

Perfect Situations

Her heels made an echoing, clicking sound as she walked purposefully down the aisle of the church.

She made an elegant figure, wearing a black Muggle mourning dress, with her black hair tied back by a single emerald ribbon.

The church was full, completely packed with people from Hogwarts, the Ministry, the press, and the general public. Outside, thousands more were gathered to watch the proceedings on charmed screens.

All of them gathered to mourn the death of a hero and a legend.

Harry James Potter – dead at the age of seventeen. It was such a young age to die, but he had managed to do more in his seventeen years than most people could have managed in several lifetimes.

He had destroyed Voldemort – not once, but twice. The second time had cost him everything, but he had done it willingly, to defeat the person who thought himself unbeatable.

She reached the front and was stopped in her progress by the angry faces of the people who had once been Harry's closest friends: Hermione Granger, Ron Weasley and Ginny Weasley, his ex-girlfriend.

"What are you doing here?" the male Weasley hissed, the other two nodding their heads in agreement.

She looked at them and sighed softly. They were so predictable. "You've given your speeches," she whispered to them. "Scrimgeour and the others have said their eulogies; I thought I'd give these people a true account of Harry, from someone who *really* knew him."

"Knew him?" the female Weasley said scornfully, keeping her voice quiet. "You didn't know him."

She almost smiled. She could have scripted their responses. She looked at Ginny and whispered, "The Chamber of Secrets and Tom Riddle's diary." She turned to Hermione and continued, "Cat hair and polyjuice potion." She finished with Ron. "Followed any spiders recently?"

Ron flinched, and the other two looked shocked. She nodded at them and made her way up to the front, to the lectern where so many people had already paid their respects to the Boy Who No Longer Lived.

She looked out at the sea of faces and gripped the sides of the lectern firmly. She could feel her wand down the back of her Muggle dress and contemplated placing it within reach. She didn't.

That would have been a sign of weakness, and she never showed weakness in public.

The door to the church flew open, and Kingsley Shacklebolt stumbled in. He saw everyone looking at him, and he looked directly at her. He winced and took a seat quietly, waving apologetically for interrupting the ceremony.

It wasn't really his fault. He had tried to stop her getting through the gates and had been rather surprised when she had simply frozen him on the spot and walked past. The public had separated before her, allowing her a stately path to the front of the church.

In front of her, the first row to the right was made up of the Weasley family, their respective spouses and partners, and Remus Lupin.

To the left were the teachers from Hogwarts, including the Headmaster, Minerva McGonagall, and Severus Snape – who had been cleared of Dumbledore's murder after his help with finding the Horcruxes – and from the Ministry, Rufus Scrimgeour with Percy Weasley next to him.

Everyone was staring at her, wondering the same thing. What was she doing there, and why hadn't she started yet?

She took a deep breath and exhaled slowly.

"My name is Daphne Greengrass," she said firmly. The Sonorous charm on the lectern insured that everyone could hear her words. "For the last four months, I have been Harry Potter's lover."

There was a roar of surprise at the bombshell she had dropped that seemed to ripple through the crowd in a visible wave. In front of her, Harry's three friends were looking shocked – the female Weasley looked like she was going to faint.

"Looking back, I could have played things differently," she said, allowing a small smile to grace her face. "But that wouldn't have suited us."

"Liar!" Ron Weasley yelled, finally surging to his feet.

As fast as she could, she pulled her wand out from its hiding place and pointed it directly at him. "People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw

stones," she whispered intently. The whisper still picked up by the spell and amplified. "Sit down, all of you," she ordered. "And listen. You might learn something."

Ron flushed and sat down as Hermione tugged at him. The bushy-haired girl was staring at her with a look of dread on her face.

She placed her wand down on the lectern, a little more comforted to have it there.

"It all started at the beginning of the school year, as all good stories do."

"Greengrass," Draco Malfoy sneered. "It's time that you declared your loyalty to our Lord."

Daphne looked up from her book at the vapid blond before her. "Has anyone ever mentioned to you just how rat-like you are?" she asked curiously.

Draco flushed angrily and pulled out his wand. "You have five seconds."

"Can you even count that high?" Daphne taunted, her manner calm and undisturbed despite Malfoy's threats.

Draco's face turned another shade deeper red. "Cruc..."

Daphne sighed softly and pushed the table hard, the corner catching the boy straight in the groin.

With an ear piercing scream, Draco collapsed to the floor, his high colour now caused by pain rather than embarrassment.

She stood and walked around the table, shooting a warning look at Crabbe and Goyle. "If you ever talk to me again, I will kill you," she said softly, crouching down so that she loomed over him. "And no one, not your Dark Lord, not your body guards will be able to prevent it," she warned. She calmly reached into her pocket and pulled out a small red bag. She moved it toward his face, but his hands flew up to stop her.

Almost absently she punched him in the groin again, and as his mouth opened to scream in agony, she pressed the bag between his teeth and shook the contents out.

He swallowed reflexively, and she smirked. She climbed back to her feet and turned, striding out of the room confidently.

"What was that?" Draco asked, having managed to push himself to his knees.

"Poison," Daphne said over her shoulder from the doorway. "Fatal, obviously, in ten month's time to be exact. I do have the antidote, and you can have it at the end of the school year, if you leave me alone. If I die, so do you."

"But..."

"No buts, Malfoy," she spat. "You want to play in the big league? Then you deal with the consequences."

She turned and walked out the door and headed into her dorm room. It was empty. She walked over to her bed, drew the curtains and collapsed. No matter what tests Draco used, he would never find out how that stuff worked. No one but her could.

Because no one else would ever know that it was a bluff.

"All I wanted was for that toad to leave me alone," she explained to the church. "I had no idea how much it was going to change my life."

The reactions of the people in front of her had changed again. Ron was looking delighted; anything with Draco being hit in the balls was good for him. Hermione and Ginny were now studying her, identical looks of concern on their faces.

Snape was looking proud; McGonagall had her lips pursed, but her eyes were smiling softly. It was a look Harry had described that she had never seen before, or really believed that McGonagall was capable of giving. The Headmaster was frowning and shaking his head a little.

"Anyone would think that you wanted to be alone," a voice drawled slowly, interrupting her.

"They would be right," she said, ignoring him as much as she could. "What do you want, Potter?"

"Me?" Harry asked with a smirk audible in his voice. "Why would I *want* anything?"

"Then piss off."

"Ah, there's that famous Slytherin charm I've heard so much about."

"Look, I've already taken out one of the big boys; I'll happily add the Gryffindor Golden boy to my list if you don't bugger off and go do whatever the hell it is you Golden boys do to pass the time."

"As you asked," Harry said cheerfully, as he pulled up a chair and joined her, "normally we go searching for ferrets to irritate, but a certain ice queen has put a stop to that, so now I'm bored. And as you're the source of my boredom, you can entertain me."

Look, Potter, I'm sure your charm has the female half of Hogwarts panting for you, but it does nothing for me. I have an important potions test to study for, and you are interrupting me. Go bother a Hufflepuff." She looked up from her book and glared at him, hoping it would emphasise the fact that she did not want him around.

"The test isn't until Friday," Harry pointed out. "So you've got plenty of time."

She groaned and pulled her wand out, casting a *Stupefy* spell automatically at him.

"Now that's not very nice," Harry said.

She studied him thoughtfully. She looked down at her hand, and the way his hand had lightly grabbed it and pointed it away from him. The potted plant in the corner looked slightly worse for wear now, though.

"Interesting," she stated softly. "Perhaps you aren't totally useless."

"Of course not," he agreed. "Only around ninety-five percent useless."

She felt her lips twitch slightly.

"What do you want, Potter?"

"For you to call me Harry," he smiled. "From there, I don't know."

"You don't know?"

"You are very inquisitive, aren't you?"

"Knowledge is power."

"So I've heard," he agreed. "You're a pureblood. You're a Slytherin. Why did you turn Draco down so forcefully?"

She stood, slamming her books closed, and walked to the door. "None of your damn business," she whispered.

She walked away from him, absently cursing him under her breath, and hoping that was the last she would see of him.

It was a futile hope.

Everywhere she went, he seemed to pop up alone. A second year knocked her bag off of her shoulder as the child ran by, and he was there, giving unwanted help with it.

Crabbe and Goyle decided to act on their own initiative and beat Draco's cure from her, and he was there, as Head Boy, taking points from Slytherin and humiliating them.

Eventually, she could stand it no longer and gave in.

"Stop stalking me!" she demanded as she pulled him into an empty classroom.

"I'm not," he grinned at her.

"And take that damnable smirk off your face."

He bowed mockingly and sneered at her. "This the sort of expression you're most used to?"

"Yes," she admitted. "Now, why in the name of Hades are you following me?"

"Perhaps I like Hades – he has custody of a number of my friends and family."

She blinked and then clapped slowly. "So, a Gryffindor with a brain. And I thought that Granger was the only one."

"Maybe," he replied.

"Look, Potter, what do you want?"

"I told you; for you to call me Harry."

"Will you go away if I do?"

He nodded.

"Fine. Harry. Please leave me alone."

He shook his head.

"You promised."

"I had my fingers crossed," he grinned, moving his hand from behind his back.

She stared at him and threw her hands in the air. "Leave me alone!"

"You didn't say the magic word."

"Please," she said as coldly as she could.

"That's not the magic word. Everyone knows it's Abracadabra!"

She groaned under her breath. "Muggle nonsense!"

"But then, aren't we all nonsensical?" he grinned impishly.

She pulled her wand out, only to find that again, he had moved closer to her and made her point it away from him.

"I told you, that's not nice."

"I'm not nice," she growled.

"Did anyone ever tell you that's sexy?" he asked curiously.

"No!"

"Their loss," he shrugged.

She decided to change tactics, as the normal ones she used weren't working. She stepped forward into his personal space. "Look, Harry," she said, drawing one of her nails down his face. "Please," she emphasised the word, dragging it out. "Leave me the hell alone." She finished by raising her knee hard.

But he had already moved, and all she hit was his thigh – which seemed to absorb the blow easily.

He smiled at her and backed away, bowing effortlessly, showing her the door.

She closed her eyes and counted to ten, before stalking out. She only vaguely heard him say, "The growling isn't nearly as sexy as your arse."

Remus Lupin was laughing softly, as were some of the Weasleys. She could see smiles on the faces of the people in the crowd. She picked up her wand and conjured a glass of water; before she let her eyes drift down to Harry's three friends.

They were looking confused more than anything else. This wasn't a side of Harry they had ever seen, and they didn't know why.

She decided that confusion would be good for them, because she hadn't even started yet.

"I hoped that was the last I would see of him. But like a bad knut, he never stopped turning up. He continued to just coincidentally be everywhere I was. In the library, on the Quidditch pitch, even doing Potions homework."

"Don't you have friends who like your company?" she asked eventually. "You know, people who actually want you around, value your company, and don't wish you would die?"

"Now I'm hurt," he said, that same damn grin on his face. "You want me to die? Isn't that a little harsh."

She groaned. How did he do this to her every time?

"Look," she said firmly. "Why can't you go and play with your other friends and leave me alone?"

"They're snogging in a cupboard," he said cheerfully. "So there's nothing to stop me from being here."

"They are?" she asked in surprise. "They finally got together?"

"Officially, no," Harry explained. "But well, let's just say that my sources are pretty damn accurate, and that they don't spend all their time on prefect patrol."

She paused and took another sip of water. Ron and Hermione were blushing furiously, while Mrs Weasley appeared to be glaring daggers at them. Ginny was smirking – it was a smirk she was about to wipe off her face.

"Well, what about Weasley? You were dating her last year."

"I was," he agreed. "But not any more."

Why not?"

He sighed softly and absently cast a silencing spell around them. It wasn't that he did the spell that impressed her; it was the casual ease of it. It was almost absent-minded, as if the wand movements and actions were done for the sake of form, rather than because they were needed.

"You know we broke up at the end of last year?"

She nodded. It was common knowledge – along with why he had done it and the exact words he'd used.

"What would you do if a boy broke up with you like that?"

She smirked. "A boy, dump me? I don't think so."

"Seriously," Harry said, rolling his eyes playfully.

"Okay, if I liked him, and we were good together, and he came up with a steaming pile of bollocks like what you served up to Miss Weasley, I would have punched, then kissed him, and told him that if he ever thinks of doing that again, I'd see to it one night while he was sleeping that he'd never have children."

Harry threw his head back and laughed loudly. He kept laughing until tears ran out of his eyes and breathing became an issue.

She sighed and waited for him to finish. She contemplated casting a water spell at him but had already realised that getting a spell to actually hit him was a lot more difficult than it would be with anyone else.

"And that's the reason," he said softly, as he wiped his eyes.

"Excuse me?" she asked. "That's the reason for what?"

His face lost all its humour as he looked at her. "I was thinking about it over the summer – at the time, I was trying to be noble and do what was best for her. But afterward, I was trying to work out why she didn't fight for me, why she didn't tell me I was being an idiot – that I was worried for nothing."

"And she didn't?"

"Nope," he sighed. "So I got to thinking that I was right. And now she's trying to make me jealous with Seamus."

"Hell of an ego you have there, Harry. She might like the boy."

Harry smiled slightly. "My sources tell me that when they are away from me, they don't spend any time together, and Seamus likes Lavender anyway."

"Oh," she said softly. "And you're not jealous?"

He shook his head. "Once I thought she was the one for me, but if she was, she wouldn't be playing games, and she wouldn't have let me get away with that."

The look on Ginny's face was pretty funny. The smirk was gone, and she now seemed to be cycling between incredibly pale and bright red. The girl turned and shot an incredibly hurt gaze at Hermione, and a lot of things slipped neatly into place. It must have been Hermione – who supposedly knew Harry – who had advised her on what to do. It had had the opposite effect, instead of getting jealous as he had in the sixth year; he had walked away completely from her.

It seemed as if Harry's friends had trouble realising that the events of the summer had made him grow up.

She decided to move on, as she had a lot more history to cover.

"So why me?" Daphne asked. It had been another few weeks of Harry appearing near her whenever he could.

"Because you're not impressed with Harry Potter."

She paused; that had sounded a lot more honest than she had expected. "And you're not Harry Potter?"

"Not if I can bloody help it," he sighed. "But you do like Harry, and that makes it a lot of fun for me."

"Do I?" she asked.

"Yep," he said confidently. "You haven't tried to hex me in over a month."

"Something I can make up for quickly," she growled.

He shivered in an exaggerated fashion. "I told you I think that is sexy," he grinned.

She raised one finger in a universally recognised gesture.

Harry grinned. "Too many people here see Harry Potter, the Boy Who Lived. The only people who didn't were my friends, but things change; life changes, and with time on my hands, I started looking around the school. I wanted to see if there was anything else here in this world that was worth dying for."

"Worth dying for?" she asked, folding up the book in front of her, and for the first time she examined him closely. It was a little bit of a shock to find that he had grown up. Long gone was the small boy she had first seen at the Sorting ceremony. This was a boy on the verge of adulthood. He wasn't tall, or big, but there was still something about him; something that said that he could handle it, what ever it was. There was no childish playacting that the likes of Draco would use, just an inherent belief in himself and his ability to do what was needed.

His eyes were bright and affected her in ways that she would rather not think about at the moment. He had a bit of stubble on his cheeks, but it looked good on him and made him appear a little rougher. His hair was the only thing that hadn't changed; it was still unruly. Still untamed, and in a way, it seemed like an analogy of him.

And she stifled that thought immediately. There was no way in hell she was getting into thinking of him like that. She was a Slytherin Queen, and if there was one rule she followed, it was that Gryffindor Golden boys should be avoided at all costs. They could only bring trouble.

"Yes," he eventually said slowly. "Worth dying for."

"Explain."

It was his turn to look at her, and she fought the urge to look away. His eyes were too bright, too piercing; they were looking at her and seeing things he had no right to see. But she held his gaze proudly. She would not be beaten by anyone.

"The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches ... Born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies ... And the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not ... And either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives ... The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies..." His voice was mocking as he delivered his recital.

"Ahh," she said slowly, nodding.

"Ahh?" he asked.

She nodded. It explained a lot. "So why aren't you out being a good Gryffindor?"

He looked at her and stood slowly. He smiled at her, that same smile that was almost cocky but not quite. "That," he said with a mocking bow, "is a story for another time."

He turned and walked out, leaving her gnashing her teeth in frustration.

She took another sip of water. It was just as he had said it would be. Tell them a story, and they'll listen. For most, it was the first time that they had heard of the prophecy, and unlike her, they were confused.

What a surprise – the great unwashed were confused. Was it any wonder that Voldemort had managed to do so much?

She knew he was playing games with her. She knew it as much as she knew she was a Slytherin. A proper Slytherin, not like these idiotic pretenders, who preached about sanctity of blood and used Salazar's name in vain.

None of them had even bothered to actually look at the original Slytherin, or what had caused his decision to try and exclude non pure-bloods. It had nothing to do with purity, and everything to do with the fact that Muggles spent an awful lot of time hunting down Wizards and killing them in the most gruesome of ways.

She sighed and tried to refocus.

Damn that boy. Damn him to Hades and back.

He hadn't come back to her. He had left her alone. He had given her a piece of the story, enough to rouse her curiosity, and then backed away.

He wanted to her to come to him.

Well, she wouldn't. Damn him.

It was only now that she realised just how clever he had been. In a school this big, secrets were impossible. Yet he had kept one. No one knew that they had spent so much time together. No one knew of their conversations.

Just how he had pulled it off gnawed at her, because it was impressive. It was almost... Slytherin.

She stood abruptly and slammed her books shut. She ignored the looks she got from Parkinson, walked out of the Slytherin common room and headed toward the library. At the last minute, she turned and entered the classroom they had talked so much in.

It didn't surprise her that he was waiting for her. It didn't surprise her that he had two cups of steaming hot chocolate.

She sat opposite him and shook her head slowly.

“You’re what, five foot six?” he asked.

She nodded.

“And about eight and a half stone?” he asked.

She tilted her head and allowed a smirk to grace her lips. “I wear a size 4 shoe; I’m 38-24-34 if you must know. And yes, I am a C-cup. I tend to have my periods regularly, but thanks to the Potion, I don’t get bothered by them.”

She hid a smile as he flushed bright red. “Too much information, Harry?” she asked. “If it helps, I’m still growing, so who knows what size I will end up at.”

She looked out at the audience. The looks had changed with that one statement. She was now being looked at in awe and jealousy, and with some disbelief. Maybe not as much, as this Muggle dress did emphasise the curves she had been talking about. Just because most of the boys at Hogwarts had never bothered to find out what was under the loose robes was their problem, not hers.

She could feel the hate in Ginny’s gaze and winked at the girl deliberately. Ms-barely-an-A-Cup looked like she wanted to pull her wand out and cast the Cruciatus at her.

“Do you even know what those numbers mean?” she asked curiously, as he regained control of himself.

“I’ll go to the library and find out later,” he replied, his smile returning.

She laughed softly. “So you’re only interested in me for my body?”

“Not really,” he said, his smile going. “I quite like your mind and attitude as well.”

“So serious,” she teased.

“When it is important, yes,” he agreed.

“Is this important?”

“I think so,” he said. “And I’m willing to find out.”

She nodded silently. “Why are you here and not defeating Voldemort?”

“You can say his name?”

“Fear of a name is irrational and stupid.”

“Especially when it is an anagram of Tom Marvolo Riddle,” Harry agreed.

“The old head-boy from the 1940’s?”

He nodded.

She sat back and whistled slowly when a thought struck her, almost violently. “Wasn’t he a half-blood?”

He nodded again, a smirk appearing on his face.

She laughed properly for the first time with him. “Oh, Merlin,” she sighed happily. “The biggest Dark Lord in history is a half-blood.”

“So is Snape,” Harry said casually.

“I knew that,” she nodded. “You didn’t answer the question though.”

“You said yourself, knowledge is power,” he said, his smile going again.

She looked at him curiously.

“I want something for the story.”

“What?” she asked.

“A date.”

She blinked. “You’re asking me out on a date?”

He nodded.

“In public?”

He thought for a couple of seconds and then shook his head.

“I don’t think either of us really wants that, do we?”

“No,” she agreed. “So how would we have a date?”

He grinned at her, his eyes twinkling in the candlelight. “Pretend we were normal – that we could go anywhere on the next Hogsmeade weekend, that the world was our oyster. Where would you go?”

“Are you saying that you can get us out of this castle, without being detected, and take us anywhere you want to go?”

He nodded.

“Manchester,” she said decisively.

His eyebrows rose. “Why?”

“First, we need to go shopping. I’ve seen the crap you wear, and it’s not fit to be burnt. If we’re going to date, you are going to dress better. Second, it’s not London. Let’s face it; you show your face there, and everyone, including the Prophet, will know about it in minutes.”

He nodded. “Manchester it is. So, you’ll go on a date with me?”

She knew the question had changed; it was no longer light as it had been before. This was a Gryffindor asking her out, with everything that entailed.

She had been asked out before; by too many people to count. Since her second year in fact, when a sixth year had asked her out. It had been disturbing and confusing for her. She said no, not sure why. That had started her reputation as being an Ice Queen, and it was one she had embraced, brushing boys, and the occasional girl, off with practised ease. Yet here was a Gryffindor, showing the courage he was famed for and doing it seriously.

“What do you see, when you look at me?” she asked softly. For the first time, she was nervous, and she didn’t like the feeling.

“External or internal?” he asked.

She tilted her head and looked closely at him. He wasn’t trying to be funny; he was just asking a simple question. “Outside, then inside.”

“I see shoulder length black hair that sometimes seems to absorb the light, and at others, seems to reflect it as brightly as a mirror. When you wash it and leave it to dry, it starts out perfectly straight, but it soon dries into waves that seem untameable.

“I see a tanned face with pale blue eyes that at first glance can appear to be chips of ice. I see a nose that’s slightly too long, and a mouth that is slightly too wide, yet the whole package is one of beauty and strength. It’s something that shouldn’t work, but it does.

“The inside is strength. You stand alone, you make your own decisions, and woe betide anyone who tries to divert you from the path you are on.”

“So why are you asking me out?” she asked softly. “Why are you not afraid of that?”

“Because you are an immovable object, and my life is an overwhelming force,” he said, his eyes clear. “I’ll wash over anyone else.”

She nodded slowly and settled back down, sipping from the hot chocolate. His honesty appealed to her. Many boys had told her how beautiful she was with flowery words and pretty phrases, but none had ever told her the truth. She had long ago come to terms with herself; that her nose was a little too long, and her mouth was a little wide. It really wasn’t hard to settle for beautiful; she felt the minor flaws gave her face some character.

“I’ll go out with you,” she said. “And my ancestors are rolling in their graves, wondering why their Slytherin heir is agreeing to date a damnable Gryffindor Golden Boy.”

“It’s because I’m cute,” he grinned.

“Dream on, Harry. Dream on.”

He smiled at her. “I’ll keep my end of the bargain.

“After Peter Pettigrew betrayed my parents – he was the Secret Keeper by the way – and he framed my godfather, Sirius, I was abandoned by Dumbledore at the doorstep of the narrowest minded and cruellest Muggles in existence.

“For the next eleven years, I was neglected and treated as a slave. I lived in a cupboard under the stairs. My schooling was infrequent, their biological son bullied me, and in short, life was hellacious.”

Everything was said in a calm voice, as if he was merely reciting from a transfiguration book.

“But on my eleventh birthday, everything changed. I had a letter from Hogwarts, addressed to me in the cupboard under the stairs.

It was only last year that I realised what that meant. That far from being forgotten about – which in some strange way I could have accepted, I was kept there, in that position, for a reason.

“I had been taken from a loving house and left with people who called me a freak. Why? Because Dumbledore liked to play games with peoples’ lives, and I was his favourite toy.”

There was a look of shock on most of the faces in the crowd now and a lot of whispering, as people turned to each other and asked a hundred variations of the same question. “Is she lying?”

“No,” she said icily. “I am not lying.” She looked at the people in the front row. “Would any of you care to refute my words?”

There was a telling silence as they all shifted uncomfortably, but no one stood up to defend him.

“I do wonder,” she said. “How many others knew about it and did nothing?”

She looked down and nodded to herself as Snape, McGonagall and the Headmaster refused to meet her eyes.

She felt her contempt for Snape grow.

“So Snape hated you because of your father?” she asked.

He nodded.

“I always knew he was a dick,” she sighed. “But that goes beyond the pale.”

“Oh, his story gets worse later,” Harry shrugged. “If I ever decide to go dark, the first person I torture will be Snape.”

She nodded. “It’s almost a shame you won’t.”

“I know,” he agreed with a small laugh. “But he was the first person to really make me question why I should fight for others. For many years that didn’t matter, really. The will to survive was bigger than the distaste I felt for so many people in the Wizarding world.”

She told his stories: how, with the help of Ron, he had saved Hermione, and the friendship that had resulted. How, in his second year, he had rescued a student from Tom Riddle’s diary.

She didn’t use Ginny’s name, even though she knew it. Not because she had any feelings for the red-haired girl, but because not doing so would confuse the hell out of her, which was reason enough in its own right.

She had been talking for an hour now, but no one showed any signs of wanting her to stop. In fact, on some faces it looked like if she stopped now, they would riot. She was tempted for a few seconds, but that wasn’t what Harry would have wanted.

“And so Snape had killed Dumbledore, and after my initial mourning, I was determined to avenge him. That I would be able to go Horcrux hunting with my friends, we’d find and destroy them, and finally end this.”

“But?”

“But bloody Dumbledore wasn’t dead. It turns out the great and light wizard, far from using a Golem like he claimed he did when he returned from the dead to the public, actually used the *Imperio* us to control a lowly Death Eater to impersonate him.”

There was a huge intake of breath as every head in the room swivelled to look at Albus Dumbledore, the Hogwarts Headmaster. He was staring at her – so she smirked at him.

“Please,” she said softly. “There is more of this story to come. Please save your recriminations until I’ve finished.”

“He did what?” she demanded.

“Voldemort was starting to think Snape was a spy. Which he was, of course. When Snape found out that Voldemort had ordered Draco Malfoy to kill Dumbledore, he went immediately to Dumbledore, who came up with this plan. As far as he was concerned, it was perfect. Snape would be back in Voldemort’s good books, and Draco would have a chance of redemption.

“So Albus and the Order of the Phoenix captured a Death Eater, and Albus took control of him with a mix of Legilimency and *Imperio* us, doused him with some polyjuice potion, and hey presto, one Dumbledore clone.”

“But what about his funeral?”

“It was a remarkably well attended funeral for a minor Death Eater,” Harry shrugged. “After the funeral, it was a little difficult knowing that I was

alone, that my mentor was gone, and that I would have to make my own decisions about what I should do about Voldemort. But I knew I could do it. That I would do it for Dumbledore, for Sirius, for Cedric, and for my parents – because after all,” and his voice turned mocking, “I was Dumbledore’s man. So I was ready to go Horcrux hunting, when I was summoned to the headquarters of the Order of the Phoenix. I was hoping that I was going to find Ron, Hermione, and Ginny there, and the four of us would duck out the back, and have another adventure. To be honest, I was really looking forward to it despite everything that had happened.

“But,” Harry sighed. “Dumbledore had already talked to the three of them, and had told them that I must not be allowed to go hunting, because he had it all under control, and they believed him – completely.

“I can still see their faces; they were all alive with excitement. Ginny’s eyes were sparkling.”

“Interesting chat up line,” she noted, “talking about another girl.”

He shrugged. “They led me into a room and vanished. I looked around curiously, and Dumbledore turned around in the chair and smiled at me – his eyes were twinkling merrily.”

His voice went cold. “I knew what I was supposed to feel. I was supposed to cry with joy and embrace him. I was supposed to admire his amazing planning.”

“What did you feel?” she asked softly.

“I hated him. Completely. When he staged his death, he put me under an invisibility cloak and made me watch as ‘he’ was killed. I had no more respect for him, because he, as sure as hell, had no respect for me.”

“The first thing Dumbledore said was, ‘Rumours of my death were greatly exaggerated.’ I could have killed him then, but I didn’t. I smiled and congratulated him. I was still hoping that I could go hunting for Tom, but I had underestimated him again.

“Every time I brought it up with any of the others, they told me not to be so silly, not to act rashly. People were dying out there, and they were totally under the power of Dumbledore. So I had to watch as Ron and Hermione made googly eyes at each other, as Ginny played with my mind, and as the others all joined in with the cult of Dumbledore knows best.

“That was just another piece of confirmation that Ginny wasn’t the right person for me. The right girl would have listened to me, talked to me, and gone with me on the hunt. I can’t blame her, not many girls would give up their place in the magical world for that sort of thing.”

“I would have,” she said honestly. “I guess it’s too late now?”

“Yeah,” Harry sighed. “We’ve destroyed the bulk of the Horcruxes. There’s only Nagini and Voldemort left.

“So we came back to school, with McGonagall in charge, Voldemort with no idea that Dumbledore was alive, and Malfoy back in the school, as Dumbledore told McGonagall that he hadn’t actually done anything.”

She shook her head slowly. “Even after all of that, he let that Death Eater spawn back in Hogwarts to terrorise as many people as he could?”

“I’m kinda glad he did,” Harry grinned. “Because otherwise, I would have never seen you smack him down like you did. And I wouldn’t have had my curiosity piqued.”

She smiled slightly at him. “So what now?”

“Now?” he sighed. “We go shopping on Saturday in Manchester?”

Ginny was now looking apoplectically at Hermione and Hermione was looking down at the floor. So, this had been another instance where Ginny had followed the advice of her friend, rather than her own instincts.

It was a harsh lesson to learn, but one that would do her well for the future. At least if you fail on your own, you have no one else to blame but yourself and very few actual regrets.

Dumbledore was looking down as well, and she could see Rufus Scrimgeour glaring at him. Of course, Rufus was completely unaware that every member of the crowd who wasn’t glaring at Dumbledore was glaring at him.

“So,” Daphne asked. “As we are now dating, exactly how do you know what is going on with the school?”

He smiled and held out a tatty piece of paper toward her. “I solemnly swear I am up to no good,” he said.

The paper changed, and a map appeared, showing the location of every student and professor in the building.

“Wow,” she whispered softly. “This is some piece of work.”

“I should have mentioned it earlier,” he admitted. “When you couple this with my invisibility cloak, you can see why we got into so many adventures.”

She nodded. “So, how are we going to get to Manchester?”

He smiled. "Dobby," he called.

A house-elf appeared. "Daphne, this is Dobby, the one person that, until recently, I could totally rely on."

Dobby smiled and blushed. "Dobby is being pleased to meet Miss Daphne," he said.

"Charmed," Daphne said, shaking his hand.

"Can you take us to Manchester, Dobby?"

"Dobby will be happy doing that," the elf smiled and took both their hands. A second later, they appeared in an alleyway.

"Harry Potter sir and Miss Dark Greenie will be calling for Dobby when they is wanting to be at Hogwarts agains."

"We will, thanks," Harry smiled.

Dobby nodded and vanished.

"I didn't know they could do that," she noted.

"Not many people do," Harry agreed. "But then, not many people actually talk to them."

"True," she agreed.

"Is there a branch of Gringotts around here? I need some money."

"Not today, you don't," she smiled. "I've got enough to cover us."

Harry nodded slowly. "Won't your parents mind?"

She paused for a second. "Voldemort killed my parents last year." She turned on her heel and walked off.

There was a gasp of shock through the crowd. She scowled at them; the last thing she wanted was their pity.

"Hey," Harry said, touching her shoulder. "I'm sorry."

"I know," she sighed. "Actually I don't think Voldemort even knows. They were on holiday and simply arrived back at the wrong time. They Apparated into a raid and were killed without thought. One of our servants bought them back to the Manor, and I was informed immediately. I decided to keep the illusion that they were alive so that I wouldn't be inundated with people wanting a bite of the fortune. The Goblins knew of course, with the magical Wills, but they were willing to keep quiet for a fee."

"Aren't you afraid that I'm after your money?"

She laughed at him gently. "With the Black inheritance on top of the Potter fortune?"

He grinned at her. "First time I've been grateful for it," he admitted.

"Let's go shopping!"

They spent the day shopping, eating in the shopping centre, and just having fun.

When they arrived back at Hogwarts, long after the others had returned from Hogsmeade, Harry stepped closer to her and reached up, taking her face in his hands.

She didn't flinch and watched him closely.

He moved his head forward and gently touched his lips to hers.

She didn't move, but she didn't pull away either.

He smiled into her eyes and kissed her harder, his hands going to her back and pulling her in closer.

She relaxed slowly and started to kiss him back.

"Wow," he said softly.

"Yeah," she agreed.

"I'll see you tomorrow?"

She smiled at him, lightly touching his face, before she turned and walked out into the corridor. As she moved away from him, her smile fell off her face, and she reached back into the role she had played for so many years.

"Where have you been?" Parkinson asked.

She pulled out her wand and stunned the pug-faced girl.

"None of your damn business."

She took another sip of water and glanced at her watch. She was going to have to speed this up; she didn't have that long left.

"As first kisses go, it was pretty much perfect, so I guess I should thank you, Weasley."

Ginny looked like she would have rather received a snake in the post.

She couldn't believe it. After everything she had said to herself, she had still gone ahead and fallen for a Gryffindor. Despite her plans of leaving the country as soon as she could, her ideas of a totally independent life and everything that entailed, she had fallen for Harry Potter.

And what was worse, was that as soon as she was with him, it all seemed worthwhile.

Now that she had fallen, and with someone who was so adept at keeping secrets, she was quite happy to move their relationship along as fast as possible.

She looked up and smiled slightly. "Harry Potter was an athlete, and possessed one of the finest practical minds of his age. Without boring you with unnecessary details, I can assure you that he was more than an adequate lover."

She allowed the smile to turn into a self-satisfied smirk. "He was an absolute demon in the sack."

The journalists were scribbling as fast as they could. She could almost see the headlines for the next day.

The professors, especially Snape, were looking vaguely nauseous.

Fred and George Weasley looked like they wanted to celebrate with each other, and she flashed them a very quick smile.

But as always, it was his friends that she was most interested in.

Ron seemed to be trying to decide if he should be proud, jealous that his friend had got there first, or upset for his sister.

Hermione seemed to be more upset that she hadn't known about it.

Ginny appeared resigned now, as if she had truly realised that she had gambled and lost everything.

"I'll fast forward a little now, as I've taken up a lot of time so far."

"Why are you in school?"

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"You're rich, smart, and beautiful. What does Hogwarts offer you that you haven't already got?"

She smiled slightly and rolled over, straddling him. She sat down comfortably on his stomach and drew the covers around their naked bodies. "I couldn't get all my inheritance until I turned eighteen," she explained.

"And you are eighteen now."

"I know, but I figured that since I've come this far, I may as well finish it."

Harry nodded slowly. "I've had an idea," he admitted.

"You've already had me twice tonight, you're getting greedy?"

"Well, yes I am," he grinned. "But first things first. I know where Voldemort and Nagini are."

She paused and stared down at him. "How do you know that?"

"House-elves talk to each other. Dobby overheard it from one of Malfoy's elves."

"So you're thinking of leaving school, going there, and killing them both?"

He nodded. "Come with me?"

She smiled slightly and traced a pattern on his chest. "What do I get if I do?"

He smirked up at her. "A snakeskin purse?"

She laughed under her breath and nodded slowly. "I've not got one of them," she admitted.

"I know."

His hands reached out and touched her face. He closed his eyes and gently trailed his fingertips over her nose and cheek. "What do you want to do after Hogwarts?"

"Travel," she whispered softly. The atmosphere had changed suddenly, dramatically. "I want to leave this damn country and never see it again. I want to pick a place in the world I can fall in love with and never leave from there. Any children I have, I'll explain why I never want to go back. I've seen the corruption, the incompetence, and the smug superiority of people who are as superior as my heel."

"I like the sound of that," he whispered. "How would you feel about company?"

She suddenly found it hard to breathe. "Why would you want to?"

His fingers slid down her face, to her shoulders, and his eyes opened. "What have I got here?" he countered. "I've lived in the care of this country all my life, and I'll never subject myself to it again."

"Why?" she asked again, no longer sure what she was asking, just aware that it was the only thing in the world that mattered to her.

"Because I love you," he said softly. He didn't look away, didn't try to hide. He just lay beneath her, his glorious green eyes so totally open.

She opened her mouth, but he raised his finger, touching her lips, and shook his head.

"Why not?" she asked.

"Not 'til you mean it," he whispered.

She let the covers drop from her and leaned down to kiss him deeply. His hands stroked down her arms and then up her ribs, claiming her in his unique way.

"Can you manage another?" she asked again, gently nipping his ear with her teeth.

"Wench," he growled softly. "Why don't you just shift back a few inches and we'll find out?"

She pulled back from him and sat back, inching her way slowly.

"You are so beautiful," he whispered.

"As are you, darling."

"So that's how we made the decision," she said, preaching a little to his friends. "He asked me; I said yes. This decision was ours to make. We knew the risks, and we knew the possible price we would have to pay. But we both felt that with his history of being manipulated, that it was time for us to take some direct action."

His three friends wouldn't meet her eyes, and Dumbledore was still looking down as well.

She walked into her dorm room.

"You've got a boyfriend," Pansy said, sitting down on her bed.

Daphne raised an eyebrow inquiringly as she reached into her trunk and pulled out a pair of jeans.

"Why else would you spend the whole night away from your bed? The infamous Ice Queen's been melted."

Daphne shrugged and changed quickly. She pulled out a bag and placed her favourite dress and her photos of her parents in it. She looked around briefly.

"You're leaving?" Pansy gasped. "Where are you going?"

"*Petrificus Totalus*," she chanted, pointing her wand at Pansy. "I hate you, Parkinson," she whispered into the paralysed girl's ear. "So let me make this clear. You say anything to anyone about me, and I will kill you. It won't be when you expect it, and your stupid ferret of a boyfriend won't be able to protect you. No one on this earth will be able to stop me. You know me when I am determined."

She could see the fear and acknowledgement in the frozen girl's eyes.

She finished packing and looked around the room that had been her home at school for over six years and shrugged. She wouldn't miss it.

She shrunk the bag and pulled on her school robes. "I'd say it's been a pleasure," she said to Parkinson. "But it would be a lie."

She walked out of the dorm room, through the Slytherin common room and popped into the Potions dungeon, before she met Harry in their classroom, and a minute later they left Hogwarts for the last time.

"I asked Harry how we managed to get away with everything we did. He smiled at me and told me that Gryffindor Golden boys always found that the rules were more advisory than actual dictates. But then he grinned in that way he had and admitted that he had turned off Hogwarts monitoring charms, so that not even the Headmaster knew what we were doing.

"In a way, that is how I will always remember him. He was lounging on a couch, wearing a pair of jeans that were butter soft and stuck to him like a second skin. He'd just got out of the shower, so his hair was still damp, and he wasn't wearing anything else.

"He hadn't even put his glasses back on. His eyes were glowing in that special way of his when he looked at me."

She reached into a pocket and pulled out a small picture. She cast a spell on it, and a second later a larger than life version of the picture appeared behind her.

In the picture, Harry raised his hand and absently brushed his hair back, before winking at her.

She looked out at the crowd. This picture would be on the front page and the walls of every teenage witch within the next few days.

"This was when I knew. This was when I told him I loved him."

She looked down. It seemed that Hermione, contrary to popular belief, didn't think of him as purely a brother – because the way she was staring at the picture was anything but platonic.

"So what's the plan?" she asked.

He was lounging on the bed of the Muggle hotel they were staying in. "Dobby has found out that Voldemort is planning to launch a Death Eater attack tonight. While they are gone, we'll go to him and confront him."

"It would make more sense to do this with help," she pointed out softly.

"I asked them, I asked them all," he sighed. "I even begged them; I didn't tell them any specifics. I called on our friendship, but they said no, every last one of them. They told me I needed to trust Dumbledore."

She walked over and sat next to him, "What did you do?"

He smiled at her. "I said goodbye to them before I left. I left Ron my invisibility cloak, Hermione an autographed copy of *Hogwarts: A History* I had ordered for her and Ginny the Marauders Map."

"You'll see them again," she pointed out lightly.

"Not in the same way," he whispered. "Because I've changed and they haven't. But the best present I can give them is Voldemort's death. Then they will be able to have the life they want. I owe them that much."

She kissed him softly. "So it's down to two people with nothing left to lose, to defeat Voldemort?"

He nodded.

She smiled broadly. "To be honest, I wouldn't have it any other way."

Ron, Hermione, and Ginny now had tear tracks down their faces. For the first time she felt a little sorry for them. They had made their decisions, putting their faith in Dumbledore, and they had paid for it.

"We had twenty-seven hours together before we went to Voldemort's hideout. It wasn't enough time. We never had enough time. As we got dressed that morning, I realised that I had finally taken the time to get to know the man, and in return, he had shown me parts of himself that he had never shown anyone else."

She raised her hand, brushing away an unwanted tear.

"Dobby came back, and the poor elf was crying. But even he knew that we had to do it. He understood that you can't stand by and watch evil when you can do something about it. It was something that everyone else didn't get. Every time someone died, Harry felt it. Every time someone was tortured, he felt their pain. He knew that it would continue until he defeated Voldemort.

"It was his sense of responsibility, his nobility, and everything else that made up Harry James Potter. I truly believe that forcing him to do nothing was the biggest torture that you could have inflicted on him. His soul had been dying bit by bit.

"But I was grateful for it, because it meant that he had pursued me when I intrigued him. It meant that, in an attempt for him to feel alive, he sought

me out. And in return, I helped heal him. I gave him the one thing he needed. Support.

"It was the base of our love."

She felt raw and open, too open, too vulnerable. This wasn't supposed to happen. She was supposed to be in control.

They appeared with Dobby in the ruins of an old church.

"Typical," Harry snorted. "Voldemort's such a drama queen."

She struggled not to giggle, both at his words and the expression of distaste on his face.

"Wait here," he smiled at her.

She nodded. "I love you," she whispered.

He turned. He didn't say anything; he didn't need to. His eyes said it all.

With a wink, he turned and walked into the church, calling out for Voldemort.

She took a deep breath and followed him silently. They had both known that she wasn't going to wait.

Voldemort sat on a throne of black obsidian, staring at Harry, his pet, Nagini, by his legs.

They taunted each other, the three of them hissing in Parseltongue. She had no idea what they were saying, but shortly afterward, Nagini reared up and attacked.

"*Diffindo*" she shouted, pointing her wand at the snake, forcing all her magic into the spell.

She heard Harry cast the same curse at the same time, and she looked with interest as the most powerful spell she had ever cast seemed to merge with Harry's, before it hit the giant snake.

There was a moment of absolute stillness, before Nagini's body slid in two separate directions, dead.

Voldemort screamed – a scream of anger, of hate, of rage, and of loss.

"That's the last of your Horcruxes," Harry said quietly. "Dumbledore found the rest, including the one that Regulus stole. It comes down to this. Just you and me."

Voldemort stood, power emanating from him. "Two on one, that's hardly fair, Potter" he said.

Harry laughed at him. "Fair? I don't remember you ever treating me fairly, you half-blood bastard."

Voldemort looked faintly amused at the insult. "Fortunately, I am not alone." He made a motion of his hand, and three Death Eaters appeared.

"Take her," he indicated. "But don't kill her. I'm sure that my other loyal Death Eaters will want a piece of her later."

Harry growled, and she realised he had been right. It was a very sexy sound.

As Harry started to duel Voldemort, the three Death Eaters started to stalk toward her.

She took another sip of water, letting the tension build. For a second, she was tempted to leave now and not tell the end of the story. Unfortunately, that might get her lynched.

She stumbled forward, tears running down her cheeks. "Please," she begged.

They laughed, and the first one reached out to grab her. She stepped forward and drove her knee as hard as she could into his crotch.

She pointed her wand at the second Death Eater, and spat, "*Avada Kedavra* ." The green light shot out of her wand, ending the Death Eater's life.

Without pause, she pointed her wand at the other and snarled, "*Diffindo* ."

The spell had a similar effect on the Death Eater as it had on the Snake.

The Death Eater who was on his knees in front of her toppled over – she didn't realise she had caught him with the same spell. She quickly checked him, he was still alive, but fading fast.

Harry and Voldemort had changed, their wands had locked, and now they it seemed to be a battle of wills. The light slowly moved back and forth as they pressed their magic against each other.

But then Harry stopped and opened his arms, embracing the magic.

Voldemort smiled in triumph, but it wasn't over. Harry wasn't falling over.

She swallowed convulsively, feeling sick; she could see the pain Harry was in.

But then, Voldemort fell to his knees. The Dark Lord screamed in a voice full of pain.

Blood was running down Harry's face from his scar. He stepped forward, slowly, a pace at a time. And the nearer he moved to Voldemort, the louder the Dark Lord screamed his agony.

Harry knelt in front of Voldemort and stared into his blood-red eyes.

"No," the Dark Lord begged.

Harry didn't stop, and the Dark Lord suddenly went stiff and toppled over, dead.

"Harry," she cried, running over to him, dropping to her knees next to him.

"It was the power he knew not," he whispered sadly. "Dumbledore thought it was love, you know?" He smiled crookedly; looking slightly amused at the idea that Dumbledore had possibly told him the truth. "Maybe it was. Maybe it was love that made me take this stupid risk and channel his power. It could have been love that made me turn myself into a conduit for it, and then send it back to him through our connection. I burnt his mind out from the inside."

"Shhhh," she whispered, wiping his blood from his face with her sleeve. She could feel tears form at the sides of her eyes as she looked down at him. She could feel him slipping away from her.

"I'm sorry," he whispered. "I had to stop him."

"I know," she sobbed.

"I used too much of my own power. He was so strong."

"Please," she begged him.

"You made me happy," he whispered, his eyes dark. "You were my reason. You were my love."

"You are not allowed to die." She tried to be strong, but it came out as a prayer.

"I love you, Daphne," he said, and his eyes closed.

And her world ended.

Tears ran down her face as she prepared the end of her carefully crafted story.

"That was when I sent up homing spells and walked away. Dobby helped me get back to our room where I collapsed.

"And now you know what really happened."

She was spent now; she didn't have any more anger, any more desire to talk. She couldn't look at his friends, at the others. It was all gone.

She slipped from the pulpit and walked down the steps.

Snape stood in front of her, but she didn't wait to hear what he had to say. She didn't care. She didn't pause, and she proved that he hadn't been paying attention by kneeing him hard in the groin when he didn't move out of her way.

She walked out of the church, her head held high, ignoring the calls for her to stay. The public who had watched her performance on the screens separated again, allowing her an easy exit. Some of them mouthed 'Thank you' to her.

What did their thanks mean?

Nothing.

She strolled out of the gates and pulled the emerald ribbon that was holding her hair back, letting her hair fall around her shoulders, and she placed the ribbon in the snakeskin purse she was carrying.

An Aston Martin DB7 pulled to a stop next to her, and she climbed in.

"Better?" he asked.

She nodded and scooted over to him, resting her head on the snakeskin jacket he was wearing.

He gunned the engine, and the car responded instantly, carrying them off.

"You are so not going to die," she swore. He still had a pulse. She rushed over to her bag and pulled out the healing potion she had stolen from Hogwarts.

"Drink it, damn you. I am *not* losing you now; I've invested way too much of myself in you."

Harry seemed inert; she checked his pulse – it was gone.

She gripped her left wrist with her right hand, and placed her palm flat on his chest. She counted in her mind as she pressed down, almost a third of the way into his chest, using her palm.

She repeated several times, before she switched. She tilted his head back and checked that his airway was clear.

She placed her hands directly over his heart and locked her elbows. She leaned forward, compressing his lungs fifteen times with an even pressure, before she stopped and placed her lips on his, exhaling, and inflating his lungs.

She didn't know how many times she repeated this, but she refused to let him go. Defeat, even by death, was not something she was willing to consider, and she knew that he would fight as well.

She pressed down on his chest again, and then he coughed. Almost violently she shoved the potion down his throat. He coughed as he swallowed, but it started to work almost immediately.

"Hey," she whispered, as his eyes opened.

"I saw the light," he whispered. "I could hear my parents and Sirius."

"Did you want to go?"

He shook his head. "Not without you."

She smiled and rested her head on his chest for a second.

"I don't want to go back," he whispered.

"To Hogwarts?"

"To the Wizarding world."

"Then we won't," she said. "We'll organise our trip around the world, and stop where we feel like it."

"They'll chase me."

She grinned at him. "Dumbledore is a very clever man."

"He is?" Harry asked doubtfully.

She reached into a bag and pulled out a vial. She lightly pulled one of his hairs from his head.

"Polyjuice potion from Snape's private supply."

"And we have a Death Eater who is going to help us."

She walked over to the nearly dead Death Eater and poured the Polyjuice potion down his throat. He changed into a perfect replication of Harry, just before he died, locking the change for eternity.

She smiled and cast a spell that changed his clothes into some of the old clothes that Harry used to wear.

He was on his feet now.

"Dobby," he called.

The elf appeared, looking ecstatic, and the three of them vanished.