we will all charm this ring together, and it will give Charles a power boost so that he will have an aura that will suffice for tonight."

George grinned. "Does it strike anyone else as funny that it will take nine of us to try to fake what comes naturally for Harry?"

"And we will not even come close," Aimée agreed. "Watch me, and then cast the same charm."

Aimée pointed her wand at the ring and cast the spell in a clear voice. A feeling of magic rushed out of her and into the ring. She stumbled slightly, and then leaned against her husband.

"Aimée," Hermione asked in a small voice. "How many of those spells did Harry cast on this ring?"

"Seventeen. And this was one of the easiest," Aimée replied as she seemed to gather herself and stood up straighter. "Frederick, it is your turn now."

Fred nodded and cast the same spell. George followed closely afterward, followed by Ron, Hermione and Jean.

"Now, Charles, place the ring on your finger."

Charlie did and gasped. "Oh, wow," he murmured.

"Now walk," Hermione told him.

When he had finished, Aimée smiled. "That is perfect. You do indeed, resemble Harry in disguise. How do you feel?"

"Like I could make a hole in the Hogwarts wards," he admitted.

"Don't try it," Aimée warned. "We have merely raised your power level to mimic Harry's when he is suppressing it normally. This is but a fraction of his power now, let alone his true potential."

"You know his potential?" Hermione asked.

"I do, but do not ask. I will not betray Harry's secrets."

"Not even to me," Jean muttered with a playful pout.

Aimée smiled briefly at him. "It would be better if you could Apparate in, but we can not risk Albus working out the truth."

"Won't he be able to see who's who anyway?" George asked.

"Harry charmed the Great Hall earlier," Aimée replied. "He mentioned it to Olympe."

"Good," George replied cheerfully. "He was thinking ahead. His only problem was that while he might be able to disguise himself and Gabrielle, he simply could not change who they are."

Katie walked up to Charlie and slowly circled him. She closed her eyes and took several deep breaths. "He's not Harry," she announced, "but it should fool everyone who hasn't slept with him. And of the other three, two aren't here tonight, and I'll talk with the last one."

"That will have to do," Fred replied. "Off you go, Chuckles."

"Don't call me that," Charlie said irritably. "Wish me luck."

He turned and walked out.

"Okay, so, back to the party?" Fred asked.

"I am afraid not," Aimée said. "We have only solved half the problem."

"Excuse me?" George asked.

"We are going to have to produce my youngest daughter as well, to avoid any complications."

"How are we going to do that?"

"Hermione, do you have any Polyjuice potion?"

"I can get some quickly enough. I keep a supply locked up in my office. I'll need to nip outside the wards, then Apparate."

"Will you be a dear and do so, as quickly as possible. Ron, will you go and tell Fleur to fetch Gabrielle's hair brush from her room."

"Yes, ma'am," he saluted, before he and Hermione turned and ran off.

"Now," Aimée continued. "Jean, a line or two of poetry in French please."

"*Je fais souvent ce rêve étrange et pénétrant d'une femme inconnue et que j'aime et qui m'aime*," Jean said. He switched back to English. "I have found that it is far easier just to do what Aimée says when she is in this mood."

Aimée smiled faintly. "Now, I want you all to repeat that line, one at a time, please. Angelina?"

Each of the five others recited the line in their best French.

"Congratulations," Aimée said to Fred and George, "your pronunciation was the closest to how Gabrielle would have pronounced it."

Fred and George paled, and then looked at each other. Together, they sighed, and held out their hands. They shook them three times, before each made a fist. They tried again, this time going to a scissors shape. They continued another four times, before George managed to win – his paper beating Fred's rock.

Fred sighed mournfully. "I knew I should have gone with scissors."

"Fleur and Bill will be here in a few minutes," Ron announced as he entered the room.

"Excellent," Aimée said. "Frederick has agreed to play Gabrielle for us. What am I going to do about a costume? Last year, it would not have been an issue, but now that my daughter is happy with Harry, her dress sense has improved dramatically."

"How about that Pompadue lady she likes so much?" Ron suggested.

Aimée winced. "Do you mean Madame de Pompadour?" she asked.

"That's her," Ron agreed. "Harry and Gabrielle talked about her the other night. They both seemed to respect her a lot."

"That is an excellent idea. My daughter would indeed dress to honour such an ancestor. Jean, please go and get a couple of my older dresses."

"Yes, dear," Jean said evenly and walked out quickly, passing Hermione and Fleur in the doorway.

"What is going on, Mama?" Fleur asked.

Aimée smiled faintly. "We have just sent Charles out to replicate Harry, who is currently acting as Merlin and we are about to send Frederick out to replicate Gabrielle."

"Which is why you needed some of her hair," Fleur said. She handed over the brush in her hand.

"Here," Hermione added, passing a small vial of potion.

"Excellent," Aimée praised. She carefully pulled a long blonde hair off the brush and placed it in the vial. The potion frothed energetically as it changed colour. She looked at Fred appraisingly. "Just one sip," she said.

Fred nodded and did what he was told. He shuddered at the taste. A moment later, 'Gabrielle' stood before them, clothed in Fred's now too-large Tweedledum costume. "So, how do I look?" he asked.

"Beautiful," George said. "For the first time," he added as he playacting a sniff, "a Weasley is really good looking."

"Ginny would disagree with the 'first time' remark," Fred replied.

"Yeah, but she's in Greece doing *something* with centaurs. Suspicious, that one."

"George!" Hermione complained, looking outraged at the insinuation. "She is working for the Ministry as a liaison officer."

"Right," George agreed. "Which is why she walks bowlegged and always has that stupid smile on her face."

"She's your sister!"

"That doesn't change the facts," Fred shrugged. "Maybe if we didn't have to listen to Mum complain about her never coming home every other day, we'd be slightly more sympathetic. But let's move on, no one here wants to see our dirty laundry."

"I love English," Jean said from the doorway. "So many lovely idioms and colloquialisms. I have your dresses, my love."

Aimée smiled at him.

"And that, ladies and gentlemen," Ron said dryly, "is an example of why Jean is a famous politician. He managed a complete subject change, garnering everyone's attention and stopping any negativity with a natural and unforced charm that makes the rest of us look like rank amateurs."

Jean merely grinned and winked at him. “What is the next step, dear?” he asked Aimée.

Aimée took the dresses. “Fleur, be a dear and transform Fred’s shoes, and then work with Hermione so that he can walk in them.”

“Yes, Mama.”

Aimée sat and took the dresses. She sighed as she ripped them apart along the seams, before she started to cast numerous small charms on them.

“Where did you learn to do that?” Bill asked.

“My mother – she felt that every woman should know certain things in life.” Aimée shot him a quick smile. “I need to concentrate now.”

“Sorry,” Bill apologised.

As Aimée cast the spells, the pieces of fabric from the dresses joined together and started to turn into one similar to the one she was wearing, but more elaborate. After another few minutes, she finished and held it up.

Bill, Angelina, Katie and Alicia all applauded.

“Thank you,” Aimée said. “Fortunately my daughter is known for not being very sociable at this sort of event, which will help us. We will need to ensure that Fred stays with us, to maintain the illusion.”

The others all nodded.

Aimée pulled a large curtain off the wall, and created a large changing area. “Frederick,” she called. “It is time to change.”

Fred nodded and walked over.

“Take off your clothes.”

“This is interesting,” he noted as he stripped. “For the first time, I understand why bras are a necessity.”

Aimée smiled. “Quite,” she agreed. “Why do you have your eyes closed?”

Fred blushed. “Because I don’t want to see her naked. Gabrielle’s Harry’s, and I wouldn’t feel right.”

“Then I will help you, and I commend your attitude.” She moved quickly, helping him into the outfit. “There,” she announced, “you can look again.”

Fred opened his eyes and looked down. “They look different from this side.”

“They?”

Fred just blushed.

Aimée laughed under her breath as she pulled out Gabrielle’s brush from her dress and started with Fred’s hair, pulling it back tightly into a ponytail, which she then shaped into an elaborate ‘do’ with charms. Gabrielle’s hair was light enough that no powder would be needed.

“That’s uncomfortable,” Fred noted. “The things you women do for fashion is beyond me.”

“Do you not appreciate it when your date looks her very best?”

“I do.”

“Next time, remember what she is going through for you.”

“I will.”

Aimée pulled back the curtain. “How does he look?”

“Perfect,” George whispered.

“You should volunteer next time,” Fred announced. “I’ve already learnt all sorts of fascinating things, and had some great ideas about how we can exploit it in the shop.”

“Businessmen to the core,” Jean murmured approvingly. Aimée, Hermione, and the other females rolled their eyes.

“Fleur, Bill, George, take Fred out to the dance. We will join you shortly. I will pass you a drink with some more Polyjuice in an hour. Before that wears off, we will take you ‘home’, and then you can rejoin the party as yourself.” Aimée said. “And thank you, everyone, for your assistance this evening.”

Fred took a deep breath and glided out the door, a small smile on his face, accompanied by the other three.

“Aimée,” Hermione said softly, “Exactly why did you choose Fred, when there are four females in here?”

“It was because of the way the twins pronounced some poetry,” Katie said.

Hermione frowned. “But why would that be important, since we wouldn’t be letting any one near him anyway? He doesn’t know any of Gabrielle’s friends, or even how she constructs her sentences. I can’t see Fred speaking so formally.”

“Was I mistaken?” Aimée asked, a sly smile playing around her lips.

“In what way?” Ron replied warily.

“I was under the impression that the twins enjoyed a good prank. This one is on them,” she said, the smile growing wider.

---

Charlie tried to keep himself composed and mimic what he knew of Harry’s facial expressions as he walked across the dance floor. He’d rejoined the queue to enter the Ball, re-using his own ticket to get in, and hadn’t really enjoyed standing around as Harry Potter after the first ten minutes. Being a celebrity was not what it was cracked up to be.

A couple moved in front of him, and before he knew it, he was dancing with Morgana La Fey.

“Why are you pretending to be Harry pretending to be a Dragon Rider?” she asked softly.

Charlie blinked.

Morgana smiled and he found himself being led around the dance floor. He was a good dancer; he had practiced long and hard, but he had never had a partner who made him feel so graceful before. “We felt the magical signature as soon as you entered the room, as did many other people.”

“It worked then,” Charlie said in relief. “Fred and George worked out who you and Merlin were. You may be in disguise, but your dancing and attitudes can’t be hidden.”

“Attitudes?”

“Harry is one seriously powerful wizard, and you are an incredibly beautiful witch. On top of that, there are very few people in the country who would have the guts to come as Merlin and Morgana. Especially with Morgana’s reputation as an evil witch. So, we felt that we should do something about it.”

“Thank you,” Morgana replied as she kissed him on the cheek. “Now, try and put a half smile on your face, and stay away from the Hogwarts Head Girl – she is a determined minx, and she is quite intent upon getting into Harry’s trousers.”

“Thanks for the warning.”

Morgana smiled mysteriously and swirled away, falling into instant step with Merlin, as they danced off.

“You are fortunate among men,” Aimée said, as she took Gabrielle’s place. “You are the first man she has voluntarily kissed who is not bound to her by blood or magic since she was eight.”

Charlie felt a feeling of pride shoot through him.

“Fleur will be over to dance with you shortly, then Hermione, followed by Susan Longbottom, Katie, Angelina, and Alicia, and finally, Penelope. After that, you may leave, get changed, and join the party for real.” She winked at him. “You may then dance with Natalie if you so desire.”

“Thank you,” Charlie replied dryly. “You know they say that you can’t appreciate someone until you’ve walked a mile in his shoes?”

“An English colloquialism, but I understand it.”

“I have a lot more respect for Harry now,” Charlie explained. “First, this is but a fraction of his power that I’m feeling, and I feel like I should be doing whatever I want, because who could stop me? And secondly, it is lonely. As Charlie, people talk to me all the time. As Harry, people have not talked to me. They move to one side to allow me to pass, and then I catch what they’re whispering out of the corner of my ear.”

Aimée smiled and stopped with the music. “Then tonight has been worthwhile for you, too,” she decided.

She turned away and Fleur took her place.

“I’ll say one thing for all of this,” Charlie said, an amused tone in his voice, “Harry gets to dance with some truly beautiful women.”

“Why thank you,” Fleur purred back. “You are not zo bad yourself. ‘Arry is lucky to ‘ave friends like thees.”

“It feels good to be able to pay a little back,” Charlie explained. “We owe him so much that this is the very least we can do.”

---

Fred entered the Great Hall, pleased he had people surrounding him. He really didn’t like being leered at so openly. He was making a mental note of everyone who was doing it aggressively, and determined that he was going to pay them a visit as soon as he was out of this costume.

He looked around, and when he looked back, he somehow found himself dancing with Merlin.

“Relax,” Harry said, “I’ll take you around. Just let your body react normally, and you’ll look as graceful as you can. Aimée is acting surprised that you are dancing with me, and Jean is making the excuse that you are just being polite.”

“Thanks, sweetie,” Fred whispered.

“Thank you for doing this,” Harry replied. “Gabrielle’s already said thanks to Charlie. Although I hope you won’t mind if I don’t kiss you.”

Fred blushed. “I’d appreciate it if you didn’t,” he agreed. “Do you have any idea how many people stare at Gabrielle?”

“Far too many,” Harry sighed.

“Why don’t you do anything about it?”

“Because I’d end up with a body count higher than Voldemort’s if I did.”

“Oh.” Fred thought for a moment. “You wouldn’t mind if I was to take steps later, would you? Just on the ones who seem to be over the top. I have a few things from the shop that need testing.”

“No,” Harry smirked. “Be my guest. How do you like being female?”

“I’m going to find a way of replicating Polyjuice potion, so that you can switch easily. It’s great fun.” He looked around warily, and continued, “and I’m gonna be so irresistible to chicks when I use this knowledge.”

Harry laughed softly. “We really appreciate this,” he said seriously.

“Harry,” Fred replied seriously, “this is the least we can do for you.”

Harry smiled and twisted, and before Fred knew it, he was dancing with Jean.

---

Katie stretched as she awoke from a deep sleep. She looked around her living room and smiled. Angelina and Alicia were showing signs of life on the other chair and the sofa.

She turned her head and squeaked with surprise. The squeak drew the attention of the other two.

“Katie?” Angelina asked.

She smiled slightly. “Look next to you,” she advised.

The girls did, and squeaked themselves. Next to each of them were a small card and a small box. Katie opened hers. Inside was a small pair of diamond earrings. The shape and size were her favourites.

Angelina squealed as she opened hers and found a thin platinum necklace with a Celtic Irish cross pendant. Alicia’s box had an elegant silver watch.

“Who?” Angelina asked.

“Open the card and find out, silly,” Alicia replied as she ripped the envelope open. She read the message and smiled brightly.

Katie opened hers and read:

Last night was above and beyond the call of duty. We value our privacy, and you enabled us to keep it and to have one of the best nights we have enjoyed together. Your friendship is worth everything to us.  
Please accept this trinket as a thank you.  
Harry and Gabrielle

“Trinket?” Alicia snorted. “Right. So, Bell, just how did Potter get these to us?”

“He’s Harry Potter,” Katie replied. “He probably just Apparated half-way across the world to find an open jeweller’s shop, and then placed them next to us as we slept.” It was exactly the sort of thing that he would do, and would do without a second thought, as if that level of dedication was normal. She tried not to think about what might have happened if she had tried a little harder with him, rather than following the easy path.

She sighed softly, her eyes caressing the words on the card.

“Katie,” Angelina said softly as she moved over to her. “You need to talk, love.”

Katie looked up.

“You do,” Alicia agreed. “We’ve been worried about you for a long time, but you wouldn’t talk. We knew something was wrong – you changed, sweetie. Now we know what it is, and it’s time.”

Katie took a very deep breath and then exhaled slowly. “Gabrielle knows some of this, but I gave her the watered down version, so please, don’t ever talk about this again.



"It was two years ago, Harry was already having a stellar career and had learnt from his dating mistakes. I was out with Mel, and, as always the men were falling over her – including my date. That was when Harry sat down next to me. I'd played against him, and of course I knew him well from Hogwarts, but until that moment, I hadn't realised that he was Harry Potter."

"What do you mean?" Alicia asked.

"That he's *special*, you know? That he can change the world. He wasn't just a Quidditch player, or an heir, or the defeater of Voldemort, he was *special*. We got to talking, and he was trying to cheer me up. He told me some stories about his dating disasters and I kept drinking. Harry never drinks that much. He must have nursed his beer for a couple of hours. Anyway, he took me home, and I invited him in. I was lonely, slightly drunk, and horny as all hell."

Angelina nodded. "What did he do?"

"He kissed me gently, and told me to ask him again when I was sober. And by the time I'd cast the sobering spell, he'd gone. And I was bloody angry. I was still horny as anything and now I was stone cold sober on top of it. As attractive as my bed is, it wasn't somewhere I wanted to be alone right then. So I got on the Floo, called in a few favours and found out where he lived in London – it was easier to do then than it is now, trust me.

"I changed quickly into my best lingerie, threw on a long coat and Apparated to his address. I knocked on his door, and he opened it. His shirt was half open, his hair was a little unkempt – more than normal – and he was wearing a pair of tight jeans."

"And?" Alicia prompted breathlessly.

"I looked at him, undid my coat, posed as sexy as I could, and said, 'I'm sober now.'

"He looked at me for the longest moment of my life before he grinned and pulled me into his apartment. I didn't get more than a glance before he was kissing me. It was an incredible kiss. I had been horny before, but this was something else."

"He's that good?" Alicia asked.

"You've been near him and felt that little thrill, right?"

"Like you're standing next to something very magical?" Angelina murmured.

Katie nodded. "When you kiss him, it's a lot more. Somehow, he manages to move his magic into his kiss. It's intoxicating, it's breath taking, and it's almost addictive. His hands slid around me, and he picked me up as if I'm weighed nothing. I'm five-eight, and 149 pounds - we're professional Quidditch players, we're never going to be lightweights – and I felt like a feather. He didn't stop kissing me as he carried me upstairs."

"And?" Alicia demanded.

Katie smiled softly. "I thought I'd be the experienced one, but I didn't have to teach him a thing. He knew where all my buttons were and pressed them all before he found some new ones. He's amazing, his body is beautiful, and he knows how to use it – and then you add his magic, and it was the best sex of my life."

Alicia and Angelina nodded.

"So anyway, I was happy, sated, and we fell in to a routine. We played Quidditch during the day, and had great sex at night. We enjoyed each other's company. But it seemed like we weren't really connecting at a deeper level." She took a deep breath, trying to fight the tears that suddenly threatened to overwhelm her. She could feel her friends wrap their arms around her.

"I wanted him to go first – you know, to say those three little words. To commit to me before I would commit to him. But that wasn't happening. I knew what I had to do, but I was scared. I thought I wasn't ready for a permanent relationship yet. After all, I had a career, I had friends, I had a night life, I had everything I persuaded myself I wanted – so I convinced myself that it was all his fault, that he was emotionally constipated." She could almost feel her friends wince. "And so we started to argue." The tears started. "I've tried to deny this for so long, and I feel so guilty about what I did – I couldn't even tell Gabrielle the truth."

"But wasn't the Bond they have part of the cause?"

Katie snorted. "Bond, schmond. All I had to do was tell Harry that I loved him more than anything in life, and that I wanted his children, and that Bond would have snapped faster than Flint facing a referee. It was easier to take the coward's way out."

"What did you do, Katie?" Alicia whispered.

"I said, in the middle of an argument, when he was trying to placate me, 'Of course you don't love me, you're too busy fucking Hermione behind Ron's back.'" She gave in to the tears completely. "And as soon as I said it, I knew it was over. I would have given anything and everything to take those words back."

Angelina and Alicia were holding her tightly and she was so grateful that they hadn't shunned her.

"Any other man would have hit me, would have shouted at me. Harry, he did something a million times worse. He just whispered, 'Goodbye, Katie,' and Apparated away. And just like that, the very second he was gone, I realised that Quidditch didn't mean as much to me as he did, and that I had just broken it beyond repair. There are a few things that Harry holds inviolate, and his relationship with Ron and Hermione is one of those," she

finished with a sob.

"After that, I threw myself back into Quidditch and he went on to get injured in the Cup final. I didn't even go see him. Instead, I wrote him an apology letter, and the next time we met, we were back to being friends. I know I hurt him badly, but he never showed it; he never did anything but treat me as a gentleman and a friend. But never again did I see his eyes smile at me, like they do at Gabrielle." She sniffled a half laugh. "And that's it, that's my tawdry story of cowardice and regret."

"Oh, Katie," Alicia whispered and hugged her tighter.

"Some times I wish I could hate him. I wish he had called me a bitch, called me a whore, that he had hit me – anything other than give me his friendship, because when I'm alone at night, and I can't sleep, all I can think about is how it was my fault, not his." She tried to laugh, but it didn't come out right. "But you know, it's a little better now than it has been."

"It is?" Angelina asked, surprise in her voice.

"Yeah. Have you looked at Gabrielle? She's the first woman I've ever met who is really Harry's equal. She can give him something I couldn't – not just unwavering devotion, but an incredible empathy and intellect. With me, he would have been happy, we would have had a couple of kids, and he would be famous and powerful.

"With Gabrielle, he will fulfil his potential and be a legend."

"But what about you?"

"I have to believe that there is a man out there for me. I'm still young. I'll find someone who can make me happy – and maybe even forget that I came close to living a dream."

The three girls were silent for a few minutes. "Okay," Angelina announced abruptly. "That's enough."

"What?" Katie asked.

"You fucked up, and you've paid the price. It's time to move on. Now we all know the truth, Harry's forgiven you, we've forgiven you, it's time for you to forgive you."

"Damn right," Alicia agreed. "You screwed up yourself and Harry. He's fallen on his feet – like he always does – and you can move on now as well."

Katie nodded softly.

"So, this Saturday, after the game, we'll go out, have a damn good time, and come home and have a blow out on chocolate, champagne and strawberries."

"And Sunday, we'll head into the gym and get rid of everything," Angelina added with a grin.

Katie couldn't help laughing. "Thanks."

Alicia shrugged. "We all talked about sleeping with Harry when we were younger – at least one of us did it. You're part of an exclusive group – of people who are close to Harry Potter. You should be proud."

"In a way," Katie agreed. She pulled herself together and took a deep breath. "It could have been *much* worse."

"Oh?"

"Yeah," she grinned. "I could have slept with Flint."

"Ewwwww!" Alicia and Angelina screamed in unison.

---

"Wake up, sleepy. We had a visit from Father Harry."

Fred opened his eyes blearily. "What?"

"Father Harry – you know, like Father Christmas, only he comes on different days."

Fred sat up. "What, and why?"

"Well, he gave the girls jewellery, he gave Bill and Fleur a weekend in Dubai, he gave Charlie a holiday in Ibiza, Ron got a new broom, Hermione a spell book that no one even knew existed, Aimée got a necklace she loves, and Jean got a new watch. All of it, as expected, extremely tasteful and refined. As for why, well, for helping him out last night. You know what Harry's like – he can't believe that we might possibly owe him, so he treats it as something special when we do help him."

"Damn it," Fred said with a slight pout. "I told him that we were happy to help! The next time we help him, we then sit on him until he admits that we got to pay him back and he doesn't have to do anything for us."

"That would be difficult," George said, "because you can see that Gabrielle helped."

“Do I want to know what he got us?”

George just held out a piece of parchment.

Fred looked at it and blinked. He read it, and then read it again slowly. “He is insane.”

“Or a frickin’ genius.”

“The two are often close. Did you understand this?”

“I was up early, and when I saw this, I couldn’t go back to bed. If it works…”

“Yeah. If…”

Fred shook his head. “I think it’ll take close to a year to work this out into magic that we can actually do something with, but I think it’s a way to charm to objects to work like a Floo system. You know what this is, don’t you?”

“Global mobile phones,” George agreed reverently. “Only Harry could give us a year of solid work, and make us happy about it.”

## Hope 12 - London(2)

Harry was pleased to be back to teaching normal sized groups, although his schedule was now overstuffed. He had agreed to help out with Hogwarts' lessons after Minerva had asked him, and after a little work, had managed to work them in with his normal Beauxbatons sessions. Facing only the seventh year Ravenclaw and Slytherin class, he rested his hands on his broom in front of him.

"All right, everyone into the air," he ordered, and watched the various ways that the students mounted their brooms. At least they did that properly, although he was convinced that was due to them learning before Malfoy had got his claws into them – that, and the fact there were relatively few ways to screw that up, Neville Longbottom notwithstanding. Without any real thought, he allowed his broom to push him straight up, not changing his standing position.

He could see the students gaping at him as he did that and hid a smile. He was showing off a little, true, but he had to get through to this group of students, and show them that flying was not just about power.

"Your performance in the last tournament was pretty bad," he said quietly, addressing the Hogwarts students as he looked at the combined class. "But you're all in the last year of Hogwarts, and basically adults now. So I'll leave the choice up to you. I can start you on a path that will allow you to fly properly, or you can depend on what you've learnt. If you don't want to learn from me, you are dismissed. If you do want to learn, I'll see you the other side of the pitch." He took a deep breath and heaved himself up, pushing his broom down at the same time. He somersaulted backward twice, before landing on his broom perfectly. In seconds, he'd swooped down and looped back to the place he'd pointed out.

He turned to watch the students with interest. There seemed to be a large argument brewing between Natalie and John, as the two head students tried to persuade the others to follow their suggestions. It looked like Natalie was winning, as John was going bright red and shouting.

Harry sighed and waited. He knew what Malfoy would have done in this situation, and he expected John to react in the same way. As Natalie turned to head over to the spot he'd indicated, John suddenly went for his wand and started to cast spells. Harry was prepared, and cast three of his own before John even finished the flourishing and gesturing he seemed to find necessary. Harry's first spell intercepted whatever it was that John cast, the second removed John's wand from his hand, the third summoned John – without his broom – over to hang in mid-air before Harry.

John's face was still red and he swore viciously at Harry, ignoring the fact that he was thirty feet off the ground, being held up only by Harry's magic.

"John Abrams," Harry said formally, "attacking an unarmed student is against the rules of Hogwarts, and as such, I hereby suspend you from the position of Head Boy of Hogwarts."

"You can't do this, you fucker," John spat.

"I have already done it," Harry said calmly, ignoring the insult. "Madame Maxime and Professor Andropov insisted that all students maintain a common code of practice and behaviour. You have repeatedly broken that, and your attack on the Head Girl just now was the last straw. Now, you will return to your room and wait until this evening for a formal hearing."

"Snape won't let you," John sneered.

Harry smiled coldly. "I believe I told you not to sneer at me." He waved his hand and the boy vanished.

Natalie and the others flew across to join him, curiosity on everyone's face.

"Natalie, John's been suspended for today, pending an investigation this evening. I will expect you to be there."

"Yes, Professor Potter," Natalie replied.

"So, are you guys ready to fly?"

They all nodded.

"Right, follow me, do what I do, and don't worry about falling off."

"Why not?" one of the students asked.

Harry smiled and rotated along a horizontal axis before he let go and fell to the ground. He tumbled in the air and landed flat on his back. The charms he had placed on the field earlier caught him and bounced him back into the air. He did a double somersault and called for his broom. As soon as it was in his hand, he swung it between his legs and zoomed back up to meet the others.

"Charmed ground," he explained with a grin. "Now, follow me."

The rest of the lesson went smoothly. A lot of the Slytherins didn't look happy, but they kept their opinions to themselves as Harry tried to erase several years of bad teaching in as short a time as possible.

Near the end of the lesson, he looked down and smiled. "Keep going," he yelled, as he rocketed down to meet the Goblins.

"Mr Potter," the lead Goblin said respectfully. "We have the items you requested."

"Excellent," Harry replied.

"Sign here," the Goblin muttered.

Harry signed with a flourish from years of signing autographs, and took the package. "Thanks for dropping it by personally."

The goblin nodded. "You are welcome," he said as he turned and started to walk away.

Harry quickly flew back up to the students, shrinking the package and putting it in his pocket. "Just some personal business," he explained at the curious looks he was receiving.

"The Goblins aren't known for leaving Gringotts," Natalie pointed out.

Harry smiled faintly, but otherwise ignored her comment. "One more loop and we're done."

As soon as the lesson was over, he watched the students put their brooms away, and then Apparated to the Beauxbatons castle before Natalie could corner him. He walked through the halls to Jean and Aimée's room and knocked on the door.

"Harry," Aimée greeted him cheerfully. She was wearing the necklace he'd picked out with Gabrielle from a jeweller in Australia the night before.

"Busy?" Harry asked.

She shook her head. "I'm expecting Jean back shortly for lunch."

"I know; that's why I thought I'd catch you here." He followed her into the living room and took a seat at the table, rather than the couch. Aimée raised her eyebrows at him slightly.

"Would you like a drink?"

"Please."

Aimée vanished into the kitchen and returned with a cup of tea and a butterbeer. She placed the butterbeer in front of him and sat next to him. "You are being mysterious, and your eyes are twirling."

Harry took off his glasses and smiled. He placed the package he had received from the Goblins down and placed the envelope to one side. He opened the package and pulled out a folder. "This," he explained, turning the folder and opening it, "is a summary of the current holdings of the Black Trust."

"What is that?" Aimée asked, as she automatically started to scan the text.

"It's something I inherited from Sirius. It's a trust set up to help others. Originally, it was a way of funding Voldemort without anyone knowing who was donating the money, but as it was already set up like a charity, I decided to keep funding it and use it for a legitimate purpose."

Aimée nodded, her eyes not moving from the figures in front of her.

Harry smiled happily; he had hoped that she would be interested. "The problem is, I don't have time to run it properly, and while the Goblins run it for me, they'd really rather not. As the idea is not for it to make money but to give it away, it goes against their nature – and they are truly conservative in their world view."

"As I can see," Aimée murmured, as she turned the page and continued to read.

"Aimée," Harry said formally, "I would like you to take over running the Black Trust."

"Hmm?" Aimée asked absently, not looking up. She suddenly paused and carefully placed a perfectly manicured finger at her position. "I'm sorry, Harry, what did you just say?"

"I asked you to run the Black Trust."

"Oh," Aimée said, and for the first time since he had met her, she was completely lost for words.

"I mentioned this idea to the goblins, who went away and did a little research, and they agreed that with your experience in running a large company, you would be perfect. So, how do you feel about taking on a project of this size?"

"I don't know what to say."

"Try 'yes', and we'll take it from there."

Aimée shook herself and then looked at him. “Details, Harry – I need details. What is your goal with this?”

“I’m rich,” he said. “I have no wish to be poor, but really, I don’t need all this money, so I may as well do something with it to help others who haven’t had the luck to be the heir of two wealthy families or haven’t had the luck to be paid an obscene amount to play a game for a living, or who weren’t fortunate enough to get in on the ground level with Fred and George.

“What I want is someone to run it – to decide what goes where, to hire people to help them run it, and to ensure that the money goes to ethically correct places. The idea isn’t to blow all the money, but to use it to make a real difference. The person who runs it will be in charge, completely, with minimal oversight from me and the goblins, naturally.”

Aimée nodded slowly and went back to looking at the figures. “I thought that we were wealthy,” she muttered under her breath, “but this is wealth on a completely different scale.”

The door opened and Jean walked in. “Good afternoon, Harry. Hello, love.”

“Lunch is in the kitchen,” Aimée said distractedly.

“Harry?” Jean asked. “What have you done to my wife?”

Harry smiled innocently at him. “Me?”

Jean groaned. “Harry, you haven’t given her a challenge, have you?”

“Jean-Sebastian, kitchen,” Aimée ordered. She finished the last page and turned to Harry. Her eyes were alight. “Do you really want me to do this?” she asked.

“Yes.”

“Then I accept. Thank you, Harry.” She offered her hand, but Harry ignored it and stood so that he could hug her.

“Thank you,” he replied.

Aimée smiled and hugged him back. “As you are here, you can eat with us,” she said firmly. “And we will explain to my husband why he is losing his little housewife again. Sit.”

“Gabrielle’s on her way,” Harry said as he felt his Mate draw nearer.

“Excellent,” Aimée said. “I’ll go and rescue my kitchen.” She paused. “Gabrielle gets her ability in the kitchen from her father.”

Harry laughed and relaxed back, tilting his chair onto two legs.

A few seconds later Jean joined him, with a sheepish look on his face. “So,” he said amiably, “what have you offered Aimée?”

“Two secs,” Harry said, as the door opened and Gabrielle walked in.

“Papa,” she greeted her father with a nod and a smile as she walked over to Harry for a hug.

“Your fiancé has conscripted your mother,” Jean said, a teasing smile on his face.

“You have?” Gabrielle asked.

He nodded and pointed to the paperwork. Gabrielle reached it before her father could and moved it in front of Harry, so that she could sit on his lap while she read.

Harry met Jean’s eyes and shared a moment of amusement.

“Gabrielle,” Aimée said firmly from the kitchen door. “Sit on your own chair.”

“But...”

“Gabrielle!”

“Yes, Mama,” Gabrielle said with a pout. She slid into her own chair and continued to read for a moment before glancing up. “You have asked Mama to...?” she asked him.

He nodded.

Gabrielle shot him a smile that warmed him inside.

“Will someone please tell me?” Jean asked the ceiling.

Aimée entered and placed a bowl of soup in front of Harry and Gabrielle. She walked back in to the kitchen and returned with two more bowls. “Harry has invited me to run the Black Trust,” Aimée said calmly as she sat down.

Jean frowned. "That was a Death Eater slush fund, was it not?"

"Once upon a time, yes," Harry agreed. "But it's now a proper charity."

"Why do you need Aimée to manage it?"

"Because the goblins object to giving money away," Harry replied calmly.

"But..."

Aimée sighed. "Gabrielle, pass your father the last piece of parchment. We will not be able to eat until he has reassured himself that I have a proper job. The soup needs to cool, anyway."

Gabrielle passed the paper; Jean took it and skimmed it. He looked at the bottom figure and his face lost some colour. "This number," he said in a low voice. "It is a telephone number with an area code, yes?"

"Jean," Aimée sighed. "This is not the time for levity. That is the current balance."

Jean pouted. "That is a lot of money."

Harry shrugged. "I guess." He passed the other envelope to Gabrielle.

"What is this?" she asked softly.

"She gets that from Jean as well," Aimée said to Harry. "Open it dear, and find out."

"Yes Mama," Gabrielle replied, sticking her tongue out at her mother. She opened it and blinked as a card fell out of the folded paper, onto the table.

"Harry?"

He shrugged. "The paper is your personal identification number."

"Harry, I do not need this," she said, picking up the card nevertheless. "I have my own money."

"We have our own money," Harry corrected. "We're getting married, that means that we share things. If I trust you with my heart, I can easily trust you with everything else."

"Thank you," Gabrielle whispered, she reached out and lightly took his hand. "Thank you."

Jean sighed softly, "Well, that's another sign." He looked down and tried the soup. "At least the soup is good." He looked at Harry, his eyes amused, "Are you sure you know what you're getting into here? The Delacour women are headstrong."

"Papa," Gabrielle protested.

"Your father is teasing," Aimée said calmly. "And if he doesn't want to be sleeping on the couch, for, say, the next decade..."

"See," Jean said to Harry. "It won't be long until Gabrielle is threatening you with the uncomfortable couch."

"I would never threaten like that," Gabrielle replied, her voice completely scandalised. "Mama taught me much more effective things than that," she finished with a grin.

Harry laughed and started on his own soup. "I didn't think anyone in your family could cook," he said, changing the subject.

Aimée smiled. "My daughters are spoiled and my husband thinks that chicken comes from the farm pre-cooked. I did try to pass on my knowledge, but Fleur and Gabrielle had other, 'more important' things to do."

"We are going to learn, Mama," Gabrielle said. "Anton has offered us both lessons."

"Why don't you just hire a cook?" Jean asked.

Harry paused, timing his reply carefully. Just as Jean took another mouthful of soup, he replied. "Because then Gabrielle would have to get dressed, and I prefer her running around in whatever she is comfortable in."

"Harry James Potter!" Aimée yelled as Jean spluttered, spraying soup everywhere.

Harry laughed under his breath. "I'll stop," he promised.

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The meeting room next to Dumbledore's office only had eight people in it. Albus Dumbledore was at the head of the table, flanked by the heads of Houses for the school. Opposite them sat John, Natalie and Harry.

Harry was only invited because he was the one who had suspended John earlier.

“Why don’t we start at the beginning,” Minerva McGonagall said formally. “Mr Potter.”

“I had thought that allowing students to curse other students without provocation was something that had been eradicated from Hogwarts,” Harry said. “Sadly, I see that you are still teaching that violence is a perfectly acceptable way of settling a dispute. I gave the seventh year Hogwarts students a choice: they could learn to fly a broom or leave. I left them to a decision. Natalie appeared to be winning the argument, so when she turned to join me, John pulled his wand and attempted to curse her in the back.”

“Lies,” Snape sneered.

“Which part?” Harry asked politely.

“All of it.”

Harry sighed. “Of course, the fact that I have witnesses from Ravenclaw and Slytherin is irrelevant, and the fact that the Hogwarts Head Girl is here before you and corroborates it is also irrelevant?”

Snape sneered, while John smirked.

“I don’t think we’re going to get anywhere at the moment,” Harry said dryly, “so I think that as Severus seems to think that violence is the answer, I will respond in kind.” He raised his hand suddenly and batted at Snape. The greasy professor flew across the room, sticking to a wall near the ceiling.

“Severus Snape, I hereby challenge you to a duel,” he announced quietly in a formal manner. “You have impugned my honour time and time again, and I refuse to accept it, anymore. You are an arrogant, offensive, snivelling coward with the scruples of a slug. I will expect to see you tomorrow on the duelling platform.”

“Stop,” Dumbledore roared. “I will not have this.”

“This is no longer about you,” Harry replied without looking away from Snape. “You may allow this piece of slime great latitude. I do not.”

“Severus,” Dumbledore said.

“I withdraw my accusation,” Snape mumbled.

“Excellent,” Harry replied, freeing Snape – who dropped twenty feet to the ground. There was a distinct ‘crack’ and the Potions Master screamed in agony. Harry absently cast a silencing charm on him and looked around at the other three professors. They were all fighting to hide smiles.

“So,” Harry continued. “Now that we have established that the Head Boy tried to curse the Head Girl, what are we going to do about it?”

“Mr Abrams,” Professor McGonagall said formally. “This is not the first complaint that we have received about you. The Hogwarts Head Boy position is a position given to students who maintain the highest possible standards of conduct, something you seem to be unable to do. You have shamed yourself and brought dishonour to your house. We have no choice in the matter. You are hereby stripped of the position of Head Boy. The House Elves will return your belongings to the Slytherin seventh year dorm room, where you will rejoin your peers.”

John went completely white.

“Miss Jenkins, do you think that you can handle the responsibilities as Head Student on your own?”

Natalie nodded. “If Gabrielle Delacour can manage it at Beauxbatons, I’m sure I can do it here.”

Minerva nodded. “Is there anything you would like to add?” she asked Albus, Filius and Pomona.

Filius and Pomona shook their heads.

“Are you sure this is the correct decision?” Albus asked softly.

Minerva looked at him for an endless moment, then simply replied, “Yes.”

He nodded slowly and turned, walking over to Severus.

“If you would explain to the prefects what has happened,” Minerva said to Filius, “I would be grateful. If you could also remind them of the consequences of acting in a manner unsuitable for a prefect, we will perhaps not see this sort of thing again. In all my years of teaching, this is the first time I have had to strip a Head Boy of his responsibility, and I hope that I never have to go through it again.”

She turned her attention to the former Head Boy. “Mr Abrams, I hope that you understand that the sort of behaviour shown today is completely reprehensible. It is also foolish. We watched as Tom Riddle, or Lord Voldemort, if you prefer, spouted the sort of ideology that you seem to prefer, and he is now dead, his dreams of conquest a long-forgotten nightmare. We live in a society that is slowly overturning the idea that violence is an acceptable solution to any problem, and we, as professors, support that ideal to the end. I hope you take this opportunity to examine your current behaviour, and see the error of your ways.

“Miss Jenkins, I will ask the head teachers of Beauxbatons and Durmstrang to direct their head students to assist you for the next week, so that you may have a period to get used to this idea.”



"Thank you," Natalie said softly.

"Mr Potter, Hogwarts tries to live up to the highest possible standard of behaviour and responsibility. You have shown today that we have not reached that mark. I will also be launching an independent, formal investigation into the actions of Professor Snape. Hogwarts has a reputation of being the best school in the world and it is a reputation that you have helped set. I will not sit by and watch that accolade pass to Beauxbatons or Durmstrang without a fight.

"You can rest assured that the results of the investigation will be made public."

"May I suggest that you ask Percy Weasley to chair the investigation?"

Minerva nodded. "I did have him in mind. I thank you for your quick action today."

Harry nodded and stood. "Thank you for your time," he said, ignoring the sight of Dumbledore helping Snape, limping heavily, out of the room.

Gabrielle hovered above the ground, watching the students who had qualified for the final. After a long discussion with Harry, she had persuaded him that it was better that she didn't take part in the contest. He wanted her to, as he was convinced that she was the best flyer there, and he wanted everyone to know it.

While she loved her Mate's pride in her, she didn't think it would be fair for her to participate. Besides, as the wife of a World Cup player, she would be going to the match anyway, and so had no need of a ticket or an invitation to meet the team.

Harry had reluctantly agreed, and then shown his pride in a more personal way – a way that she was extremely happy about.

She was happy to help him organise the final. It gave her a break from Natalie. The Hogwarts Head Girl had taken every opportunity to pick her brains, and while she did not mind helping, it was eating into time she could spend with Harry.

Her Mate was in his full Quidditch uniform, and was warming up with Viktor. The two of them were equally good on a broom. They had different styles, but the same amazing speed and control.

The students and professors were in the stands, cheering each move, ready for the competition to begin.

She called out the names of the first two students from a list on her clipboard, and the first race started.

It was another close competition, as the competitors were whittled down slowly. The Hogwarts students did better this time, as they took more time to fly the course, rather than try to barrel through it.

Stephan, the winner of the original competition, was knocked out in the semi final, but Marie, the sixth year, was in the final. Gabrielle made a mental note to spend as much time with her as she could, so that she could take over as Seeker when she left. The girl's flying skills were improving all the time.

She could see Harry talking to her intently, just as Viktor was talking to the other finalist – Reinhold, the Durmstrang Seeker.

"Ready?" she called, stopping the impromptu coaching session.

The two students lined up next to her. "On three," she said. "One. Two. Three!"

The two students raced off, ducking and diving through the course as they tried to avoid the Bludgers. She felt like cheering herself, but restrained from doing so. She floated higher, so that she could see their progress more easily, and could see Harry and Viktor shadowing them from the outside of the course, both ensuring that no cheating was going on.

They both exploded through the last obstacle at the same time, but Marie's roll had been smoother, and she carried just enough momentum to beat Reinhold to the line.

The Beauxbatons students exploded into cheers, as Harry swooped down and hugged Marie. The girl was dancing on her broom excitedly, and hugged Harry back exuberantly. Gabrielle was slightly amused the effect her Mate could have; it was almost like hers, only without the magic.

As Marie floated down to her friends, Harry flew over to Reinhold and Viktor, and shook hands with both of them. Whatever he said to Reinhold had the boy straighten his back and the disappointed look faded slightly from his face.

Gabrielle smiled and cast a *Sonorus* spell. Greta and Simone stood at the same time – they knew what was coming and were going to translate so she only had to talk in English.

"We'd like to thank all participants for putting on tonight's entertainment. And to thank Professor Potter for generously giving up his free time to arrange it." There was a roar of approval from the students present.

"Now, as many of you know, after the first competition, Professor Potter and Assistant Professor Flint raced through this course on professional mode. Today, Professor Potter and Assistant Professor Krum have agreed to race for you."

There was another huge roar, as Harry and Viktor shook hands before they flew up. She floated down, and as she had with the students, she counted them off. This time, she had to fly as fast as she could to her vantage point, as both Seekers flew off at top speed, braking at the last moment for the first obstacle.

The two were neck and neck as they shot through the course at the same incredible speed. There was hardly a gap between them as the two of them ducked and spun around moving objects. The Bludgers were chasing after them, but they couldn't keep up as the two best Seekers in the world battled it out.

She felt herself tense up as she bit down on the urge to scream her support for her Mate. It was something she would do as soon as they went public, but for now she had to content herself with willing him on, silently.

He was so graceful on the broom, and she loved watching him, especially like this, when he was so focused.

They both blasted through the last obstacle, heading for the line, but Viktor was moving faster, and he crossed the line first with several seconds to spare.

She swore under her breath, disappointed for Harry above everything else. But her Mate was smiling, and she couldn't detect anything negative from him as he drifted over to Viktor to offer his congratulations. She gathered up the pride she felt for Harry, and her love for him, and gently pushed it down the Bond to him.

It was the first time she had really seen Harry lose, and his grace and genuine delight for Viktor was something she hoped that everyone could see.

As the crowds started to disperse, she helped Harry dismantle the course, and then headed in for dinner, wishing that she could find a way to spend some time with him. It wasn't fair that she couldn't.

Dinner was interminable as she tried to be herself. It helped knowing that Harry was okay, but she still didn't like it. After dinner, she had a meeting with the other head students before she could finally go to her room, and then Apparate to Harry.

She arrived and jumped at him without hesitation. He caught her, and she buried her face in his neck.

"Gabrielle?" he asked softly.

"I'm sorry," she mumbled.

"For what?" he asked.

His hands stroked her back softly and she slowly leaned back and looked in his eyes. "But you hate losing," she said softly, confused by the complete lack of regret that she was feeling from him.

"I do," he agreed. "But I can't hate losing to someone who's better than me at the moment. Viktor is in the middle of a season and he's playing at the highest level every week. I'm not. I'm out of practice, and hopefully, we'll do this again when I'm back playing, and I'll see if I can beat him then."

She smiled, her earlier glumness disappearing. She kissed him tenderly and then hugged him. "I'm proud of you," she told him seriously.

"You are?"

She nodded.

"I see you went shopping."

She laughed softly. "Actually, I asked Mama for help. She shopped – I just tagged along and agreed with her. And I paid," she said firmly. "Mama argued, but I felt that it was right."

Harry nodded. "It was. That's why I got you the card. At some stage, we'll go over my finances so that you can see where we are."

She reached out and lightly touched his hair, trying absently to see if it would look better a different way. "Thank you," she said. "It means a lot to me that you'd do this."

He nodded. "I trust you."

"I think you should grow your hair long."

"Oh?"

She nodded. "It looked really nice on Merlin, and I think it would look nice on you, as well."

"I'll think about it. When I'm not playing competitively."

She smiled brightly. "So, what is the plan for this evening?"

"Why don't you put your new clothes away, and then do your homework. I'm going to work out for a bit."

She nodded and kissed him briefly and moved up the stairs, pausing to look down over the balcony at Harry. He cast some charms on a corner and a fully fitted gym appeared. He stripped his shirt off, replacing it with a thin t-shirt, and then changed his jeans for a pair of shorts.

He waved his hand casually, starting some music, as he moved into a space and started to stretch. Each movement merged seamlessly into the next as he worked all his major muscle groups. She sighed softly, a smile on her face, as she enjoyed the ability to just watch her Mate, and know

that later, she would be able to kiss him, and that he would kiss her, and they'd spend the night together.

She tore herself away from watching regretfully, and started to unpack the bags in the bedroom. There were a lot of them, but over half were for Harry. She'd enjoyed being able to shop for him, and had chosen clothes that she was positive would look great on him.

The clothes stored away, she moved to the kitchen table and started her homework. She was out of Harry's sight simply because she knew that if she *could* see him, she wouldn't get anything done.

An hour and a half later, Harry padded in softly, a towel around his neck. He leaned over and kissed her lightly. She inhaled deeply, drinking in his scent, and decided that she'd done enough homework. She stood and turned to face him, grabbing the towel.

"Gabby?"

She smiled at him and started to pull him toward the bedroom. She'd done her work, he'd done his, and they'd been diligent all evening. Now it was time for their reward.

Harry looked out at the Quidditch pitch and couldn't help smiling. This last week had been the best of his life. Gabrielle had slotted neatly into his life. They'd spent every evening together, sometimes with their friends or with Gabrielle's parents, and sometimes with just the two of them. He'd never actually spent this much time with one person before. Even with Katie, they had both had their own lives and didn't spend every waking minute together.

Rather than resenting it, he found it quite wonderful. He disliked not being able to show her affection in public, or to spend even more time with her.

The only slight blip on his horizon was the fact that the Aurors still hadn't captured Malfoy.

Down below, Gabrielle was with Reinhold and Viktor, as they helped her practice some of the new Seeker moves she had learnt. Fred and George were with the Beauxbatons and Durmstrang Beaters, and the pattern was repeated all over the pitch. Each Beauxbatons player had both a professional and a member of the Durmstrang team with them.

"Okay, guys," he shouted. "This is as good as it's going to get. Everyone down."

He swooped down casually, and sat on his broom. Viktor landed next to him and did the same. He shot his friend a quick grin.

The Beauxbatons team spread out in front of him, the Durmstrang players behind them.

"I'm proud of you, all of you," Harry said in English, as it was the common language for everyone there. "When I joined Beauxbatons this summer, we didn't have a team. Now we stand on the verge of a final of an international Quidditch tournament. In a fair world, we would be playing Durmstrang tomorrow, but this is not a fair world."

"Tomorrow, when we take the pitch, we will have the weight of not just one school, but two, on our shoulders. Viktor and the others have helped us out above and beyond the call of duty, and none of you resemble the players you were a couple of months ago."

"You have worked incredibly hard to get to this position, and you are all nervous. It's okay to be nervous, but tomorrow, when you hear the roar of the crowd, and you see the light of the sun, that is when you will lose your nerves, and you will go out and give it your all."

"You will lose yourself in the roar of the crowd, in the majesty of the moment. And when you do, that is when you will truly become Quidditch players. That is when you will taste immortality, as you touch something bigger than you, bigger than your team."

"This is sport at the highest level. It is addictive, it is competitive, and at the end, when you have put everything of yourself into it, you will feel like nothing before, like nothing you have ever imagined. You will feel and understand exactly why Viktor and I have dedicated everything we have to playing a game."

"So tonight, I want you to go to your rooms and get a good night's sleep. There are vials of dreamless sleep potion by your beds if you need them. Tomorrow, you'll meet me here before breakfast. And that goes for you Durmstrang players as well. For tomorrow, you're honorary members of Beauxbatons."

"Viktor, anything to add?"

Viktor grinned. "Potter tocks too much," he grunted. "But he spiiks vell. Sport is honourable combat. Do not lose dat honour tomorrow, and give it everythink. Dat vay, vin or lose, you vill be able to look in mirror and see a mon." He paused and looked at Gabrielle. "Or wo-mon."

Gabrielle smiled at him.

"Go on, the lot of you," Harry ordered.

As the students left, Viktor turned to him. "You expect problems?"

Harry sighed. "Certainly. Snape's not the sort of person to take direct action, so I'm expecting the food to be tainted. We'll take them somewhere else for breakfast and to have a practice match, and then come back for the final."

Krum smiled and patted Harry on the back. "Veela chick is content. You did good, Harry."

Thanks, Vik. You will be coming to the wedding, right?"

"Dat depends," Viktor said with a smile. "You introduce Krum to the pretty chaser properly?"

"Katie?"

"Ja."

"Viktor," Harry said seriously, "I'd be delighted."

Viktor grinned and stood. "I'll leave you to tidy," he said. "Us poor professionals have to get our beauty sleep."

"Night," Harry replied and started to pack away.

"Potter?"

"Harry?"

"Can we have a few minutes?"

Harry looked up to see the press descending on him like a horde of Dementors. He swore to himself. He'd forgotten that Picup, Olympe, and Albus had been holding a press conference this evening. He contemplated Apparating away, but at the last second, decided not to.

Gabrielle had managed to deal with the vermin nicely, so maybe he could as well.

He sat back down on his broom and crossed his legs casually. "You've got thirty minutes."

As a group, the press seemed to freeze as they stared at him in disbelief. "Do you mean it?" one of them asked.

Harry glanced at his watch. "That's ten seconds gone. I'd advise using the rest of the time to ask better questions," he said with a grin. "Of course, I can sit here and just answer 'yes' for the rest of the evening, if you want. Let's do it one question at a time, so, you first."

The journalist Harry pointed at blinked, and then asked, "What do you think of Beauxbatons' chances tomorrow?"

"Very good. They've worked incredibly hard, and we've had some very good people training them. I think they're ready, and tomorrow I look forward to seeing them play their hearts out. Next."

"How do you feel about teaching students to beat your former school?"

"Torn. I dislike a lot of what has happened to Hogwarts, and I've made no secret of the fact that I think that neither Malfoy nor Snape are qualified to deal with students of any age. On the other hand, Professor McGonagall and the other Head of Houses are incredibly gifted and talented professors who are doing what they can.

"But the biggest thing I feel is the need to show that violence and rule breaking are not how to play Quidditch. Quidditch is the sport I love. I like to play it hard, but within the rules. Sure, I've broken a few in my time – every professional will say the same – but not having anything other than cheating to rely on means that as soon as you have a strong referee, you have nothing left to rely on. Okay, the guy at the back with the hat."

"What did you think about Snape wanting to referee?"

"You heard about that?" Harry grimaced. "It was the most ridiculous idea ever. I remember playing under his tutelage at Hogwarts, and it was the most unfair game I've ever seen. I had never before even contemplated abandoning a match, but I came very close in that one."

"You still won, though."

Harry grinned. "I did, at that," he agreed. "Snape was livid – good memory, that one. Okay, the lady in the purple robes."

"What did you think about the Delacours shutting down the Daily Prophet for a day, and did you think that the full page apology was enough?"

"That wasn't really any of my business," Harry said thoughtfully. "I'll have to say, personally, that I was pleased. It doesn't seem like much to ask for in a society – a free and accountable press. I believe in press freedom, but I also believe in accountability. Some of the articles about me have been full of lies and slander, and no one has seemed to care. Well, this time the Prophet chose the wrong person to pick on.

"Jean and I fought together during the war against Voldemort, and I know him to be an honourable and upstanding man. You can trust that his word is his honour. Gabrielle is one of the most talented people I've ever seen pick up a broom, and her Quidditch progress has been nothing short of phenomenal."

"What do you feel about Mr Delacour being made the next Minister of Magic in France?" the same witch asked.

"If I were a French citizen, I would vote for him. The world needs more honourable politicians. But we're moving a bit far afield here, my opinion on international politics isn't that important. Okay, the witch to the left of the guy in the hat."

"Potter, do you have a girlfriend?"

"What is this, Primary school?" Harry mocked. "My private life is that, until I choose to make it otherwise."

“Are you gay?” she asked.

Harry laughed. “No. Okay, you at the front.”

“How did you bend the wards of Hogwarts to allow Beauxbatons castle to descend?”

“First, I want to say how hard the pupils of Beauxbatons worked. It was an incredible display of teamwork that fully deserved the praise it has earned them. My job was minor compared to the magic involved with moving that huge building.

“What I did was channel my magic to the same frequency as the wards, then set up a rotating counter frequency to divert the magic around the edges I wanted. From there, it was simply a case of keeping everything together and allowing Beauxbatons to drop down.”

There were some very blank looks on the face of the journalists at his response.

Harry smiled faintly, “I’d recommend talking to Hermione Granger, who may be able to explain the theoretical magic in a more digestible format. You have two more questions. You, and then you.”

The first wizard looked at him for a long moment, and then shrugged. “Are you the most powerful wizard alive?”

Harry thought about his answer for a long second. “I’m certainly one of the most powerful,” he agreed. “I’m not sure if I’m *the* most. People like Albus are exceptionally strong wizards, and have a lifetime of experience behind them. I’m still young, and have so much to learn. Ask me that again in fifty years’ time and we’ll see if the answer has changed. Last question.”

“You’ve been more open tonight than ever before,” the last journalist said. “Does this mean that your relationship with the press is changing?”

“Possibly,” Harry answered. “I’ll see how this gets reported and take it from there. I learnt a long time ago that public opinion is fickle. I don’t like being hounded, so if being more accessible means I can walk down a street on my own, then I’ll give it a shot.” He paused to draw his wand. “If not, I’ll start walking around like this.” He cast a spell on himself.

“What does that do?”

Harry smiled. “Take a photo and then look at it when it’s developed, and you’ll understand. It blurs my image from any form of recording.”

Most of the photo-journalists paled at the idea of losing their favourite target.

Harry nodded at them and patted his broom. It flew off to one side and parked itself neatly in the racks with the others.

“It’s been interesting,” he said with a nod, and Apparated away.

A few minutes later, he felt Gabrielle draw on his magic and Apparate next to him. She appeared and bounced into his arms. “I am so proud of you,” she said after kissing him.

He smiled at her. “Just learning from you,” he said.

“You were wonderful, and they were pretty shell-shocked that you did it,” she said. “They might even print what you said.”

Harry smiled. “We’ll see. I’m not holding out too much hope.” He yawned. “Come on, we should get to bed. We need to be up early so that we can take everyone out for breakfast.”

Gabrielle nodded and yawned as well. “Carry me?”

“I think I can manage that,” he said with a smile, and drew her up so that he had one hand under her knees, the other around her shoulders. She snuggled against him.

“You always look after me,” she whispered.

“And I always will.”

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The day of the final match in the inter-school Quidditch tournament dawned clear, if cold. The Beauxbatons and Durmstrang players gathered together in front of the Beauxbatons school building talking cheerfully, their breaths visible in the early morning light. Viktor, Angelina, Katie, Olive and Alicia were all standing slightly to one side, talking in low voices.

Fred and George were planning on meeting up with them later; they were going to spend the morning in Hogwarts.

“Good morning,” Harry called as he appeared near to the doors, holding several brightly-coloured plastic hoops. All the students turned to face him, excited expressions on their faces. The feeling of excitement and anticipation in the air increased a bit.

“Too early to be gut,” Viktor grunted. “Breakfast better be worth it.”

“Yeah,” Harry agreed. “I’ve not actually eaten where we’re going before, so I have no idea.”

Viktor sighed mournfully.

Harry laughed and tossed the large hoops at the students. “Portkeys,” he explained. “Everyone grab hold.”

The students did, and Harry activated the Portkeys. They appeared in front of a large house in the middle of London. The door in front of them gleamed invitingly; the silver serpent knocker shone as if it had its own power supply.

“Professor Potter,” Gabrielle said, “is this...”

“The erstwhile headquarters of the Order of the Phoenix?” Harry asked. “Yes. Welcome to one of my ancestral homes.”

The door swung open, and several house elves peered out excitedly. The first, in a blue uniform, walked out. “Welcome,” he said, bowing deeply.

“Thank you, Matti,” Harry said. “Is everything ready?”

“Things are being readiest,” Matti said. “We is being excitedest as well.”

“The outside looks excellent. You’ve done a fantastic job.”

Matti beamed. “We is enjoyableing the work,” he said. “And we is being delighted to get rid of dankest. Follow Matti, food is being readiest.”

They all followed the elf into the bright and friendly entrance hall. The walls looked freshly painted, and the carpets were new. At the end, a large painting of a couple dressed in Wizarding robes looked down at them.

“My parents,” Harry said with a faint smile. “Sadly, they never sat for a Wizarding portrait, so I had this done from some old photos I had.”

A lot of the students half-bowed at the painting in respect, before they followed the excited elf up some stairs and into a large dining area. The room was as sparkling clean as everywhere else, and the ceiling had been enchanted so that it showed a bright summer’s day, filling the room with light.

The table was polished so that it shone, and there were enough plates for everyone.

“Please be sitting down,” Matti invited everyone.

They all sat down, Harry taking the head, the other adults took the foot.

Immediately, large jugs of orange juice appeared, as well as milk, cereal, and some fresh fruit.

“Don’t stand on ceremony,” Harry said dryly, “dig in.”

“Professor Potter,” Reinhold started.

“For today, you can call me Harry,” Harry interrupted. “When we’re back in class, we can be formal.”

“And you can call me Viktor, or Vik,” Viktor added. “Ve are not really Professors.”

“And that makes us Angelina, Katie, and Alicia,” Angelina added. “It freaks me out every time you are formal; I keep looking over my shoulder for Mum and Dad.”

“Harry,” Reinhold started again, “Our History professor talked about this place being dark and miserable – and that you didn’t really like it. What happened?”

Harry poured some milk over his cereal and tilted his chair back. “What happened here is well known – Hestia did a pretty accurate job with her account of the efforts before the final battle. A lot of my memories of this place were tainted by the fact that Dumbledore was still trying to control me, and it was the last place that I spent any time with my godfather.

“The summer after the war, I spent some time with the goblins looking at my finances. This turned into an intensive lesson in asset management, as I didn’t have a clue just how rich I actually was. I grew up not knowing that I had any money at all, and it made me pretty independent, so I decided I wouldn’t use the Black or Potter money personally.” He paused and smiled slightly. “My determination might have been somewhat influenced by the signing on bonus I got from the Cannons, and the first dividend check from Fred and George.

“So, anyway, I resurrected the old Black Death Eater slush fund, made it into a proper charity and begged the Goblins to run it. They agreed – for a large fee – and I thought that would be the end of it.” He paused as the cereal and fruit vanished, to be replaced by a veritable smorgasbord of dishes – a mixture of French, English and German breakfast items. The students blinked for a second before eagerly diving in like it was going to be their last meal.

Harry waved his hand absently, and his plate filled itself. “What I hadn’t thought of was what to do with this place – which wasn’t part of the deal – and the house-elves I owned. I was planning on freeing them – anyone who is Muggleborn is never going to be truly comfortable with the idea of indentured servitude. But Matti had been talking to Dobby, and he came to me to ask for a favour instead.

“He asked for permission for him and the elves to renovate this place. As it was what they wanted, I gave them the go-ahead, and set up the finances for them to do what they want.” He paused and looked around. “I think you’ll agree that they’ve done an amazing job.”

He took a few bites of his breakfast. “To be a professor for a second, the obvious thing to realize here is that if people are motivated and want to work for you, they will do a much better job than someone who is forced into it. And that if you find talented individuals with a passion for what they

do, you should trust them to do it. The goblins and I did regular inspections to check that things were on course, but everything went perfectly – or as perfectly as any renovation project does,” he finished, smiling wryly.

“The elves have one more floor to do, and then they’re going to start on the next property. They’re happy and don’t overwork themselves. And when I asked them earlier this morning if they would mind putting on a breakfast at short notice, they were delighted to help.”

“What do you think the Hogwarts players are doing now?” Nicholas Blanc asked.

Harry sighed. “Probably swearing at us for putting Snape in a bad mood. They’ll be having breakfast with everyone else, and Snape will be fuming that we’re not there and he’s not able to try and spy on us. Madame Maxime and Professor Andropov will be telling everyone where we all are.” He smiled. “After we finish here, we’re going to have a warm up.”

“Professor Potter,” Gabrielle said lightly, “I think we all know that smile of yours means you are about to announce another surprise.”

“Me?” Harry asked innocently.

“Right,” Angelina said dryly. “Come on, Potter, spill the beans.”

“Just because we’re going to be practising at Old Magic Park, doesn’t mean that I have any beans to spill.”

“No way!” Claude and Anton shouted, their voices drowning out the other expressions of shock and surprise.

Harry grinned at Viktor who was laughing.

“We’ll have a good look around, and then we’ll have a practice session before we go back to Hogwarts and get ready for the match. So eat up – don’t let this wonderful food go to waste.”

Harry took his own advice, and started to eat with a bit more attention. He could feel Gabrielle’s excitement, and her pride in what he had arranged, and sent back the equivalent of a hug.

After the breakfast was finished, all the students made a point of thanking the delirious elves, and they took the next Portkey to the famous Chudley Cannons stadium.

Harry looked around and almost laughed at the awe-struck expressions on the students’ faces. The stadium was massive, standing hundreds of meters tall. It was able to hold close to fifty thousand fans in comfort, and was a regular sell-out. It was one of the biggest dedicated sporting arenas in the Wizarding world.

“Come on,” Harry said, and led them through the gates.

“Harry,” Katie called. “We’re going up to the observation deck.”

Harry smiled and nodded at the others.

“Morning, Mr Potter.”

“Good morning, Stephen. How’s the pitch today?”

“It’s good, sir.”

“Excellent,” Harry said cheerfully. “Stephen is the Cannons’ head gardener here, guys; he keeps the pitch nice and firm for us, and repairs it after we crash into it.”

“Aye,” Stephen said with a grin. “It is fun.”

He led them through a maze of corridors to a large changing room. There were fifteen benches, each marked with a number, with a broom holder to the left. The students milled around, looking at the places and running their fingers lightly over the broom handles.

“The away team’s facilities are identical,” Viktor said.

“Which spot is yours?” Eric Ernhand asked.

“Normally, number seven,” Harry said. “Keeper is one, Beaters are two and three, and the Chasers have the next three spots. The rest are substitutes. Gabrielle, if you want to use the away changing rooms, you’ll find that your Quidditch kit is waiting for you. Everyone else,” Harry clapped his hands, and a large trunk appeared.

“Where are the changing rooms, Prof... Harry?” Gabrielle asked.

“You show her,” Viktor muttered. “I will take care of everyon else.”

Harry nodded and led Gabrielle across the hallway and down a corridor. As soon as the door shut behind him, Gabrielle reached up and wrapped her arms around his neck. “Hi,” she said softly.

Harry raised his eyebrows at her as his hands dropped to her waist and he held her against him.

She smiled at him brightly, before standing on tip toe to kiss him quickly. "That was from everyone else," she said, "or it would be if the Durmstrang students knew I was with you." She leaned up and kissed him slowly, pushing herself against him. "That is from me," she whispered against his lips. "For managing to make today even more special than it was going to be."

She drifted away from him and dropped her robes onto the floor.

"Gabby," Harry sighed as he picked them up.

She grinned unrepentantly at him as she stripped off her shirt and bra, tossing the items of clothing at him as she did. She reached onto the pile of clothes and pulled on a sports bra followed by a short t-shirt. She bent and removed her knee-length school skirt and looked up at him, a mischievous expression in her eyes.

"Yes," he said to the unasked question. "I am enjoying the show."

She smiled happily. "Want to dress me?"

"Not here," he said with a shake of his head. "I've got enough spells to notify me if anyone comes near here, and I don't need to be distracted."

She pouted. "It's only one more day until we can announce it and I can get used to kissing you whenever I like." She paused. "What are we going to do at Beauxbatons?"

"I had a word with Olympe about that," he replied. "We'll do what we need to at school during the day, and at the end of the day we'll Apparate to our apartment and spend the night there. That way we don't have any issues with the other students."

Gabrielle nodded. "And we can go shopping soon?"

"For?"

"Things to warm it up," Gabrielle explained as she wiggled into her Quidditch uniform trousers. "Maybe some pictures for the walls, a plant or two, something for the balcony, that sort of thing."

Harry nodded. "Next weekend?"

Gabrielle finished getting dressed and pulled her hair back. "There," she announced.

Harry made a show of looking her over from toe to head, and nodded approvingly. "I've never seen anyone wear that uniform as well as you do."

Gabrielle grinned at him. "That is because you are male," she explained. "If you were female, and looked in a mirror, you would understand."

Harry laughed, fighting a blush. "Come on; let's go have a warm-up."

Gabrielle nodded, and she seemed to shut down a little before his eyes. The bright light dimmed, the smile she had been wearing for him faded, and she looked like she did when he had first met her. The differences were both subtle and extreme at the same time.

He walked out the door, putting his own mask back on, aware that Gabrielle was following him a couple of paces behind.

They emerged onto the pitch where the male students were already waiting for them. Harry walked in front of them as Gabrielle joined them. "Hmm," Harry said with a fake casualness as he glanced around. "I know what we're missing. Brooms!"

As he said brooms, Stephen walked onto the pitch, pulling a cart behind him. He opened them up, and as a single group, the students screamed. Inside were a series of professional brooms, for each position. "Be careful with them," Harry said. "We're only borrowing them for the day."

"For the day?" Henri, the Beauxbatons Keeper asked incredulously, his eyes wide in surprise. "Does that mean we get to use them in today's match?"

Harry smiled and nodded.

There was another cheer – a louder one from the Beauxbatons students who would actually be using them. "Okay, everyone up," Harry yelled, as he grabbed his own professional broom and flew high into the air. "We'll have a game – no Bludgers and no contact. Beaters, you can play as auxiliary Chasers. We're just here to warm up."

"What about you and Viktor?" Gunther shouted.

Harry looked at the Bulgarian Seeker, who shrugged and then smiled. He thought for a second, and then grinned. "Okay, change of plans. As before, two teams, but Viktor and I will play as Bludgers. If we tag you, you have a thirty second penalty where you can't move."

What followed was a two-hour match with a lot of laughter. All the Beauxbatons players seemed to forget that they had a big match that afternoon as they played against the excited Durmstrang team. Gabrielle and Reinhold were holding a low speed battle for the Snitch, but using that as an excuse to dive through the players. Viktor was doing the same thing Harry was, pulling off outrageous broom moves to catch any student who came too close to them.

As Harry looked around, Gabrielle floated past him, so he turned his broom and gave chase. She looked over her shoulder, and then wiggled her rear at him as she hunkered down and tore off.



He moved into the racing position himself and started to follow her. She led him around the goal posts for the Beauxbatons team then straight across the pitch, diving in and out of players, before she headed down.

He followed her, concentrating on closing the distance, and he slowly did – before he had to abruptly pull up to avoid hitting the ground, as she pulled off a picture book Wronski Feint. Harry laughed out loud, sped up near her, placed his feet on his broom and jumped across. He caught himself one handed on her broom, and heaved himself up to tap her shoulders, then let himself go. He somersaulted backward twice before calling for his broom and landing perfectly.

“Just wait, Potter, until I tell everyon you ver almost ploughed by Veela-chick!” Viktor shouted in between laughs.

Harry shot him the finger but grinned at the same time. “Okay people, we’re going to have lunch in the restaurant here, so everyone down!”

They all dropped to the perfect pitch, most of the players congratulating Gabrielle for her feint.

Harry looked at the players, and then cast a cleaning charm on the lot of them. There was some wiggling, before they looked at each other in surprise. “Easier and quicker than a shower,” he explained as he led them off the pitch and up to the fourth floor restaurant, where a buffet was already spread out for them.

“What do you think?” Harry asked as Viktor wandered over to him, plate in hand.

“You will beat Hogvarts,” Viktor replied confidently. “Players are good, more relaxed, and determined to win. And Veela-chick is almost as good as we are – or will be in a few years.”

Harry nodded.

“Besides, they have to win, I have money on them with Flint,” he finished with a large smile.

Harry shook his head, laughing at the final comment. “The Durmstrang players have the best seats I could get for them,” he said. “They were supposed to be for VIPs and other non-imports from the Ministry, but I decided the kids deserved them more.”

“Danke.”

“This has been more fun than the summer camps.”

“Ja.”

“I might do something like this over the summer instead. Invite the best from all the big schools together and work with kids who actually want to learn. I’ll make it invite only, so no one can pay for their brat to get in.”

Viktor’s eyes lit up. “You will be needing help, no?”

“If you want,” Harry said with a smile. “I’ll probably be able to get a few more players involved.”

“Including prettiest Chaser?”

Harry smiled and winked at him.

Viktor laughed and they finished their lunch in a companionable silence. The door to the restaurant opened and Fred and George wandered in. “Nice digs, Harry,” Fred said admiringly

“Are we going to have a nicer place next year, Harry?” George continued.

The room went silent as everyone stared at the Weasley twins.

“Quick,” Fred whispered, “do something to make them forget we just said that.”

“Like what?” George asked.

“*Obliviate* the lot of them?”

“Do I look like Harry?”

“No, you’re shorter, stouter, and have red hair.”

“Then I don’t think I can do it.”

“Damn. Retreat?”

“Would avoid the displeasure, but would leave some questions unanswered.”

“Damn. Face the music?”

“I guess,” George finished mournfully. “Erm, whoops.”

What is going on?" Henri asked. "What did you mean by that?"

"Yes," Viktor agreed. "Potter?"

Harry glared at Fred and George, who playfully fended off the glare. He set up a privacy charm around the room. "This is not public knowledge yet, although it will be soon. I'm going to be leaving the Cannons and starting my own Quidditch club. I've already got a core team lined up, and the land where I will build the stadium."

"Wow," Nicholas whispered. He shook himself. "You will be holding trials for back-up players, right?"

Harry nodded.

Nicholas smiled brightly.

Stephan frowned. "What about the rule about there only being thirteen professional Quidditch teams?"

Harry shrugged. "We'll ask them to change it." He grinned and continued, "And if they say no, we'll join the French league. But really, we're putting the league in a position where they can't say no. We have the two most popular English players in the country, a full team that could represent England, and my name behind it. There's too much money involved for them to say no."

"What about your contract with the Cannons?" Anton asked.

"It ends this summer. Basically, my contract covers me when I play. When I don't play, I don't get paid. I did negotiate image rights, so I still have a share of all the merchandise coming in, but as I'm out for a year, that's it. It's pretty standard for a Quidditch contract, so I have no real problem in ending it when the contract ends this summer.

"Despite the size of my contract, it's very much in favour of the Cannons, and it's the same for every team. If we players are injured for a long time, it is down to us to look after ourselves. Despite the fact that we were injured playing for the club. It means that we have no real team loyalty, because loyalty has to go both ways."

"Jah," Viktor said with a nod. "It is the same everywhere."

"Damn right," Katie agreed. "They won't even give us more than a single year contract. That way, if we're injured, they can get rid of us easily and quickly. We're kinda hoping that once people realise what we're doing, the other players will demand the same sort of terms that we'll be giving ourselves."

"Things have improved a little with Harry," Oliver added, "at the Cannons at least, but even that has been grudging."

"I love this sport," Harry said softly. "But I dislike the people running the clubs. I've got the resources to do something about it, so I'm going to do it." He looked at his watch. "How are things at Hogwarts?"

Fred and George looked at each other. "Snape was hopping mad that you didn't turn up for breakfast," Fred said. "We thought about testing the food, but decided we'd rather have him there at the match to see Hogwarts lose, rather than in the Aurors' custody, so we didn't do or say anything. Flint got called away this morning, so Snape is in charge. The team have been holed up all morning, and there's been a lot of shouting. McGonagall and Flitwick tried to intervene, but were told to stay out of it."

"The crowds are gathering in droves and the stadium is rocking," George put in. "Lee's been going through some anecdotes about the previous matches that we all played in at Hogwarts."

"Did you bring the fireworks?"

"Of course," George replied, holding out a bag.

Harry grinned. "Okay, you two get back to Hogwarts and tell Lee what we're planning."

"Yes, *mon capitain*!" Fred shouted, saluting. George threw the bag at Harry, who caught it easily, before they turned to each other and vanished with a loud pop.

"Harry," Gabrielle asked. "What are you planning?"

He could feel that she also wanted to know just when he had planned this. He made a note to mention that he didn't sleep much later.

"First rule of Quidditch, *always* make an entrance!"

The students grinned at each other and looked at Harry eagerly.

"I'm going to charm your brooms into Portkeys set to appear at the same place in relation to each other at the same time. These fireworks will go first, and will set up a ring of fire."

"So we fly in formation, and appear through a burning ring of fire?" Claude asked excitedly.

Harry nodded and laughed at the cheer that went up. "I suggest that the Seekers go first, flanked by the Keepers, then the Beaters and the Chasers. Try and keep it as tight as you can. Then the Durmstrang students can veer left and fly to your seats – Viktor will be waiting for you there

– and the Beauxbatons players can fly down to Katie, Alicia, Angelina, Oliver and me, and we'll be ready to start."

Everyone was nodding eagerly, so Harry walked along and turned all their brooms into Portkeys. He opened a door onto a balcony that overlooked the pitch. "Get into position. Gabrielle, you're in charge."

"Yes, Professor," Gabrielle replied automatically.

He sent her a mental smile and then leaned over and told her how to activate the Portkeys. "Everyone, start to fly."

Almost as a wave, the students ran out and jumped onto their brooms, launching themselves into the sky. It didn't take long for them to get into formation, and they swooped across the pitch a few times as they practiced. Shortly he felt that Gabrielle felt that they were ready.

He turned to others and smiled. Viktor was standing casually next to Katie. "Okay," he said, "Everyone join hands." Viktor grinned at him, as he took Katie's hand. Oliver took Angelina's – who made a playfully disgusted face. When they were all together, Harry took a deep breath and Apparated the lot of them to Hogwarts.

Harry quickly Apparated Viktor to his seat, before returning to the others on the pitch.

"And if I'm not mistaken, and I rarely am, Harry Potter has just arrived with Viktor Krum, and the coaching team that has helped Beauxbatons so much. That means that the Beauxbatons students should be arriving shortly." Lee's voice was already excited, and it seemed to turn up another notch as Harry surreptitiously opened the bag from Fred and George and sent the fireworks high into the air.

He called for Gabrielle to activate the Portkeys as he activated the fireworks. True to Fred and George's genius with all things pyro-related, a loud explosion preceded a small ball of fire. Somehow breaking the laws of physics, the ball quickly formed itself into a ring, which grew until it was fifty feet across. Then the players appeared, their brooms gleaming in the sunlight, as they flew through the ring in perfect formation.

The noise from the crowd was deafening as they cheered their response. In absolute synchronisation the two teams separated, the Durmstrang players flying to their seats, where they all stepped off their brooms, turned, and dropped into their seats in unison. As one, they then reached under their seats and pulled out Beauxbatons scarves, to Harry's pleased surprise.

The Beauxbatons team landed smartly on the surface of the pitch. Harry smiled at the beaming students before him. "Know what you're going to do?"

They all nodded eagerly.

"Need me to say anything more?"

They shook their heads.

"Then go out there and have fun," Harry ordered. "I know you're good enough, and you know you're good enough."

"Captains," the referee shouted.

Gabrielle walked over and looked at the Hogwarts players. They looked tense and nervous, the complete opposite to the Beauxbatons team who had now stopped joking and were beginning to look focused and hungry.

The Captains shook hands, Harry getting a little burst of how much Gabrielle disliked having anyone else touch her, and the teams were in the air. With a sharp whistle, the balls were released and the match began.

The excitement was palpable as the first interchanges began, only to stop as the referee called an immediate foul on Hogwarts. The Hogwarts players protested loudly, but were stared down by the ref.

Harry laughed to himself. This referee regularly handled some of the most intense matches in the world, and he was not going to be intimidated by a bunch of school kids. Hogwarts were not going to be able to use any dirty tactics.

He smiled faintly before stopping his emotions from showing, and turned his glasses into their darkest setting, so that he could watch Gabrielle.

"Very subtle," Angelina whispered.

"Yeah," Alicia agreed. "Not one of us can actually see that your eyes are firmly on Gabrielle's bum."

"Oh no," Katie protested mildly. "I'm sure that at least some of his attention is on the way her top emphasizes her boobs."

"Do you *mind*?" Harry asked.

"No, not at all," Oliver replied with a wide smile. "We're just getting started."

"And Beauxbatons score the first non-penalty points of this match. Frederick Girard drops a pass to Nicholas Blanc who fakes and scores past Sean Murphy. Coach Snape isn't happy; you'd think he'd keep a tighter rein on his temper. I know if I had that much grease in my hair, I'd be afraid of spontaneous combustion."

There was a roar of laughter from the crowd, followed by a glare from Snape.

We finally have a moment of peaceful play from the Hogwarts team. It's a pity they can't play like that all the time." Lee continued. "Crabbe and Parkinson launch both Bludgers at Henri Mercier, who dives out the way. Claude and Anton Dubois scramble for position, but Charles Shaw scores!"

Harry smiled faintly as Gabby flew in front Sean Murphy, and then dived down as if following the Snitch. As he watched her, he had to hide a smile. He knew exactly what she was doing, and was not surprised as she pulled up the same way she had earlier in the day. Murphy ploughed into the ground at high speed, not having the skill to be able to pull up as Harry had.

Viktor was on his feet, cheering loudly, his hands in the air, before he smirked at Harry.

Snape called a time-out, and the teams came back down.

"Having fun?" Harry asked.

They all nodded. "They can't foul and get away with it! It's brilliant," Anton declared excitedly. "This is sport, just like you said."

Harry nodded. "Just keep concentrating. You're already pulling away, and Gabrielle is a better Seeker."

"Damn right," Claude said enthusiastically. "That plough was almost poetic!"

Gabrielle smiled faintly. "Their hearts aren't in it," she said with a small sigh. "They've lost."

"Well, when we win, perhaps they'll learn from what happened and they'll try a different way," Henri suggested.

"We can hope," Harry said. "Keep focused out there, guys, and remember, this is fun!" The players jumped back onto their brooms and spiralled back into the sky. The match started again, with Beauxbatons rapidly scoring another ten points.

Without warning, ten wizards dressed in familiar black robes and white masks appeared in the middle of the pitch.

"*Avada Kedavra!*" they yelled, their wands pointed in different directions, randomly casting at the large crowd.

Without thinking about it, Harry threw up his arms, creating a dome-shaped shield over the Death Eaters, to protect the crowd and the students. He yelled as the curses struck his shield, the strain unbearable as he attempted the impossible – stopping a barrage of killing curses. There were nine splashes of green light across the dome, and Harry collapsed to his knees as the shield flickered and died.

The last wizard, who had held his fire, looked at him, and then turned deliberately, selecting his target. He pointed up to the air and yelled, "*Avada Kedavra*." There was a flash of green light, and Gabrielle Delacour slumped down over her broom.

From the crowd, rather than panic like at the Quidditch World Cup eight years ago, came a huge volley of curses, as every person present who had fought with Harry reacted with vengeance. Katie, Angelina, Alicia, and Oliver moved in front of Harry as they cast their curses, protecting him as he was on his knees, stunned.

Viktor was already out of his seat, arcing over the stands, his broom under him as he chased after Gabrielle, whose broom was flying away out of control.

The Death Eaters were all on the ground, some of them screaming in agony and some mercifully unconscious. One, the one who had thrown the Killing Curse at Gabrielle, was still standing. Harry felt a rage like never before as he stared at him. He knew who that one was – a curse from behind him had removed the mask, revealing Draco Malfoy.

"You dare attack my Mate," Harry snarled. "I should have dealt with you after you cursed Hermione, and again after you duelled Gabrielle, but I thought that law would catch up with you. That is *not* a mistake I will make again."

Malfoy looked at Harry and paled. He grabbed for a something in his pocket, but Harry had been expecting it, and threw up an anti-Portkey ward. Malfoy tried to Apparate, but Harry and his Mate were the only ones who could do that here.

"Wait," Malfoy shouted.

Harry looked at him, his expression making it clear that Malfoy could say nothing that he was interested in hearing. His Mate was dead, and Malfoy would pay.

"Obliterate!" he snarled.

"No!" Malfoy screamed.

There was a rush of pure magic, and Malfoy flew a couple of feet into the air. He threw his head back and started to scream silently in absolute agony as his feet dissolved, scattering a fine grey powder as his boots fell to the ground. The effect burned up his body, leaving empty clothes fluttering to the ground and dust scattering in the wind.

Harry's broom snapped to his hand and he launched himself into the sky, following Viktor and half the Beauxbatons and Durmstrang teams as they chased Gabrielle's erratically veering broom. The small part of him that was aware of such things wondered why she hadn't fallen off the broom yet. He reached the peak of the arc over Beauxbatons just in time to see Viktor desperately making a last-ditch effort to stop Gabrielle as she slammed into the great lake, a plume of water flying high into the sky.

Tridents abruptly appeared from beneath the water and Viktor was blasted into the air, away from the lake. Some of the Beauxbatons students

managed to catch him before he smashed into the side of the school.

Harry felt the tears run down his face, unable to believe his Mate was dead.

Suddenly, he took a deep breath.

He could still feel her.

The Bond was faint, *incredibly* faint, but it wasn't totally gone.

"Harry?" Oliver called.

"She's alive. I'm going to get her."

"We're coming with you," Ron announced firmly.

He looked up in surprise, finding that he was surrounded by fifteen of his friends, all mounted on brooms. All with their wands out and extremely focused expressions on their faces.

"The Merpeople have Gabby," he explained, stripping off his jacket and letting it fall into the Beauxbatons courtyard below. "She's not dead, but they've tried to kill her before. We're going in and I'm going to get back what is mine. I'm not taking any prisoners. Jean, Percy?"

"Yes, Harry?" Jean asked. There was a cold, frigid look of fury on his face, easily matching the anger found on Aimée's.

"Take care of this mess," he said, pointing back to where the shocked crowd and the Ministry officials were spilling out of the stadium, some trying to get away and some trying to see what was happening.

"We will," Percy assured him.

Harry turned toward the lake. He could feel his magic returning with a vengeance, and opened his arms wide, drawing it in.

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Jean's heart was racing. He had been afraid that he would lose both his wife and his daughter. One of the curses had been aimed directly at Aimée, and there seemed like nothing he could do – he had thrown himself forward, but known that it was too late.

But then Harry Potter had intervened.

Without a thought for the sheer impossibility of the task, he had thrown up a shield - the like of which had never been seen before, stopping not one, but nine different Killing Curses. It was impossible, but that sort of thing never bothered Harry.

But even as Jean had whipped out his own wand and started to fire curses down on the Death Eaters, he had watched helplessly as one had fired a curse that hit Gabrielle. He could almost feel the pain that caused Harry, as he felt his own heart break. His curses were as vicious as he could make them, without being fatal. He wanted at least one alive for questioning.

From around the stadium, a huge volley of curses appeared alongside his, from Aimée, Bill and Fleur and from total strangers. Aimée had tears in her eyes, but a determined expression on her face.

Almost absently, Jean cast a charm to unmask the Death Eater, wanting to see the face of the man who'd killed his daughter, revealing Draco Malfoy. Like the others, he had heard the absolute pain, agony and hatred in Harry's voice as he spoke to the blond Death Eater. And then Harry had obliterated him - literally - in a public display of what happened when you enraged someone who had more power than Merlin. It was a fitting ending for anyone who dared touch Gabrielle. For one of the first times in his life, Jean didn't know what to do. Harry was on his knees, the expression on his face painful to view – that of a man who had just had his heart removed, when the expression had suddenly changed.

Jean had felt his own heart re-start as he watched Harry summon his broom and launch himself toward the Great Lake. Many members of the audience had their brooms with them and followed, and several members of the Durmstrang team had pressed their brooms on Fleur and Aimée. And then Harry had announced that she was alive. And Jean knew, without doubt, that it was only thanks to Harry that she was.

And he also knew that Harry would get her back, because no one on the face of this planet was going to be able to stop him.

He felt a strange touch upon his magic and from the expressions on the faces of the people around him, it looked like whatever it was, was affecting everyone. An instant later, Harry stood up straighter, and was glowing with power.

Harry landed on the shore of the lake, accompanied by Ron, Hermione, Bill, Fleur, Charlie, Fred, George, Angelina, Alicia, Katie, Neville, Susan, and others Jean didn't know. He cast a single spell, and all of them waded unhesitatingly into the lake. Soon, the only signs they had been there were the abandoned brooms and footprints on the bank.

So here Jean was, with a huge crowd looking on in shock and the term "Mate" that Harry had used already being bandied around. The politicians, reporters and curiosity-seekers were gathering, and the Aurors had the squad of Death Eaters unconscious and under guard.

It was chaos.

Jean smiled coldly. It was time for him to start repaying Harry for everything the young man had done for him.

Hovering slightly above the crowd to maintain the psychological advantage of height, he exchanged a look with Percy and cast a *Sonorus* charm on his throat. The best defence was sometimes a good offence. “Silence!” His voice boomed across the lawn.

“Minister Scrimgeour!” he roared. “Please explain just how these... these...”

“Scum,” Percy suggested.

“*Oui*. How these *scum* can arrive in the middle of a match by Portkey and try to kill my daughter and future son-in-law.”

The Minister for Magic looked nonplussed.

“Nice,” Percy muttered in admiration, as Jean simultaneously claimed the right to represent both Harry and Gabrielle and put Scrimgeour on the defensive.

Jean landed and stalked over to the Death Eaters. He reached up and ripped the mask off of one of them, a pug-nosed young woman with short dark hair who looked terrified.

“Pansy Parkinson,” Percy said formally, even as his eyes burned with rage. “The punishment for using an Unforgivable is a lifetime in Azkaban. The punishment for mass-murder is death. If you want the lesser of the two sentences, I suggest you start talking.”

“I was under the Imperius,” she started to explain. “Malfoy put me under it.”

Jean immediately claimed Malfoy’s wand from the Auror who had custody of it and cast ‘*Priori Incantatem*’ at it. It showed the Killing Curse, and a variety of other curses, but no Imperius. He could hear Lee, who was hovering over the crowd on his own broom, commentating as he did, explaining what was going on, and made a mental note to thank him later, he was doing as much as anyone else to stop this from descending into utter chaos. For once, Lee was doing commentary with absolutely no comedy, simply describing everything occurring with a cold and factual precision.

“Jean,” Percy said, “can you get some Veritaserum? I don’t trust Snape to provide any.”

“I’ll talk,” Pansy said as she deflated, her shoulder slumping as she realized her lack of options. “It was all Malfoy’s plan. He thought that we could start the good old days again. The plan was simple. We would use the Portkeys to force our way onto the pitch. First, we’d take out random people in the crowd. We knew Potter would try and save them. And then when Potter was distracted, Draco would kill the Veela-bitch that he seems to care so much about. And then, we’d all curse Potter – and with him dead, no one would be able to stand in our way.”

“You stupid, ignorant, repulsive bitch,” Percy said evenly and without rancour. “Did you honestly think that we didn’t learn the lesson last time around? Even without Harry, we would have fought you; never again will we live under the yoke of tyrants.”

“How did you get the Portkeys?” Jean asked.

“I don’t know,” Pansy sighed. “It was Draco’s idea. It seemed to make sense. None of us are trusted anymore – by anyone. It was a way to get our pride back.”

“Killing innocent people is a way of getting pride back?” Jean demanded, a disgusted expression on his face as he looked at her.

Pansy shrugged.

Percy nodded to the Aurors. “Get them out of here.” The Aurors finished removing the rest of the masks – revealing Marcus Flint as one of the others – and bundled them away.

“Thank you,” Pansy whispered, looking relieved to be out of the way before Harry returned.

“Scrimgeour,” Jean shouted next, but stopped himself because of a disturbance from the lake. There was a huge light emanating from the depths, and feeling of incredible magic.

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Harry marched into the lake, desperately sending what he could down the Bond. He knew that Gabrielle was still alive, and that was all he needed.

He’d tear down the doors of Hell itself to save her.

Beside him walked his friends, people he knew he could trust with his back. They had been the first to react to the fight, and were now here as they walked through the water. They were surrounded by a large bubble that kept the water at bay, and the mud firmed up under their feet as they went.

The direction they were heading was scarily similar to the second task, and he could see that Fleur recognised it as well by the worried expression on her face.

A group of Grindylows raised their heads, but were dispersed before Harry could react. Fred and George, serious expressions on their faces, nodded back at him.

A Merman’s trident bounced off the bubble wall, and Bill Summoned the Merman who had thrown it, bringing him through the bubble as he held him by the neck. As the Merman started to choke, Bill screeched something at him in Mermish.

The Merman croaked a reply. Bill scowled, punched him in the face, and then threw him back into the water. “He doesn’t know anything,” Bill

explained. "He was just following orders."

Harry nodded, and they continued their silent procession into the depths. The Giant Squid appeared, seemed to nod at Harry, and then moved out of the way. Harry bowed respectfully to the creature.

Three armed Mermen stood in their way, but two curses from Neville and one from Susan removed them before they could even slow down Harry's inexorable path.

Ahead of them was the giant statue of the Merman. Gabrielle was chained to it, a stream of bubbles coming from her mouth. The Merchieftainess was standing over her, her arms raised, a knife in one hand.

Harry growled and shot a burst of magic at her. It flew out of the bubble into the water, and struck the Chieftainess hard, throwing her against a rock. The Merpeople uttered harsh cries that sounded like a dozen Tri-Wizard eggs opened at once.

"They're angry at us for interfering," Bill translated. "I think we ought to show them just how angry we are. Harry, just release your magic."

Without a word, Harry dropped every restraint he normally kept on his magic. It flared around him, caressing him like an old friend. The Merpeople reared back, shouting in pain and confusion before they started to swim away in panic. He walked over to Gabrielle, bringing her and the statue inside the bubble. He reached up to her and the chains simply broke, dropping her body into his arms.

Carefully he put her down on the stone base of the statue, cradling her head and shoulders, and focused everything he had on her, on the thin thread he could feel still connecting them. He willed her back from the brink of death, sending not just his power, but his love, and how much he needed her.

There was an endless moment when nothing happened. Finally, she coughed limply and stirred in his arms.

"You came for me," she whispered, looking up at him. "I knew you would ... if I just hung on."

"Shhh," Harry said, his aura vanishing as he sat beside his Mate. He held one hand tightly, lightly running his other hand over her to check that she was all right.

She lifted up her hand. "Your ring saved me. You saved me." The ring had lost some of its lustre, but it was still intact.

Harry exhaled in relief.

"What about them?" Susan asked, indicating the terrified Merpeople.

Harry shrugged, looking out through the bubble wall. "Someone else will deal with them; I got what I came for."

There were a lot of smiles. Fleur walked over and hugged Gabrielle as well, her face wet with tears.

"I thought I'd lost you, my little Angel," she whispered in French.

"Never, not as long as I have my Mate, my darling Flower," Gabrielle whispered back.

"Thanks, guys," Harry said to everyone. "Let's get out of here." He stood and effortlessly picked Gabrielle up to carry her.

Gabrielle smiled tiredly and rested against him.

They walked quickly back through the Lake without incident, emerging where they had entered. There was a low babble of noise, as everyone appeared to be talking in whispers. Close by, Jean, Aimée, Percy, Albus, Picup, Olympe, Scrimgeour and a number of other Ministry officials were looking at them with a mixture of concern and surprise, evidently at their quick return.

Aimée was already waiting for them, a large, thick towel in her hands. She wrapped it around Gabrielle as Harry placed her down.

"I am experiencing déjà vu," Gabrielle said. "It was here, eight years ago, when you'd rescued me before and I stood shivering and wet, that the idea to Mate with you came to me. It was as good an idea then as it is now."

Harry blinked. "Say that again."

"It was as good..."

"No, before that."

Gabrielle looked at him curiously. "It was here, eight years ago," she dutifully repeated, "when you'd rescued me before and I stood shivering and wet, that the idea to Mate with you came to me."

"Gabrielle, open your mind to me," he ordered, before whispering, "*Legilimens!*"

He entered her mind, feeling her welcome him without fear or hesitation. He delved into her memories, as deeply as he could, so that he could see what happened from her perspective.

He saw through her eyes as she looked around, searching for him even as she hugged her sister tightly. He watched as she met Dumbledore's twinkling eyes for a second, and then she saw Harry, and did what she needed to do: Mate with him.

Harry pulled himself out of her mind, almost shaking with anger.

“You goddamned son of a bitch!” he roared as he whirled to face Dumbledore. “What sort of twisted pervert forces an *eight year old* to Mate!?”

Dumbledore, for once, had no soothing reply. His face was pale, his jaw slack with dismay.

There was an absolute silence, as everyone stared at Harry and Albus in shock. Aimée was the first to move. She took five paces forward and punched the Headmaster as hard as she could. Unprepared for the assault, he tumbled backward to the ground. She looked down at him, and spat a particularly vile imprecation in French.

“Harry,” Percy said, his voice stern. “Please explain.”

Harry was about to growl at him, when he realised that Percy wasn’t asking for himself, but for the listening public. He took a deep breath. “Eight years ago, during the Second Task of the Tri-Wizard tournament, I rescued Gabrielle as well as Ron Weasley. After the task, Gabrielle, who is part-Veela, Mated herself to me. Fast forward eight years. Gabrielle’s been living under a death sentence from an incomplete Mating. I’m not going to go into details, but the side effects are well documented, or you could always ask Hermione. I finally found out about it, and the opportunity for me to teach at Beauxbatons came up. To cut a long story short, we decided to ignore it and see if we could fall in love.

“To my good fortune, we did, and I proposed – she said, yes. Gabrielle has continually apologised for her mistake in Mating – and that’s all we thought it was, a child’s mistake. I had long since forgiven her for it,” he said, looking fondly down at her. “But when she mentioned *déjà vu*, I suddenly had a horrible idea.

“I checked her mind,” he said, his voice starting to rise again, “and I found that Gabrielle had not made a mistake when she Mated with me, because it had not been her idea to Mate with me at all.” He glared at Dumbledore. “It was his!” he hissed, pointing his finger at the shaken Headmaster, who was back on his feet – thanks to Olympe literally picking him up and holding in place.

“How could you do this to us?” Harry demanded. “Everything you’ve done to me wasn’t bad enough – you had to do this to *another* child as well?”

“It wasn’t about you!” Albus roared, going red in the face. “England was woefully unprepared and led by fools who were denying what was plainly before them. We needed help that only the French could give. Gabrielle is Jean-Sebastian Delacour’s daughter. I knew if she was reliant on you, Jean would be forced to help. If I hadn’t done it, the French wouldn’t have joined in the war, and Voldemort would have won!”

Harry shook his head in disgust. “Did you even try simply *asking* the French for help?”

“What?” Dumbledore asked, bewildered. Harry’s question obviously seemed like a non-sequitur to the aged man.

“Asking – you know – being polite and saying ‘Please.’ Jean wasn’t the only French official who attended the Tournament. You could have asked any of them at any time.”

“I had to be sure – we couldn’t risk ...” Dumbledore mumbled.

“Jean,” Harry said, “do you remember how you got involved in the war?”

“Yes, you, Hermione and Ron came over to France, and you asked for our help. Until that point, we didn’t even know how bad it was.”

“This was years after the Tournament, correct? And you’d never been approached by Dumbledore or the Ministry in all that time?”

“Correct.”

“Was your decision to help influenced by Gabrielle’s plight?”

Jean raised his head proudly. “No. As much as I love my daughter, I would never ask the sons and daughters of France to risk their lives unless it was truly in the interests of France, not even to save my own daughter. I agreed to help because you asked, and that gave me the incentive to launch an investigation. When I found out just how bad it was – and how your Ministry was covering it up – I had no choice but to join you. You were fighting not just for yourself, but for our future. And France will never stand by idly while her allies need help.”

Harry turned to Dumbledore and shook his head. “You put an eight year old through years of torture and agony. You forced a child to experience emotions and thoughts she was in no way prepared for. And you did it all for your own petty little games. Rather than face the problem head-on, you decided to try and manipulate your way through it – and you didn’t even follow through, once you’d set it up. You waited for me to contact Jean – and he never even mentioned Gabrielle’s problem to me at the time. You enjoy playing the game too much to even try to win – you kept extending the play. Voldemort could have been defeated long before I was born, but you were too convinced of your own cleverness – too busy playing at spies and politics – to take the actions needed to end it.” Harry shook his head in disgust. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see Percy whispering intently to Scrimgeour.

“Albus Dumbledore,” the Minister for Magic said portentously. “Because of your actions you are hereby suspended, effective immediately, from your position of Headmaster of Hogwarts. Minerva McGonagall will act as Headmistress in your stead.”

“No,” Dumbledore cried, his face going white. “It was for the greater good!”

“That just leaves one question,” Jean said. “The Portkeys.”

“How *did* Malfoy get Portkeys to Hogwarts?” Harry questioned Dumbledore. “The wards at the school have been tightened up since the war – too



late to do any good, but still... The only people who can allow a Portkey through the wards now are you, through your link to the school, and me. And I didn't allow them."

Dumbledore's eyes were wild. He tried to struggle, but Olympe was far too strong for him, and Picup was now helping her. Dumbledore raised his magic, causing the dust to swirl at their feet, but Harry reached out with his, subduing it.

Dumbledore's eyes flickered toward Snape.

"Grab him," Harry growled, nodding at Snape.

Neville was nearest, and he appeared to take Harry's advice literally. He took a couple of quick steps toward Snape. Snape raised his wand and Neville calmly palmed it to one side and followed it up with a rabbit punch that caught Snape straight on the nose – which promptly broke, sending the greasy professor to the ground.

"Whoops," Neville said with a small grin.

"*Legilimens!*" Harry shouted, launching himself into Dumbledore's mind. Unlike his use of the spell on Gabrielle, where he had moved as gently as he could, this time he didn't use any gentleness. Dumbledore tried to block him, but it was too little, too late. Harry battered away the shields, uncaring as to any damage he might do.

He pulled out abruptly and looked at Dumbledore. "Was it worth it?"

Dumbledore looked away.

"Harry?" Minerva asked.

"You were right, Min," Harry sighed. "It *is* dementia. He's known about it for thirteen years."

"But the tests showed nothing?"

"Snape brewed potions that at first arrested the dementia, and then hid the effects."

Minerva's head dropped, and she sighed deeply.

"It was good medicine at first, but then the dementia flared up again and Albus became addicted to higher and higher doses. Anything Snape wanted, he got." Harry shook his head in disgust. "Albus gave Snape the Portkeys yesterday. Snape said he needed them to transport some VIPs to the match."

"You don't understand ... Hogwarts is my life," Dumbledore said brokenly.

"How many children were you willing to ruin – to *kill* for it?" Harry demanded. "How many students have been tormented by Snape and Malfoy?"

"But..." Dumbledore tried.

"Your job was to provide a safe learning environment for children," Harry snapped, "not to cling to a position you were not capable of managing, for the sake of your vanity."

Jean stepped forward. "We're not finished," he said coldly to Dumbledore. "Your actions were reprehensible and unforgivable. You *will* be called to account for this"

"Take him away," Percy said softly.

A wave of sorrow passed over Harry as he watched the Aurors lead Dumbledore away. "At one time he was a great man," he whispered.

"That he was," Hermione agreed, "but then he sold himself to the devil, and now he has to pay the price."

"Percy?" Harry called, indicating Snape, who was still on the ground, trying to staunch the flow of blood.

"Severus Snape," Percy said coldly, "it gives me a great deal of personal pleasure to order your arrest. You are a despicable excuse for a human being, and you are now implicated as a co-conspirator and accessory to today's attempted mass-murder. Take him away."

As Snape started to protest, Neville moved again, this time knocking Snape unconscious with a boot to the head.

Harry nodded at Neville, who took Susan's hand and nodded back.

Harry looked down at Gabrielle, who was clinging onto his arm tightly. She was exhausted, staying upright by sheer willpower. "Okay, if you lot can take care of this, I want to get Gabrielle home and look after her."

"Uh, Harry, dere is one ting," Viktor said hesitantly.

Harry up at Viktor, who was sitting on his broom, surrounded by the Beauxbatons and Durmstrang players. Viktor seemed to have had no ill effects from his earlier encounter with Mermish magic.

"Vik," Harry said, "Thanks for going after Gabrielle."

“You and der Veela-chick are gut friends,” Viktor said with a smile. “You deserf each udder, it vas least I could do. Anyway, ve ver here playink Quidditch, remember?”

Harry blinked. “We’ll have to reschedule.”

“Harry?” Gabrielle said softly.

He looked down at her. She held out her right hand. She turned it palm out, and then released her fingers.

In her palm was the Golden Snitch, bedraggled and with a broken wing.

“Delacour has the Snitch,” Lee’s voice rang over the ground. “Beauxbatons wins! Beauxbatons wins!”

The referee blew his whistle and there was a huge cheer from the crowd, in part grateful that they had *something* they knew how to respond to.

“I love you,” Harry whispered, and kissed her – in front of the staff, in front of the players, in front of their friends, in front of the press, in front of the whole world.

Gabrielle didn’t say anything; she just kissed him back, her arms going around his neck.

Without breaking the kiss, Harry Apparated them away.

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The soft thud of Harry’s heart beating was the most reassuring thing in her life. It was the best way to emerge from a deep sleep, each beat reminding her that she was sleeping with her Mate, the man who loved her above all others, who had not only managed to block nine simultaneous killing curses, but had protected her, through his ring, during the one moment when he couldn’t.

When she saw Harry throwing up the shield, she instinctively did everything she could to help him – pushing all of her magic at him, leaving herself defenceless – or so she thought.

Then the curse hit her, and she had truly believed that she was going to die. But the protective magic in his ring kicked in at that critical instant. It flared for the briefest moment as the charms directed all the magic the ring possessed to shield her. Maybe if she’d had her own magic, it wouldn’t have been so hard, but with all her magic shifted to Harry, all it had left to use was the magic Harry had fused into it.

It had been enough – but just barely.

Even with the protection of the ring, though, the curse had hurt – she didn’t remember much, but she knew that she had a choice. She could move on or stay. It hurt to live, and she had thought about moving on, giving Harry back the freedom she had taken from him. But she didn’t – because she knew he loved her. He had, after all, given her the ring. She knew she made him happy, and if she moved on, he would be free again, but alone, and devastated.

And so she fought, even without magic – she refused to give up. When the broom ran away with her, she was barely able to cling to it. When the merfolk captured her, she had just enough magic to keep herself from drowning. The Bond reassured her – all she needed was time; if she fought long enough, her Mate would come to get her.

And he had.

She snuggled into him and made a protesting groan as she accidentally opened an eyelid, finding the familiar bedroom at Harry’s London flat quite bright, filled with morning light.

“Morning,” he rasped.

“Mmm,” she mumbled, closing her eyes tightly.

“You okay?”

“Mmm-hmm,” she agreed drowsily. She reached blindly for the blankets, and then pulled them over her head, so that she was cocooned against the evil light, safely locked up with him.

She could feel his amusement, but didn’t care. She *was* going back to sleep.

A loud knock from downstairs interrupted her determined attempt. She could feel Harry tense.

“What is it?” she asked grumpily.

“I think there are some people out in the hall who’d like to talk to us,” he said, his voice distorted by the covers over her head.

“Tell them to go away. I am sleeping!”

“From what I can tell, it’s your family, Ron, Hermione, Bill, Percy, Fred, George, Angelina, Alicia, Oliver, Katie and Viktor. I don’t think they’re going to go away.”

Gabrielle sighed deeply, but then she smiled. She sat up, throwing the covers to one side, and looked down at him. He was naked and his hair was slightly wilder than normal. She climbed out of bed and searched in the drawers for a pair of jeans. She found the ones she was looking for, and passed them to him.

There was another knock from below.

"Wear these," she said.

He looked at her with a somewhat confused expression for a moment, and then shrugged, standing and wiggling into the tight jeans before turning toward the door.

"Stop," she ordered before he'd made so much as one step. He paused, looking at her curiously. She bent over and undid the top button of his jeans, then hopped up onto the bed so that she was taller than him and kissed him as hard as she could, a little rougher than usual. At the same time, she ran her fingers through his hair a few times, making it even more unruly.

"Now you look perfect," she breathed as she looked at him.

"Gabby?"

She smiled as innocently as she could. "If they are going to bother us early in the morning, they are going to pay."

"And how is this paying?"

"Because you are going to make all the boys self-conscious, and most of the girls jealous of me," she said smugly. "My father will have a heart attack. And maybe next time, they will wait for me to wake up before knocking on our door."

He laughed under his breath and went down to answer the door. With a sudden movement, he opened the door and leaned against the frame, his right arm above his head. "Hey," he greeted them.

Gabrielle smirked at the silence from the other side.

"Why do I think that my daughter had a hand in this?" Aimée asked with a sigh. "Of course, back when she was seven, attempts to wake her up early would produce accidental magic, not a half-naked man."

She could feel Harry's amusement, and giggled herself.

"Come in, you're blocking the corridor," he said, and moved backward. "Gabby's upstairs," he said to Aimée, who headed straight toward her.

"Everyone out to the balcony," Harry said, as he yawned and stretched, then led the way.

"Mama," Gabrielle squeaked, as she suddenly realised her state of undress and dived under the covers.

Aimée raised an eyebrow for a moment, and then passed Gabrielle some clean underwear and turned her back.

"Thank you, I am now decent."

"No," Aimée replied, "after that, you are anything but decent. Still, if it reminds your father that he can use a gym membership – not just pay for it – then it might have done some good."

Gabrielle smiled brightly, and opened her wardrobe.

"Go for jeans and a t-shirt today," Aimée advised. "You'll want to be comfortable and informal."

"Yes, Mama," Gabrielle replied obediently as she pulled out some new clothes. She dressed and turned to look at her mother, who had sat down on the edge of the bed, and was looking at her with a melancholy expression. She sighed, as if steeling herself for something unpleasant.

"Mama, no!" Gabrielle said firmly.

"Gabrielle?"

"Do not even think it! Do not make me bring Harry up here!"

"But..."

"Do not dare, Mama," Gabrielle said fiercely. "No one knew, I did not know, so there was no way for *you* to know. You could have never found the truth; the only person I would ever allow into my mind like that was Harry, and he scarcely knew that I was alive then.

"Yes, what *he* did was awful, and yes, everyone blamed me – I blamed me. But, eight years later, I *know* that I have a Mate who loves me more than life itself. I *know* that. I *know* that I have a life ahead of me that will be the envy of people all over the world, because I will be Harry Potter's wife." She paused and looked her mother directly in her eyes. "And I *know*, without a shadow of a doubt, that I have a mother who will stand by me, no matter what mistake I might make as I continue to grow.

"You always told me that life is what you make of it. Well, I have made all my dreams come true. You gave me the strength to do this. You did

everything you could for me, despite thinking that I had brought it on myself. And you even apologized for doubting my choice.

"You have been there for me through everything, never once abandoning me, never once withholding love or support. Without you, I would not be this girl you see before you, without you I would have never had the strength to chase my tiger and show that I can roam with him. Without you, I would not be here, in love with my Mate, happier than I could ever dream.

"So I will not allow you to apologise to me; it is neither warranted nor needed. Instead, I will say thank you for everything you have done for me over the past eight years. For the unwavering strength and support you have lent me."

Aimée looked a little stunned as Gabrielle finished.

Gabrielle moved over and sat next to her, hugging her hard.

"I do not think that I have ever been prouder of you, my little Angel," Aimée whispered softly.

"You will talk to Papa and Fleur?" Gabrielle asked.

"I will," Aimée agreed, and brushed a tear from her eye. "I do still feel guilty, but it will fade."

"Good," Gabrielle said. "Now, can you take Harry a t-shirt while I arrange breakfast for everyone?"

"Would you like a hand?"

Gabrielle smiled softly. "I am mistress of this house now, Mama. It is time that I acted like it."

Aimée nodded and hugged her hard for a second, before she stood and walked back downstairs.

Gabrielle considered the reality of trying to make breakfast for the small horde currently in the flat. There was only one thing to do at a time like this, and that was to enlist help. She smiled and Apparated away.

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"Aimée?" Jean asked, as she walked onto the balcony.

Harry smiled at her as he finished creating new chairs for everyone. He made a mental note to buy some more, as he could see this becoming a popular location for gatherings. Something that he found himself looking forward to.

Aimée smiled faintly. "I have just been told, rather forcefully, not to apologise for believing that Gabrielle Mated with Harry of her own volition. And she has requested that I ensure that you two don't try either."

"But - " Fleur started.

"Did you turn Gabrielle into an outcast?" Harry interrupted dryly. The others were staying out of this discussion, but were watching with interest.

Aimée passed him a t-shirt which he quickly donned, absently doing up the top button of his jeans at the same time.

"Of course not," Fleur said.

"Then all you're apologising for is believing what she believed," Harry said as gently as he could. "The idea that Dumbledore would do that never entered her mind – or anyone else's. She truly believed it was her own idea, and she liked it that way. The only way you would have been able to tell was to sink into her memories and relive the moment. But there was no way for anyone to do that. I could only do it because of the Bond we have. Without it, I wouldn't have been able to relive her memories of an event that happened eight years ago. As far as she's concerned, there's nothing to apologise for." Harry paused. "And if you gave her the choice now, of going back in time and not Mating with me, she would laugh at you and tell you not to be so silly."

"Precisely," Aimée agreed. "Jean? Fleur?"

"Yes dear," Jean agreed with a sigh. "I am allowed to still take Dumbledore for all he has, though, right?"

Harry smiled coldly. "Of course. Just because Gabrielle landed on her feet in the end doesn't mean that he should get away with it."

"I went through Snape's potions last night, and found the one Albus is taking. We'll make sure he won't be able to escape into his dementia," Hermione added. "As a side concern, we'll work on the potion and see if we can't take away the addictive qualities, as it could be a great help to a lot of other people."

Harry smiled. "So, why are you all here so early?"

"Early?" Ron asked. "It's nearly eleven."

"Hands up, everyone who stopped ten killing curses yesterday." Harry raised his own hand and looked around. "The only other person who could legitimately raise her hand is Gabby." He could feel his Mate tapping into his power to Apparate, so he knew she wouldn't be joining them for a while yet. "Her ring was designed to bolster her own magic, and in normal circumstances it would stop a killing curse without too much effort."

"So vat happened?" Viktor asked as he sat down, managing to get the seat next to Katie.

“When I threw up the shield around the Death Eaters, Gabrielle pushed all her magic toward me to help me out. That was a nice, thoughtful move on her part, but it left her defenceless. The ring had a layer of protection, one I put in for emergencies only, that fought off the effects of the curse. It was a close thing.”

“What did that layer do?” Bill asked.

“It used the power I stored in the ring to deflect most of the curse. A ring isn’t very big, so it isn’t really suitable for storing too much raw power.”

“Okay, Potter, it’s time for you to come clean,” Fred said.

“Yeah,” George agreed. “We all went to school. We all know that it’s hard enough to attach charms to inanimate objects, let alone things like platinum. We also all know that it is practically impossible to store raw power in an object.”

“Just as the idea of magical telephones that work worldwide is a crazy idea,” Fred continued. “And then there is the fact that you like to read in bed, interesting books that don’t exist, that you just happen to know exactly what Merlin and Morgana look like – down to their voices – and you get irritated by remarks about Arthur and Morgana having kids.”

Harry shot Katie a reproachful look. She blushed and looked down.

“No, Harry, you need not answer,” Aimée said calmly, turning toward the twins. “Everyone has secrets they would rather not share, whether they be magical, sexual, or merely embarrassing. Harry has the right to secrets, just like the rest of us.”

Harry took a deep breath, and looked up. “Thank you,” he said to Aimée softly. “But there will come a time where I might need their help.”

Fred and George whipped out their wands. “We swear never to divulge what we are about to hear to others who are not here,” they said in unison.

“Damn it,” Oliver groaned. “Will you two just learn to give a promise like the rest of us?”

“Nope,” Fred said cheerfully.

“If we make a magical promise, it forces everyone else to, and then we can’t accidentally let it slip, like we did with Harry’s plans for next year.”

“Oh,” Oliver said. “Knowing you two, that actually makes sense.” Everyone else started to cast the same spell. Aimée pulled out her wand and looked at him.

Harry shook his negatively. She smiled at him, and placed her wand away.

“You know, Mama?” Fleur asked in surprise as she finished her promise.

“I do,” Aimée agreed.

Harry took off his watch and turned it upside down. He opened a small compartment on the back. Very carefully, he eased four tiny books out, and cast a charm so that they returned to their normal size.

“Holy shit,” Hermione blurted, “are those what I think they are?”

“Hermione!” Ron protested, a completely scandalised look on his face.

“Harry,” Hermione whispered reverently, completely ignoring her husband. “Please tell me they are what I think they are.”

“These,” Harry said softly, “are the complete and unabridged original diaries of Bertram Nash.”

Viktor gasped. “You are serious?”

Harry nodded.

“Erm, who’s this Bertram fellow?” Fred asked.

“I’m so glad someone else asked that,” Jean muttered.

“You might know him better as Merlin Ambrosius.”

“Holy shit,” Ron gasped.

“Ron, language,” Hermione snapped.

“Sorry, dear,” Ron said automatically, and then blushed as everyone laughed.

“Don’t ask where I got them,” Harry said quietly, “some secrets are not mine to share.”

“This is where you got the idea for the phones?”

Harry nodded. “I’ve been working on it for some time, breaking it down into something manageable.”

"Thank you."

"Why didn't you tell us?" Hermione asked. Her eyes had yet to leave the books, and her fingers were making a curious grasping motion.

"Because Harry is the only person who can do the spells in them," Aimée said. "These aren't spell books in the normal sense."

"Yeah," Harry agreed, shooting a grateful look at Aimée. "One of the easiest spells in it was the one I used to create a hole in Hogwarts wards, and you saw how much that took out of me."

"Can I at least look at them?" Hermione begged.

Harry looked at her for a long moment, somewhat reluctant to let anyone else look through his window into the past. He sighed and nodded. "I'll make you a copy."

"Thank you," she whispered.

The door to the balcony opened and Gabrielle walked out. She was carrying a tray with a collection of mugs. Floating behind her were several trays, stacked high with plates. Each plate had a mouth-watering omelette on it, and the smell made Harry realise how hungry he was.

"Mama? Tea or coffee?" Gabrielle asked sweetly.

"Tea please, dear," Aimée replied. Gabrielle touched the first cup, and he smiled as he felt the slightest pull on his magic. She then passed the cup to Aimée smoothly.

"Gabrielle," Alicia asked, after everyone had a drink, and Gabrielle had passed out the omelettes, "how did you know how many cups of tea and coffee you needed to bring?"

Gabrielle laughed softly and sat down next to Harry, pulling her feet up and leaning against him. "I did not know," she confessed. "I just pulled the proper drink as you requested it."

"That was very smooth," Katie said admiringly. "The sort of thing we'd expect from Harry."

Gabrielle smiled brightly. "Eat, do not stand on ceremony. Harry and I have not eaten yet."

Harry balanced his plate on his lap so that he could eat with one hand as the other wrapped itself around his Mate. The omelette tasted as good as it smelled, and he noticed that their plates were double the size of everyone else's. As he knew she couldn't cook, and with the quantities involved, he suspected that she'd been to Grimmauld Place and conscripted the elves.

After everyone had finished their brunch, Gabrielle snapped her fingers and the plates vanished. She shifted so that she could stretch her feet out, her toes wiggling cutely, and wrapped both hands around her cup of tea.

"To what do we owe the pleasure of this morning's visit?" she asked.

"Gabrielle," Jean said reproachfully. "You cannot block killing curses, implicate one of the most respected men in the world as a twisted old pervert, manage to declare your love for the most powerful wizard in the world *and* catch the Snitch in one afternoon, without expecting repercussions."

"But Papa," Gabrielle said innocently, "repercussions are *your* job."

Jean sighed, only the corners of his mouth twitching betrayed his amusement.

"Well," Fred said, "what he said, really. Plus, of course, we all wanted to check that you were all right, and we figured you might want to know what happened after you left."

"A lot of fuss, an impromptu press conference, and general confusion?" Harry asked.

"Harry," Ron complained. "Just let us tell the story, okay?"

"Sorry," Harry apologised. "Go ahead."

"After you vanished, there was uproar for a few minutes, but Lee has a bigger mouth than all of them put together," Ron explained.

Harry looked at Hermione and rolled his eyes. Her eyes were still fixed on the books with an avid fascination he recognized so well. He reached over and took the first one, floating it over to her. Her eyes grew wide as it got near, then she grabbed it out of thin air, sighed happily, and started to read.

Ron looked amused and patted her on the leg.

"Anyway," he continued, "Lee shouted everyone down, and Percy and Jean had a quick chat, and they decided that a press conference would be the best way to go.

"So, we went back to the pitch and set up a stage quickly, and a few of us sat and faced the clamouring hordes."

"They're not that bad," Harry said with a shrug. "They get confused if you mock them."

Shh, Harry, I've not finished yet," Ron said. "Anyway, Percy talked Scrimgeour out of trying to participate, and we all sat down. The crowds weren't going anywhere, and were treating this as just another form of entertainment. Olympe, Picup and Minerva had a quick talk to the students, and as the Beauxbatons Quidditch team already knew everything, Beauxbatons were quick to accept it."

Aimée smiled faintly. "Simone told me later that the school was actually quite proud of it. They all knew that their Head Girl was special, just as they knew that Harry Potter was special. It made sense that the two of you would be together. But we are digressing. Continue, Ronald."

Ron nodded. "Anyway, we decided to answer questions." He grinned, "We asked for the first one, and no one seemed to know where to start. Eventually, we were asked about the Mating and what it entailed – and why we were so angry at Dumbledore about it."

"My dear wife answered that one," Jean said proudly. "She stood in front of them and lectured them for fifteen minutes on Veela physiology, and the mental and physical changes that Gabrielle went through. By the time she had finished, she could easily have formed a lynch mob from the spectators, who were incensed that anyone could do that to an eight year old."

"The second question was a request to interview the both of you," Ron continued.

"Ahh," Percy interrupted. "Harry, Gabrielle, I'm afraid that I promised your first joint interview to Rita Skeeter."

"You did?" Harry asked. "Why?"

Percy smiled faintly. "She Floo'd me the same morning that the Prophet presented its opinion-piece on Malfoy. It seems that someone had managed to get pictures of you two in America, having breakfast, and wanted Skeeter to use them to ruin your reputation. Rita buried the story, only asking for the interview in exchange."

Harry nodded. "Okay."

"This next bit might amuse you," Percy continued. "It seems that there has been a network of conspirators out to ruin you."

"Oh?" Harry asked.

Percy nodded, his face straight and expressionless. "It seems that there are regular meetings among the Divination professors of the major magical schools. They get together and read each other's fortunes and tell each other wonderful stories." He took a sip of tea. "Well, it seems that they have a large grudge against you for 'ruining' their reputation. It seems that Prévoyez told Trelawney that you and Gabrielle seemed close, and Trelawney told Malfoy and Snape."

"I had a quiet word with our dear ex-Professor yesterday evening, and it seems that whatever Skeeter said to her sunk in." He smiled suddenly, in a slightly feral manner. "She was absolutely terrified and hiding in her belfry. I think her career as an international conspirator has come to an abrupt and incompetent end."

Harry laughed softly.

"The next question was about the age difference," Ron continued. "Aimée took that one as well and, well, that particular journalist is probably still running away, in case she tries to find him."

"I disliked his implications," Aimée explained. "I also reminded him of some of the facts I had just finished talking about."

Ron sniggered. "Something like that," he agreed. "The next few questions Jean and I could handle, as we talked about some of the boring stuff involved. But then we got asked a question we couldn't answer; which was, what happened before we went into the lake?"

"What had happened?" Gabrielle asked.

"All the wizards and witches present, nearly forty thousand of them, felt something pull on their magic."

"And you told them not to worry about it, correct?"

"Yeah."

"Good. That's all they need to know."

Viktor raised his hand.

"Yes, Vik?" Gabrielle asked.

"Vat dit hoppen?"

Gabrielle looked at Harry. He looked back for a moment, then he nodded.

"Are you sure?" she asked softly.

"These are my friends. I trust them."

"You are all aware of your magic and where it comes from inside you, correct?"

They all nodded.

"I will draw an analogy here, and describe your magic as a well. When you do a spell, you draw your magic out of the well and the total within the well depletes slightly. After a while, the magic in the well regenerates itself." Everyone was nodding. "That is *your* power supply, and if you use it all up, then you have to wait for it to naturally refill.

"Harry is different. Harry can draw magic from his surroundings, and use it to supplement his own magic. What this means is that he has fantastic reserves he can draw on, and in a fight, if you do not kill him quickly, Harry will win, because when you run out of magic, he will not.

"But that is not the only difference. While we may draw from our well with a bucket – or wand – Harry can bypass that and access it directly. I guess, to continue the analogy; you could refer to putting a hose down there and a pump.

"Of course, Harry's well is enormous as well. Magic is like a muscle; the more you use it, the bigger it gets. If you look at the things Harry has done in his life, the escapades he has gone through, and the natural power he was born with, you can see why.

"To answer your question, Harry was drained after stopping the Killing Curses, so he took the easiest and quickest way to refill his well. He pulled from his surroundings, which just happened to include forty thousand witches and wizards."

"Oh," Viktor said. He scratched the back of his neck. "Dat vill tich me to ask such qvestions," he mumbled.

"The thing I'm wondering is if Hermione actually heard all that," Ron said with a grin.

"Hmm?" Hermione asked.

"Gabrielle was just saying that Luna was right, and that Scrimgeour was really a cross-dressing chimpanzee all these years," Harry replied.

"That's nice," Hermione agreed absently, still intent on what she was reading.

Everyone laughed, apart from Hermione, who didn't even look up.

"After that, there were a few more questions, but Aimée had already explained most things, and the press were happy to leave and get back to write their copy."

"They were pretty good with what they heard," Alicia said, "I read a few articles this morning. But really, after stopping so many killing curses, and doing what you did, no one was going to write anything bad against you."

"True," Angelina agreed. "There are calls for you to receive the Order of Merlin, first class, for managing to block the curses. Interestingly, no one really asked how Gabrielle survived. I think everyone just presumed that Harry was protecting her."

"Which he was. The only negative reports were from the Prophet, or, rather, they would have been negative," Percy added. "But I got an emergency court injunction stopping them from publishing today. I had a word with some of their advertisers, and pointed out the negative publicity they were getting, and a lot of them have pulled out. I don't think the Prophet is going to survive this." He paused. "Did you know that the owner is married to Lucius Malfoy's aunt? It explains the slavish sycophancy."

"So that was about it," Ron said. "Viktor took care of the Beauxbatons and Durmstrang players, made sure everyone was safe, and kept an eye on the victory party."

"Well, that's it apart from Viktor's new friend," Bill added.

"Oh?" Harry asked.

Viktor blushed.

"It seems that a certain Head Girl from Hogwarts, upon finding that not only were you not available, being in a committed relationship with a certain other Head Girl, decided that she would turn her attentions to a new target: Viktor Krum."

Harry laughed softly, feeling Gabrielle laugh next to him.

"She is von scary vitch," Viktor admitted.

"It's okay, Viktor, I'll protect you from the nasty schoolgirl," Katie said, rubbing his back.

"Vill you? Really?" he asked.

Katie opened her mouth, and then shut it as she looked at him. She blushed faintly and then nodded, ignoring the grins on the faces of everyone else present.

"All that is left is the award ceremony tonight," Jean said. "It has been an interesting few days, and at the end of it, I believe we have accomplished our goals. Beauxbatons has won the tournament. Olympe is thrilled that she has the Cup of Throbus. Your relationship is now well known, and there is a feeling of sympathy and respect for Gabrielle over what she has been through. Dumbledore, Snape, and Malfoy are all gone from Hogwarts, and Minerva is in charge, with Filius as Deputy Headmaster."

Harry grinned. "And if we could have managed that without Gabrielle nearly dying, it would have been perfect."

"I've just got one more question," Fred said. "Why here?"



“Sorry?” Harry asked.

“You have Grimmauld Place, you have that cottage in the Lake District that your parents used, and you have loads more properties floating around. So why do you always seem to stay in this one?”

Harry smiled. “It’s mine. The others I inherited. This is the only thing I own that I’ve paid for myself.”

“I do approve,” Percy said, “and it’s a very nice place as well – if a little cold. Anyway, to finish this off. I sent some people down to have a chat with the Merpeople, but they’d left, lock, stock and barrel. There were only a few abandoned huts. No one’s quite sure how they did it, although I did get reports that the Giant Squid was looking pleased. No one’s exactly upset about it. We take it rather personally when one species tries to sacrifice another. Oh, and one of the idiot Death Eaters was a friend of yours – Hogwarts’ ex-Head Boy. He didn’t like you, but now he’s terrified of you.”

Harry sighed. “I blame Snape and Malfoy. But he tried to kill an innocent to make a point, and he deserves what he gets.”

Gabrielle lightly took his hand and squeezed it gently.

Percy smiled faintly. “The Ministry would like to know how you perform the new ‘Obliteration’ spell.”

Harry smiled back. “Simple. You point at them, and say, ‘Obliterate’.”

“I thought that would be your answer,” Percy said, his face straight again. “Of course, the prerequisites for getting the spell to work include having more power than everyone working for the Ministry put together, and being mildly peeved at someone for trying to kill your Mate.”

“Precisely.”

“I shall report back in *great detail* .”

Harry laughed and winked at Percy, who nodded in return, stifling a grin.

Aimée looked at her watch. “It is time for us all to leave,” she announced. “We need to get ready for the ceremony.”

“Afterward, we should all go out to dinner,” Gabrielle said.

The others nodded and smiled. Hermione stood, but only because Ron lifted her up. She was still intently reading the book, with the only signs of life being her occasional blink and turning of a page.

“Harry, could you...” Ron asked.

Harry laughed and summoned the book from Hermione.

“I was reading that!” Hermione protested, a frown appearing on her face.

“We know,” Harry replied dryly. “But as we’ve finished our talk, it’s time for you to get ready for the ceremony.”

“Oh.”

“And if you’re good, Ron might tell you what you missed.”

“I missed something?” Hermione asked, her frown changing to a look of consternation.

Gabrielle smiled. “I explained how Harry’s magic works.”

Hermione’s face went white. “But...” she said.

“Come on, dear, let’s get out of here,” Ron said soothingly.

“You can all Apparate,” Harry said. “I’ve dropped the wards for a few moments.”

With a few farewells, everyone Disapparated, leaving Harry and Gabrielle alone on the balcony.

“That went well,” Harry said, as he moved to hug her.

She smiled. “We seem to have a lot of friends.”

Harry nodded. “More than I realised. I think you’ve helped me see that being more open with people means that they are more open back.”

“Viktor and Katie?” she asked.

“Vik calls her the ‘pretty Chaser’.”

Gabrielle smiled. “We should get ready as well. Should I wear my uniform?”

Harry looked at her for a brief second and then shook his head. “No, tonight we go as a couple.”

Gabrielle beamed at him. "Then I shall look my very best," she vowed.

"You always do," he replied and pulled her closer so that he could kiss her.

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Harry squared his shoulders and exhaled. He was wearing a simple white shirt with dark trousers. He had left his glasses at home, and Gabrielle had done his hair so that it looked about as good as it could get.

Next to him, Gabrielle took his hand and smiled. She looked beautiful in a grey silk skirt and a black top, but he really doubted that anyone would look at what she was wearing. Her smile seemed to say everything it needed to. She looked happy and content, and more, she looked proud that she could now be seen with him and didn't have to hide.

The doors to the Great Hall of Hogwarts slowly opened and they walked in. He squeezed her hand slightly, and she shot him a small smile. As they entered, the Beauxbatons team started to clap, and were quickly followed by the Durmstrang. The rest of the students started to join in, until they reached their spot in the centre.

"Thank you," Harry said dryly. Rather than translate, they looked at each other and cast a spell, allowing the French and Germans present to understand English perfectly for the evening.

There was another cheer, and Harry found himself relaxing. He grinned at the crowd and Gabrielle started to speak.

Just a few months ago he had felt that there was no hope left in his life, that he was never going to be truly happy. That everything he loved doing was gone.

It had taken one amazing girl to show him what he had forgotten: that life was there to be lived, and something else he hadn't known: that she would be there to live it with him. He looked to the future with excitement, and knew that he would have someone to share it with, someone who understood his hopes and dreams.

As he started to call the first person forward for the first award, he was hit by the thought that the most powerful force in the universe was the power of hope, because without it, you were lost, but with it, you could do anything.

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