

## Changes

“Arry?”

“Fleur?” Harry asked in surprise.

“Is there somewhere we can go?” she asked quietly. “I’d like to talk to you.”

He cocked his head to one side. “What happened to...?”

“My accent?”

He nodded.

“One of the reasons for coming here was to learn better English,” Fleur said with a graceful shrug. “And to be honest, mispronouncing everything was starting to irritate me.”

Harry nodded, unsure what he could say to the beautiful French Triwizard Champion.

Fleur smiled. “So, can we?”

He sighed and looked at her searchingly. He didn’t know what he was looking for, but looked anyway. Fleur met his eyes unhesitatingly, and he nodded. “Come on,” he said with a slight smile as he was hit by a thought.

“Should I be worried about that smile?” she asked, her voice teasing in a way he hadn’t heard from her before. In the past it she had ever used snobbish supremacy or breathless gratitude. This tone seemed normal, almost like when Hermione would talk to him.

“Of course,” he agreed. “I’m about to fulfil the fantasy of every male in this school.” As soon as he had said it, he wished he hadn’t.

“Oh?” she asked, her eyes dancing in a way that made him wonder if it was entirely natural.

He nodded slowly. “The beautiful Fleur Delacour -- alone in the Astronomy Tower.”

She raised her eyebrows at him.

He blushed. “It’s the place where couples go to...” he paused as he tried to find a delicate way of putting it, “expand their relationships.”

“Ahh,” she said and nodded her understanding. “Like your friends, Ron and Hermione.”

He jerked to a stop and looked at her. “So it’s not just me that thinks that, then?”

She lightly took his arm, and continued to move, forcing him to as well. “Is it not obvious?”

“I thought it was,” he admitted. “But they...”

“They are still young. Arguing and being jealous of each other will do until they are ready to admit that they do care.”

Harry groaned. “How much longer do I have to wait until they get over it?”

“Oh, I’d say judging by the stubbornness they’ve displayed in the short time I’ve seen them. It won’t be for a few years yet.”

“Bugger,” Harry sighed before going silent. He guided the elegant blonde up to the top of the tower.

“Pretty,” she said as she looked out over the parapet.

Harry shrugged. “More importantly, it’s quiet, and people know to check before coming up here, or so the rumours say.”

Fleur nodded and looked out at the Great Lake. “I hate that place,” she whispered.

“The Lake?”

“I hate water. I hate swimming.”

Harry smiled faintly as he sat down on the edge of the parapet. “It was one of the first times I’ve ever swam,” he confessed. “A lot of what I did was pure luck.”

"No, it wasn't," Fleur said, as she turned to face him. "We make our own luck, Harry. We always will do."

"Cedric," he said, and then found he couldn't say anymore.

"He was unlucky, yes?"

He nodded.

Fleur moved over to him and knelt before him, taking his hands. "You are feeling guilty about him, no?"

He glared at her, feeling his insides tense, as he thought about the boy who had been killed so casually in front of him, so very recently.

"You think you killed him, don't you?"

He tried to pull his hands away, but couldn't, she didn't let go, and she just smiled at him in that mysterious fashion that he was starting to find annoying.

"You murdered him, didn't you?" Her voice had changed, bringing back unpleasant memories of her calling him a little boy.

He reared back as if she had struck him. "What?" he gasped.

"You murdered him," Fleur repeated harshly.

He wanted to hit her, to stop her, to do anything to make her stop her accusations; make her take her words away.

Her eyes seemed to change colour, to change shape, to be different. "Murderer," she spat. "You stood there and you personally cast the *Avada Kedavra* at him. As he begged for mercy, you stood above him and laughed, didn't you!"

She swayed back a second, and her hand flew out, smacking him across the face. He touched his tongue to his lip in shock and felt a trickle of blood. "You're a killer, a despicable traitor, aren't you?"

He tried to move his hands, to push back, but he couldn't, he couldn't move. "I did not murder him," he yelled suddenly. "It was Voldemort. He did it, he gave the command. He said 'Kill the spare' and Cedric was dead, before I could do anything. It was Voldemort, not me!"

And suddenly he could move. Fleur kept hold of his hands, but he could move again. Her eyes were back to normal, a blue so deep he felt like he was falling into them.

"It was Voldemort, Voldemort killed Cedric" he whispered broken-heartedly, as the tears started to fall down his face.

She moved back and pulled him down into a hug. He didn't fight her, but didn't follow her, just lent stiffly in her arms.

"It's okay," she whispered gently, and stroked his back.

Slowly, almost as if he was scared of himself, he lent forward and gave into the tears.

He had no idea how long he cried onto her shoulder, or how long he spent kneeling against her, but it was only when he had finished crying and he started to smell the perfume she was wearing, did he pull back, embarrassed.

She smiled at him and stood gracefully. With her wand, she expertly created a sofa, and sat. "Come," she said, as she patted the spot next to her. "We still need to talk."

He nodded and sat down, resting against the side so he could face her.

"Sorry."

"For crying?"

He nodded.

She shrugged elegantly. "Do you feel better?"

He nodded again.

"Then it was worthwhile. Locking up emotions inside you can be dangerous Harry; it can lead to nightmares, as your subconscious tries to deal with something you will not acknowledge on a conscious level.

"But, we shall talk about it now." She pulled out her wand and cast a spell at his face calmly, removing the pain he still felt from when she had hit him. "That is better," she whispered to herself.

"We shall?" he asked. He wasn't sure why, but he wasn't scared of her anymore. He suspected that crying on her shoulder had someone changed things with them. He just wished he had a clue as to what and how.

She smiled at him and nodded. "You do not have a choice."

"I don't?"

"No," she said with a soft smile. "I have kidnapped you."

"It's the nicest kidnapping I've had so far," he replied dryly, smiling slightly as he discovered that he *could* smile about it.

"I know," Fleur replied. "But all the same, try and leave."

He went to get up, but found his eyes locked on her face. She was so beautiful, so amazing, he just wanted to sit there and do exactly what she said. He paused; he couldn't remember why he was going anywhere anyway. Why on earth would he want to move away from this creature? It made no sense, no sense at all.

'She's enthralling you.'

He tried to ignore the annoyingly familiar voice, but it wouldn't go away.

'You want to leave, don't let her stop you.'

He shook his head slightly, trying to clear the annoying voice away, and go back to watching Fleur, watching the way her hair moved, the loving look in her eyes.

With a wrench, he took a step away from her, and then turned, panting. "Turn that damn thing off!"

She did and started to clap softly. "I am impressed," she whispered. "There are not many men who can do that."

"Men?" he asked as he slumped back down. "Not 'Leetle boy?'"

"I choose my words with care, Harry," Fleur said firmly. "But maybe you are right. You are not yet a man, but you are not a little boy. Now, why do you believe that you are responsible for Cedric's death?"

"If it hadn't been for me insisting that we take the Trophy together, he wouldn't have been there."

"And you told him to take the Trophy with you, because you knew it was a Portkey, right?"

"No!"

"Why did you rescue Gabrielle?"

He blinked at the apparent non sequitur. "Because I couldn't see you coming, and I knew that time was running out."

"It was the right thing to do?"

He nodded firmly.

"How was that any different from telling Cedric to take the Trophy with you?"

He opened his mouth, and then closed it. "Cedric ended up dead."

"And Gabrielle ended up alive and as irritating as only a little sister can be. Each time, Harry, you took a decision, and you did what was right, not what was easy. Do you have any idea just how rare that is in the world?"

He shook his head. "Anyone would have done the same thing."

"Did Cedric? Did Krum?"

He started to feel that he needed to stop impersonating a goldfish. "No."

"That's what makes you different, Harry. You don't take the easy option, you do what you think is right. The first time you did it, you saved my sister. The second time, you fought, one on one, the most evil demon alive, and you escaped with Cedric's body. That is unbelievable, Harry."

"He's still dead."

"I know," Fleur said, reaching out and taking his hand again. He found that he liked being touched, it was somehow comforting. "But it is not your fault. It is only one person's fault. Voldemort."

He gasped at her. "You said Voldemort?"

She nodded proudly. "I will not be afraid of a name."

"Fear can be a good thing," Harry whispered. "It can keep you alive."

"You feel fear?"

"I was terrified when I saw Voldemort being reborn," he admitted. "Some hero, eh?"

"Only an idiot does not feel afraid, Harry. Only a hero does what is right despite the fear."

He shook his head at her. "I'm not a hero. A hero would have saved him."

She shook her head hard, her hair forming a halo around her face for a brief second. "No, Harry. A hero will avenge him."

"Avenge?" he whispered.

"How else would you be able to know that he sleeps in peace? How else would you know that your parents are in peace? How else will you know that your friends can live long enough to get over their squabbling?"

"That makes sense," he whispered. "Avenge Cedric. Avenge my parents. But how?"

"That, I am not sure," she sighed. "But I can tell you what not to do."

"Oh?"

"Do not go after Voldemort now. You are not ready."

He nodded in agreement. "I froze when we found out that Mad-Eye wasn't the real one."

"You were still in shock, Harry," Fleur pointed out evenly. "So I wouldn't worry about it. But that is not what I am talking about. If we were to duel now, I would beat you."

"You would?"

"Do you want to try me?"

He nodded, and they both climbed to their feet, and turned, walking to each end of the tower.

"When you're ready," Fleur said, with an elegant bow.

He bowed, and nodded. "Now."

Two seconds later he was flat on his back, his wand yanked out of his hand.

"See?" Fleur asked as she walked over to him.

He nodded, and as she moved closer, he kicked out, catching her legs, rolling and catching her before she hit the ground. He continued the roll, and ended up on top of her, his hands holding hers, with their wands, above her head.

"Well done," she said, a new light appearing in her eyes. "You don't give in, do you?"

"Not if I can help it."

She leaned forward and breathed into his ear. "Do you have any idea how many men have desired being in this position with me?" she asked in an intimate whisper.

He looked down and blinked, he was lying between her legs, his chest lightly brushing hers. He blushed furiously, and released her hands, scrambling back from her.

She pushed him, and then pounced on top of him, straddling his stomach, her wand pressed against his neck.

"You don't give in, do you?" he asked with a half-smile.

"Not if I can help it."

"Sadly," he said with an embarrassed laugh. "I can't tell you that many girls have desired to be in the same position with me."

"I could," Fleur said seriously. "But are you ready to hear it?"

"What do you mean?"

"You are very attractive, Harry."

He could feel himself blush again and wished he could control that.

"And a lot of the girls, from Hogwarts and Beauxbatons see it. You could ask anyone of them on a date, and they would say yes before you had finished the words."

"Cho didn't," Harry whispered.

"She was already taken," Fleur pointed out. "But she told her friends how disappointed she was."

How do you know that?"

"People tell me things, Harry. One of my friends was friends with Marietta – who, by the way, does not like you. She is cold, that one."

Harry nodded, filing that information away for future contemplation. "Why do girls always hunt in packs?" he asked bitterly.

"Because it makes dating a test of courage," Fleur smiled.

"That's silly," Harry pointed out.

"Of course it is, boys are not alone in being stupid, growing up."

Harry thought about that for a few seconds and then slowly smiled. "Thank you."

"Oh?"

"That's the most sense I've ever heard from anyone about girls," he grinned. "I'll be able to handle it better in future."

Fleur grinned back at him. "I don't know if I want that."

"Huh?"

"How do you feel about Cedric?" she asked, avoiding the question.

"Better," he admitted. "I like the idea of avenging him."

Fleur smiled and sat back a little, lightly tracing a pattern on his chest. "I am in a quandary, Harry."

"In what way?" he asked, a little distracted by her finger doing interesting things against his shirt.

"I like you," she said.

"I like you to," he pointed out. "There are not many people that I've talked to."

She laughed softly. "No, I meant that I *like* you." She placed a lot more emphasis on the word like.

"Oh," he felt himself blush again.

"But you are not ready for a relationship yet, and at this time, you are too young for me," Fleur sighed. "And I do not know what to do about it."

Harry opened his mouth to protest, but then shut it again firmly. With a degree of reluctance, he nodded. "I'm not ready," he agreed. "And I am probably a bit young."

"So what do I do?" she asked softly. "Do I give you a kiss and then fade away, let you live your life?"

"No!" The word was out of his mouth long before his brain had caught up. The sudden thought of never seeing her again was wrong, not after what she had done for him in such a short period of time.

She smiled lightly at him. "Do you mean that, or is it because I am Veela?"

He shook his head violently. "I can beat the Veela power," he said, really hoping it was true. "It has nothing to do with that."

"You can," she mused. "But it doesn't change the fact that you are too young."

"Wait for me."

"What?"

He took her hands, touching her voluntarily for the first time, as he realised that somehow he had a chance with this creature – a chance he had never even dreamed about because she didn't know how to handle this situation, and that he really needed to get this right.

"Wait for me. I won't be this age for ever," he said intently. "Give me a few years."

"That's a long time," Fleur pointed out gently.

"It is," he agreed. "But it's not, not really. It's less than three percent of our lives."

"Girls are going to want you, Harry," Fleur pointed out calmly. "How are you going to handle not being near me, and near all that temptation?"

He went to push her answer away, but didn't, he paused and thought about it, deeply.

"You said I need to prepare to be able to defeat Voldemort, right?"

She nodded.

And that I need to give a lot in my duelling, in my magic, everything.”

She nodded again.

“I don’t think that I am going to have time for a girl here,” he said honestly. “Not when all my spare time will be taken up with either training, or writing to you.”

She paused and looked down at him. “Not an answer I expected,” she whispered.

“But what about you?” he asked. “You are going to leave school soon, go into the big world. Will you want to wait for an awkward teenager to grow up?”

“Yes,” she said simply. “If he has a heart as big as his mind and if he works as hard as he has promised too. If he shows the courage I know he has inside him.”

“Why?”

“Because you do what is right, not what is easy,” she whispered, “because you showed that when you rescued my sister.”

“Gratitude?” he asked, suddenly horrified with the idea that all of this was some form of reward.

“Gratitude would get you a kiss,” Fleur said sternly. “Not a promise.”

“Can I have both?” he blurted and then felt himself blush furiously again.

Fleur laughed delightedly. “I think you can,” she said softly.

He struggled to keep his jaw from dropping to his chest.

“So, are we going to do this?” she asked. “Am I going to wait for you to grow up and you for me?”

He nodded, suddenly very sure that this was what he wanted.

“Then you can claim your kiss when you want it,” she said, and stood, offering him her hand.

He took it and rolled to his feet. “So, does this mean we’re going out?”

“In a fashion,” she agreed.

He moved forward and embraced her tightly. “Thank you,” he whispered.

Fleur just smiled.

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Harry lounged comfortably against a wall, as he watched the Beauxbatons students prepare to leave Hogwarts.

His own trunk upstairs was prepared, only it was very different to normal. Fleur had taught him a lot of things including a way to study that actually worked for him, a shrinking charm, and information on just how the Ministry monitored magic usage, and how he could conceal it from them.

He was determined now that he was never going to be caught unaware again.

Ron and Hermione were bickering next to each other, and he watched them with fondness.

“You alright, Harry?” Ron asked.

“Of course,” he said with a slight smile at them.

“You seem, different,” Ron continued. “I dunno, cheerful?”

He nodded. “Maybe I am,” he agreed.

“But...” Hermione started.

“Excuse me, Hermione,” Harry said, and walked over to a group of Ravenclaws. He ignored the looks from the girls surrounding Cho, and concentrated on her.

“How are you feeling?” he asked.

She looked at him confusedly, her eyes red-rimmed by tears she had shed over Cedric.

“Go away, Potter,” Marietta snarled.

He looked at her quizzically. “Who are you?”

"I'm Cho's friend," she stated proudly.

"Some friend," he whispered intently. "Wanting her to suffer rather than knowing just how Cedric died."

She paled and looked at Cho, who was now looking at him differently.

He moved over to her and slid an arm around Cho's waist, moving her away from her friends. She followed obediently, and he hid a smile. More than anything, Fleur had shown him that girls were people too.

The crush he had once had on Cho was gone, long gone, and all that was left was a sense of regret and a lingering wonder about what might have happened.

Cho was a very beautiful girl, but she wasn't Fleur. She had never talked to him directly, had never pushed him, and had never faced down his moods – not that she had been given the chance, so it was probably unfair of him to make the comparison, but then, he didn't care too much about being fair.

He sat her down, took her hand – Fleur had shown him just how reassuring that was – and started to talk.

He watched her reaction, the disbelief, the relief, and finally the acknowledgement as he finished his story.

"Thank you," she whispered after a few moments of silence.

He smiled crookedly at her. "I'd say you're welcome, but it's not really appropriate."

"You've grown up."

"A little," he agreed.

"Why?"

"Someone very close pointed out that I have a choice. I can wallow in guilt about what happened to Cedric. Or I can do something to make sure that Cedric rests in peace. So I am going to avenge him."

"Was it a girl who pointed this out?" Cho asked.

Harry nodded.

"Can I help?"

He looked at her in surprise.

"I'm one of the best witches in the school," she said openly. "You are going to defeat Him, and I want to help. I need to help. I need revenge."

"I'd like your help," Harry said slowly. "You do realise that I care a lot for the girl, right?"

Cho laughed loudly, attracting the attention of a lot of the students, and leant forward and kissed him gently on the cheek. "Don't worry," she smiled gently. "I won't poach. You're growing up, Harry Potter; a while ago you struggled to ask me to the Yule Ball yet now you warn me away from romantic entanglements. She has been good for your confidence, if nothing else."

"Sorry," he blushed. "I didn't quite mean that the way it came out."

Cho smiled at him. "Oh Harry, I know that, I was teasing you. But I like it, all the same. I think it will be fun being friends with you."

"And dangerous," Harry pointed out. "I attract trouble like Snape attracts flies."

Cho laughed. "And you will, until you win," she said confidently.

"You are so sure?"

"I am," she stated. "And I'll be there to help and dance on his bones."

"You probably wouldn't want to do that," he said with a straight face. "You might hurt your feet."

Cho laughed again. "Who is this woman, Harry?"

He laughed softly. "Maybe I'll tell you one day."

"I look forward to it," she smiled.

"I should let you get back to your coven, now," he grinned.

"And what if I don't want to?"

"Tough," he grinned. "They are looking like they are about to head over here, and I've braved them once today, that's enough for anyone."

"They're not that bad."

"Marietta is," he said simply. "But no, the rest aren't."

She opened her mouth to protest, but then stopped. "Why do you say that?" she asked instead.

He told her what Fleur had told him about Marietta.

She nodded slowly. "Marietta will have a choice," Cho said firmly. "From now on, I am your friend, Harry. It is up to her to handle that."

He smiled and stood, offering her his hand.

She stepped forward and hugged him. "Relax," she whispered. "Friends are allowed to hug."

"I just don't want my girlfriend getting the wrong idea."

"She won't," Cho stated. "She knows you."

"I hope so," he agreed.

She released him and turned, walking back to the other girls. "Harry," she called.

"Yeah?"

"Thanks."

He sketched a small bow to her, and headed back toward his friends.

"What was that?" Ron asked, in absolute shock.

"It's called a conversation, Ron," Harry said as he took up his post lounging against the wall.

"With Cho?"

"She needed to know what happened," Harry said absently, his eyes searching out for Fleur.

"Right," Ron said.

"Hi, Harry," Susan Bones said, as she walked up to them.

"Hi, Susan," Harry smiled, pushing himself up straight.

"I was wondering," she said, behind her, was a group of her friends, all looking at them and giggling, "if you'd be able to help me with my Defence preparation for next year?"

"If I can, I'd love to," Harry said enthusiastically. "I'm normally hidden for the first few weeks of the summer, but hopefully I'll end up at Ron's. When I do, I'll drop you a line and you can come over."

"Thanks," she said, blushing furiously.

"And you can write beforehand, if you want."

She nodded and turned; running back to her friends.

"You know," Harry said with a frown. "If we have a bad Defence teacher next year, we might want to form a club to practise on our own."

Ron and Hermione gaped at him.

"Guys, you're catching flies," he pointed out casually.

Ron and Hermione both shut their mouths with an audible click.

"Did you just agree to date Susan?" Ron choked out.

"What? No, I agreed to help her with homework."

"No, Harry," Hermione pointed out. "She was asking you for a date."

Harry groaned. "She was? Damn it. I will never understand girls. Okay, wait here." He looked up, and jogged over to Susan, Hannah, and a couple of girls he didn't recognise. "Can I talk to you for a second?" he asked with a smile.

"Of course," Susan squeaked.

He led her other to the side, and turned to face her. "I owe you an apology," he said gently. "I thought that you were just asking for help with your

homework, I don't speak fluent 'teenager' yet."

"Oh," Susan said, her expression falling, and her eyes dropping from his.

He reached out and touched her shoulder, and she raised her head and looked at him.

"You are very pretty," he said, and he wasn't lying. She had long red hair, and a nice figure. "But I'm already going out with someone very special to me."

"But it's not Cho?"

"Of course not," he laughed softly. "Cho and I are just friends."

"I thought..." she started, and then trailed off. "These last few weeks, from a few days after that horrid last task, you've started to change and grow up," she explained. "And well, I wanted to try and be first, you know? Normally, Hufflepuffs are the last, and I've had a crush on you for ages." By the time she had finished, her cheeks were bright red.

"Thank you," Harry whispered, wondering just how the hell he had arrived at this conversation. "But it's the girl, who's made me grow up, and well, it's complicated, but I have a long way to go before I can have the relationship I want with her, but she's willing to wait."

"Fleur Delacour!" Susan gasped in shock.

Harry blinked. "How in Merlin's name did you work that out?"

Susan looked around and moved closer to him. "Really?" she asked, ignoring his question.

He nodded.

"Well, I feel better," she grinned.

"Huh?"

"Hey," Susan smirked. "If I'm going to be turned down, at least it's for someone special," she explained. "So what's the problem?"

"I'm too young," he said honestly. "And I need to be ready to defeat Voldemort. Fleur has given me some valuable advice, and said that she will help and wait for me."

"And you're going to wait for her?" Susan asked.

"Of course," Harry replied.

Susan smiled slightly. "You seem ready for a relationship to me," she pointed out. "As you are entering into one."

"True, but not a normal one," Harry sighed. "One that gives me a goal - that gives me a chance to grow, and the knowledge that someone out there thinks that I am worth it."

"She's very clever."

Harry nodded. "I think she understands me, if that isn't really clichéd."

"It is," Susan smirked. "But it's obviously true. You know you're going to get a lot more of this?"

"Of what?"

"Girls asking you out."

Harry started to groan, but stopped half way through it and looked at her. "I can't believe that I'm groaning about other girls liking me."

Susan smiled.

"But you're right," he said. "Look, I'm thinking that apart from Professor Lupin, we've had a lot of really bad Defence professors over the past few years, and I'm betting its going to be bad next year as well. I'm thinking of forming a club to make sure that everyone has a bit of practice in fighting. Voldemort is back, now, and we have to be ready."

Susan stared at him, her mouth slightly open.

"What?" he asked. "Do I have something in my teeth?"

"No," Susan whispered. "But you are Harry Potter."

"Huh?"

"It's the first time I've seen it," she looked around, and pointed in a wide circle. . "They will see it soon, as well."

"See what?" Harry asked.

"That you're going to do it," she explained, her voice tinged in awe. "That you are going to defeat Him. You are going to save us."

"I'm going to try, but I can't do it alone," Harry said quietly. "I'll need all the help I can get."

"Cho has offered to help?" she asked.

He nodded.

Susan looked around again. "You know Tracey Davis?"

"Slytherin, isn't she?"

"She's over there with a couple of fifth years. Go and talk to her."

"Why?"

"Because I can get Hufflepuff on your side, Gryffindor already follow you, Ravenclaw will follow Cho's lead. You need a Slytherin on your side as well. She's the only human one in our year."

"She is?" Harry asked. "I didn't even know she was in our year!"

Susan shook her head and planted her fists on her waist. "Do you pay any attention to what is going on in this school?"

"Yes," he said firmly. "But only if it involves Trolls, giant chess sets, Grimms, Dementors, Invisibility Cloaks, possessed professors, phoenixes, fiery goblets, flying cars, pranks, Basilisks, dragons, merpeople, junior Death Eaters, or my friends."

Susan gaped at him, her fists fell from her hips and she lost her irritated posture. "Good answer," she finally said. "Well, while you've been fighting with Draco a lot, you've missed the fact most of the Slytherins in our year is following him. Tracey hasn't been and has been isolated for it. She's got a few other people in different years who follow her, but it's a small group, most students are too scared to go against Draco."

"I'm going to have to do something about him," Harry mumbled. He looked up and met her eyes, "so, no hard feelings?"

Susan shook her head. "Thank you."

"For what?"

"For being nice about it – you didn't have to be."

He smiled at her. "But I made a friend, so I think that was worth while."

"Yes, you did. Now go, talk to her."

"One question first."

"What?"

"Why do all the women I know seem to like to boss me around?"

"That," Susan said through her laughter, "is a question you will have to find the answer for yourself."

He shook his head and walked off, heading straight toward the small group of Slytherins.

They saw him approach, and the two older boys stood in front of Tracey in a slightly protective manner.

"What do you want, Potter," the one on the left, who Harry thought was called Adrian Pucey.

"Cup of tea would be nice, milk, no sugar," Harry replied cheerfully. "And be quick, it's a little nippy out here."

Adrian stared at him in shock as Harry ducked under his arm and stood in front of Tracey.

"Potter?"

"Tell me," Harry said curiously. "Is there a secret Slytherin plot to avoid saying my name, in case it causes the apocalypse?"

Tracey's lips twitched involuntarily. "Yes," she stated.

Harry turned. "How's that tea coming?" he asked Adrian.

Adrian started to turn red and reached into his pocket.

"If anything but a cup of tea comes out of your pocket you're going to have to run back to the Slytherin Common Room naked," Harry said casually, his eyes back on Tracey.

There are three of us," Tracey pointed out. Her voice was expressionless.

Harry leant forward to whisper in her ear. "But only one of us has duelled Voldemort one on one and survived," he bluffed. Fleur's demonstration had pointed out quite firmly that his duelling skills were not up to scratch.

Tracey leant back and stared at him, hard. "Tea, Adrian," she snapped. "You, with me."

Harry raised his eyebrows and didn't move.

"Harry," she groaned. "Please."

Harry bowed mockingly and let go of the breath he had been holding. He sent a mental paean of thanks to Fleur. Her lesson in bluffing had been very well received.

"What do you want?"

"Your help."

"With what?"

"Defeating Voldemort."

"Are you insane?" Tracey demanded, "asking a Slytherin to help you."

"What do you want, Tracey?"

"What do you mean?"

"You've got three years left at school. Your bodyguards have two. That leaves a year free."

Tracey opened her mouth, and then shut it again. "I want to rule Slytherin," she said honestly. "I want to sleep at night with my wand by my bed, not under my pillow."

"If I defeat Voldemort, Draco is gone," Harry said softly. "You cut off the head, the body dies."

"Leaving a vacuum. How do you know I won't be worse?"

"Because if you are, I'll stop you as well," he said as coldly as he could. "You know me, I'm a Gryffindor, and I've not got the mind for intrigue and subtlety. I like to think of things in the simplest way possible. You're either with me or you are against me."

"I could be neutral."

"No, you couldn't be," he said confidently. "Neutral would mean that you don't need bodyguards."

"Are you offering me protection?"

"If I need to."

"You will," she sighed. "And I don't like it. But enough about me. Who was she?"

"She?"

"You've been trained, Harry. You're acting like a pure-blood. But you didn't grow up with the training of one. And it's new. There's a new influence on your life, and it's changed you."

"For the better?" he asked curiously.

"You're more of a man," Tracey said. She looked at him, tilting her head. "Date me."

"Excuse me?"

"I'm good looking, rich, a pure-blood, and I'll sleep with you – no games, I don't do that sort of things."

"Why?" Harry asked, struggling to stop his jaw from hitting the floor.

"You're a good match," she said with a shrug. "You just proved that."

"Sorry," Harry replied seriously, deciding that he would never understand girls, even with Fleur's help. "I'm really not interested."

"I didn't think you would be," she said with a sigh. "The other girl has her fingerprints all over you."

"She has," he agreed. "And I'm committed to her."

"If you ever change your mind," Tracey said. "We could be good together."

Good in a good way or good in a way that we'd both end up sleeping with our wands and cursing each other?"

Tracey laughed softly. "Both," she smiled. "If you put in a bit of work in a gym, you'd be hotter."

"I know," he said. "I've got a training routine set up for the summer."

"For the girlfriend?"

"For me first, but yeah, for her as well."

"Smart girl."

"I'm well trained," he agreed with a smile.

"You're not supposed to know that."

He sketched out a faint bow. "So, are you joining me?"

"Who am I working with?"

"Cho and Susan."

"You're a strange one, Harry Potter. Not many men would go for three girls as the start of their revolution."

He smiled slightly. "You're the easy ones. I've got to talk to Ron and Hermione yet."

"Want some free advice?"

"Sure."

"Don't trust Dumbledore. He's hiding something from you."

Harry looked at her, and felt his expression disappear. "What makes you say that?"

Tracey gulped.

"Your tea," Adrian grunted, holding out two cups.

"Thank you," Harry said, taking one and blowing on it.

"Yeah," Tracey agreed. "Thanks Adrian."

He nodded and took a few steps back, standing next to his friend.

"Logic, Harry. Dumbledore has been playing with the Golden Boy for years, you've been allowed to do things that no one else has, but yet other things don't match. You're upbringing, you're lessons, Snape. He knows something, and he's not telling."

Harry nodded slowly and took a sip from his tea. "That's the second time you've mentioned my childhood."

"Was that a question?"

"If you want to play games, yes it was."

"You're taking the fun out of this," Tracey grumbled.

"I try."

She sighed. "I've done some spying," she confessed. "I know where you live, who you live with, everything."

"You do?" he asked softly, looking into her eyes deeply. He reached slowly for his wand. "And just what are you planning on doing with this knowledge?" he purred.

Tracey gulped nervously. "Nothing, I swear!"

He looked at her for a moment longer, and then dropped his gaze to the cup, and took another sip.

As he looked up, Tracey was on her knees before him.

"Lord Potter," she said formally. "I hereby pledge my name, my honour, my loyalty and my family to your cause."

Harry gaped at her.

"Bloody accept, you git," Tracey growled. "This is painful. Say, 'I, Lord Potter, accept your pledge'"

"I, Lord Potter, accept your pledge," he repeated automatically, not thinking things through.

There was a flash of light that emanated from Tracey's chest and struck him in his. "What the hell?" Harry asked as a rush of emotions and knowledge shot through him.

"You scared me," Tracey said, back on her feet, as if nothing had happened.

"And?"

"It was the last thing I needed," she said. "I want Voldemort dead. You can do that, I know that now, but you wouldn't have trusted me like I want to be trusted."

"I thought it was better to rule in Hell than serve in Heaven?" Harry whispered, feeling more than a little bewildered.

"I would never rule in Hell, the devil doesn't share power."

"So what was that?"

"Magical pledge, my Liege. I betray you, I lose everything, including my magic" she explained confidently.

"I will never understand women," Harry groaned in shock.

"No," she agreed with a small smile.

"And what's with the Lord title?"

"I wouldn't be surprised if you are, but I was guessing. It doesn't matter though, in a legal sense, you are now my Liege-Lord."

"Why do I get the feeling that you've just done something momentous?"

"Because I have. I just gambled everything I am and own on you."

"Why the hell would you do that?" Harry demanded.

"Because when you trust me, you will give me what I want."

"Power?"

"Power used for good is still power," Tracey pointed out.

Harry shook his head. "I think you're insane. I think I'm insane for accepting without working out what you've just done beforehand."

"Then we'll get on fine, won't we?"

He nodded. "Owl me in a few days time, you know where I live. Keep in touch with Susan and Cho."

"I will. Thanks."

Harry bowed to her slightly and turned to walk away.

"Harry," Susan called, and rushed over to meet him with Cho. A larger group of other girls followed them. Ron and Hermione to one side. Everyone was staring at him.

"Susan?"

"Did she just do what I think she did?"

"Offer to sleep with me?" Harry asked dryly. "Yes."

Cho and Susan both seemed to pause and then blush together. "Not that!" Susan hissed. "Swear fealty to you."

He looked over his shoulder at Tracey, who shrugged and mouthed, 'your call.'

"Yes."

"Why?" Cho asked.

"So that I would trust her," he sighed. "She's a Slytherin, and decided to short cut the issues I had with her."

"And it worked?" Susan asked.

He nodded slowly. "I'll trust her more after I've checked out what she has done."

Cho smiled slightly. "Hermione," she called over her shoulder. "What are the words for the pledge a wizard makes to a Liege-Lord?"

"I hereby pledge my name, my honour, my loyalty and my family to your cause," Hermione recited instantly, and then started to walk over to them, but

stopped as Cho and Susan held up their hands.

"And what does it do?" Susan asked her.

"Servitude," Hermione sniffed. "It means that they can't go against the Liege-Lord's will. What's going on here?"

"Not now," Cho said, turning her back on Hermione.

Cho and Susan looked at each other and nodded, dropping to their knees in front of him, a lot more publicly than Tracey had.

"Lord Potter, I hereby pledge my name, my honour, my loyalty and my family to your cause," the two girls said in unison.

Harry groaned at them. "You're insane," he said flatly.

They looked up at him hopefully, and he sighed. "I, Lord Potter, accept your pledge."

"What is going on here?" the strident tones of Minerva McGonagall demanded as she stormed into the courtyard.

Cho and Susan stood calmly and turned, standing in front of Harry.

Behind him, he could hear Tracey groan before she joined the two girls in front of him.

"A private matter, Professor," Tracey said calmly.

"I hardly think so," McGonagall said, shock in her voice. "Pledges of allegiance to Liege-Lords are not spells to be played with. You all know that!"

"What is going on, Professor?" the voice of Albus Dumbledore asked, as he approached the ever growing group. Next to him were Severus Snape, Olympe Maxime, Fleur Delacour, and Igor Karkaroff.

"I am trying to ascertain that myself," McGonagall said icily. "Ms Chang?"

Cho smiled at the professors and shook her head.

"Ms Bones?"

Susan straightened her back and shook her head.

"Ms Davis?"

Tracey just yawned and started picking at her nails.

McGonagall pursed her lips and turned to Dumbledore. "They were casting the spell of allegiance to a Lord."

Dumbledore's eyes widened and for a second, his face fell. It was for the briefest of seconds, but it was enough that Harry caught it.

There was a pushing from the crowd and Katie Bell strode toward Harry fast, a determined look on her face. She nodded at Cho, who stepped to one side.

"Ms Bell?" Dumbledore called.

Katie dropped to her knees in front of Harry. "You need a Gryffindor," she hissed urgently. "Lord Potter, I hereby pledge my name, my honour, my loyalty and my family to your cause." Unlike the others, her pledge was rushed out as fast as she could.

"I, Lord Potter, accept your pledge," he replied instantly – before anyone could interrupt.

"Harry!" Dumbledore's voice rang out. "What are you doing?"

Harry grinned up at Dumbledore. "If I knew that, I'd be happy to tell you," he said cheerfully. "But recently I've found that following the advice of friends is good for my soul."

"You are fourteen years old!" Dumbledore almost roared. "You have no idea what you are doing you irresponsible child."

The four girls hissed as one and raised their wands defensively.

Harry reached out and lightly touched Tracey's shoulder. She shot a protesting look at him, and then grudgingly lowered her wand. "And yet I am old enough to be forced into a Magical Contract that could cost me my life," Harry pointed out absently. "Despite being under the legal age of adulthood, you decided that I was old enough to compete in the tri-wizard tournament against my wishes. You decided I should be an adult, I am merely continuing your good work," he said with a polite bow.

"You arrogant child," Snape spat.

Harry looked at Snape and shook his head in contempt.

Albus," Olympe interrupted firmly. "It is time for us to leave."

"Of course," Dumbledore agreed, his eyes showing his disappointment in Harry.

Harry could feel Snape and Malfoy sneering at him and he almost smiled. He wouldn't react to them anymore – not that he'd let them get away with anything, but he wouldn't react like before.

The rest of Beauxbatons joined them in the courtyard as their flying coaches pulled up.

Fleur turned away from him, and then paused. She turned back and walked over to him. He was aware that everyone was watching them. "Thank you," she said, loud enough that she could be heard, "for saving my sister."

"You're welcome," Harry whispered, his eyes locked on hers. There was so much he wanted to say to her, to thank her, to get her promise once more that she would wait for him.

"I'll wait for you," she whispered. "As long as it takes."

"Thank you," he whispered back.

"What are you doing with those girls?"

"I have no idea," he replied. "They want to help defeat Voldemort."

"I do not like leaving you with four girls sworn to you," she admitted in a hurry.

He was very aware that the crowd was starting to get a little suspicious. "I've given you my word, Fleur, and nothing will make me break it, ever. They all know that I have a girlfriend and am not available."

"Good."

"Owl me," Harry whispered.

Fleur nodded, her eyes suspiciously bright.

"And trust me," Harry said intently. "Even though I have no idea what I am doing."

"I do trust you," Fleur whispered. "I do not like being vulnerable."

"None of us do," Harry agreed. "When I get access to a Floo, I'll talk to you."

She nodded. "Stay safe, my Lord," she whispered.

"Stay safe, my Lady," he echoed.

Fleur looked at him and then straightened her back. She turned on her heel and without looking back, joined the others.

He watched, his face expressionless as Dumbledore and Madame Maxime said goodbye formally.

There was a small disturbance from the students, as a smaller figure broke away and sprinted toward Harry, ignoring the shouts from the students for her to come back.

The long haired girl jumped long before she reached him, caught him around the waist and expertly skimmed up him.

"Gabrielle?" he asked the small blonde.

She smiled at him. "I did not get chance to say thank you properly in English," she said loudly, blushing cutely, and kissed him on the cheek. "Fleur said that if you get hold of a Floo, call Delacour Apartment," she whispered intently.

"You're welcome," Harry said loudly, walking toward the Beauxbatons group. "I expect you to write me over the summer," he continued. "I want to know how you get on, okay?"

"Really?" Gabrielle asked.

"Of course," Harry replied, smiling at her.

She kissed his cheek again and rested her head against his shoulder as he carried her.

"Yours, I believe," he said to Fleur.

She smiled fondly at her sister. "Again, you return what I have lost to me."

He grinned at her and peeled the eight year old off his chest – she pouted firmly at him, and let of a petulant outburst in French.

"Gabrielle Delacour!" Fleur almost shouted, although Harry could see a faint glimmer of amusement in her eyes.

Gabrielle mumbled what he presumed was an apology as she moved from Harry's arms into her sisters and buried her face in her neck.

Harry saluted her casually and turned to walk away. That simple movement was one of the hardest things he had ever done.

Nearly every face in Hogwarts was staring at him with curiosity as the Beauxbatons students departed.

He looked at them all and with a confidence he didn't truly feel, he started to speak.

"Voldemort is back. He killed Cedric. Just like he killed my parents. Next year, you are going to have to make a choice. Every last one of you. You will have to decide if you are with me, against me, or neutral." He could see Snape's face change colour and the look of supreme disappointment on Dumbledore's face. But he no longer cared; he needed to run his own life now, if he was going to get what he wanted.

And he wanted Fleur. Permanently.

"You four have some explaining to do," Harry said to the girls who had sworn fealty to him. "And you two better come as well," he said to Ron and Hermione. Without looking back, he walked into the school and left the stunned crowd behind him.

They walked in silence up to the Astronomy Tower, to the roof. With an almost casual couple of spells, he released the charms Fleur had set up for him, and collapsed into the sofa.

"Welcome to my office," he said dryly.

All six students looked stunned.

"Sit down, all of you."

They sat, and he was amused to see that Ron and Hermione sat next to each other.

"Okay," he sighed, lightly massaging his forehead. "I know why Tracey did it, Susan, Cho, Katie... Why did you decide that this was a good idea?"

Susan and Cho looked at each other. "We got caught up in the moment?" Susan offered meekly.

Harry snorted in disbelief. "The truth, please."

Cho sighed and placed her hand lightly on Susan's arm. "Because we saw what Tracey was doing, and understood. Slytherins aren't the only ones that are ambitious," she explained. "Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs are as well."

"What about the risks?" Harry demanded. "I don't even know them, but I can tell they're bad. I'm getting all sorts of things from each of you and I'm having trouble controlling them!"

"Calculated risk," Susan said softly. "If I'd had longer to think, I probably wouldn't do it. But it made sense – I'm not used to pushing myself forward, but this is one time I wasn't going to get left behind. A chance like this comes up once in a lifetime."

Harry closed his eyes. "Katie?"

"I put two and two together before anyone else did," Katie said proudly. "You'd obviously spoken to Cho about Cedric, and if you can win her over, all the rumours are definitely wrong. You have Tracey – the head of the only other faction in Slytherin worth paying attention to – so you've said something to her as well. And then you have a Hufflepuff putting herself forward. There is only one reason that they would do what they had done so publicly. You've admitted to yourself that you are Harry Potter, and are going to face Voldemort. I want in at the top level, if you're going to change the school and the world; I want to be there."

"So I seem to have picked up four very independent women," he said with a slight smile.

"But never mind that," Tracey said. "Is this mystery maiden of yours Fleur Delacour?"

Harry nodded. "Was it that obvious?"

"No, not to anyone else," Tracey replied. "But I could feel you felt something for her."

Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed Ron's face turn an ugly colour and sighed. He'd actually forgotten that his friend had a bit of a crush on the French champion.

"Come on, Harry, spill the beans!" Cho said firmly.

"She talked to me," Harry explained. "Made me see things a little differently, that I wasn't responsible for Cedric's death. And that if I simply accepted who I am, I could avenge him. I liked that idea. Anyway, we talked about what we wanted, and how we wanted to live. I want Fleur, but I'm not ready for her. I'm not even fifteen years old yet, and she is nearly eighteen."

"She offered me herself as a prize – that if I worked and did what I could, at the end of the trail, would be the one thing I want more than life. Her. She knew exactly what she was doing, and knew that I knew."

"She started me on the path to get her, and promised to wait for me. I promised the same, that I would wait for her as well. She is going to help me, and I will help her. But I do not have the pressure of a girlfriend on top of everything else – not in the traditional sense. She neatly bypassed all the

ears I have about having a girlfriend, while still giving me the support I need.”

“And she’s beautiful,” Susan pointed out.

“I know,” Harry agreed with a slight smile. “Of course, I never expected today to end quite like this when I asked Cho to talk to me.”

He paused for a second, and then looked at Hermione. “You’re obviously bursting to tell me what’s going on, so now’s your chance,” he said to her with a slight smile.

“Are you insane?” Hermione demanded. “I don’t even know where to start!”

“Then don’t,” Tracey said coldly. “You’re not sworn to protect him, we are.”

Hermione glared at the Slytherin. “You tricked him!”

“Whoa,” Harry called, holding out his hand. “Both of you calm down. You’re giving me a headache. Tracey, I trust Hermione. She’s been there for me since I started school – I wouldn’t have got past the dragon without her help. And Hermione, she didn’t trick me, I could have said no.” He paused for a second, deciding that he probably shouldn’t admit that Hermione was probably right. “So, can you please tell me what I just got myself into?”

Hermione seemed to be torn, before she took a deep breath and relaxed. “Sorry,” she said to Tracey. “I’m a little jealous,” she admitted. “I’ve been the only female for him, and all of a sudden, I’ve got four others.”

“You could always join us,” Susan pointed out gently.

“I don’t think so,” Hermione sighed. With an oblique glance at Ron, she continued, “I don’t think it would go down well.”

“The future isn’t set,” Tracey pointed out. “Emotions change as you grow.”

“For most people,” Hermione agreed. “Not for all.”

“Eventually, everyone changes,” Cho said. “Don’t lock yourself into a role because it’s comfortable. You need excitement as well.”

“What the hell are you all talking about?” Ron asked, looking confused.

“The future,” Katie explained. “But we can talk about that later. Hermione?”

“Right, sorry,” Hermione said. “Okay, Harry, you are now what is called a Liege-Lord. Technically, that gives you a lot of power over these four people. They can not, for example, betray you, or anything you support, without losing everything they own, and their magic – it all gets forfeited to you.

“You have access to all their land, subordinates, and money – and well, you could, conceivably, marry them off to anyone you felt like – or take them as partners yourself.

“In return, you promise to keep them safe and protect them.”

“You are insane,” Harry said directly, looking at the four girls. “Why on earth would you want that?”

As the four girls started to talk at once, Harry held up his hand. “One at a time, please. Tracey?”

“We’ve been though this,” she pointed out grumpily. “Look, are you going to screw any of us and betray Fleur?”

“No,” Harry replied instantly.

“Are you going to make us screw your friends?”

“Of course not,” Harry said irritably.

“Then none of that matters,” she pointed out. “We get the better deal out of this. The promise doesn’t apply to our parents, so what wealth we have isn’t exactly that much at the moment.”

“Speaking of them, what are they going to say?”

“Well, mine will probably disown me,” Tracey said cheerfully. “They’ve got no ambition, and are quite happy to toady up to Lucius Malfoy. But to get back to your question, it’s merely a device to get you to trust me, and to get me in the door with you.” She paused for a second. “We are probably all betting that you will care for us,” she admitted. “And we are gambling that you don’t get corrupted by the power you have over us.”

“Not that some of us would mind,” Susan mumbled, flushing bright red.

“Shush,” Tracey said to Susan with a grin. “He doesn’t need to know that.”

Harry groaned audibly. “Does anyone have anything different to say?”

“Well, in my case, you’ve just got quite a bit richer,” Katie said quietly. “My parents were killed last year by Death Eaters. What I have, is yours.”

"Oh, Katie," Susan said, and ran over and hugged the older girl. Katie looked a little surprised.

"She's a 'Puff," Cho pointed out gently.

"It's okay," Katie said, patting Susan's back awkwardly.

"Well, in my case, I'm an only child, my parents own a lot of Muggle and Wizarding shops. They're going to be a little annoyed," Cho said. "But not to worry, I'll sell it to them as an alliance."

"I'm the same as Katie," Susan said quietly. "Most of my family has been killed by that monster. My aunt will be disappointed, but it will probably help you, Harry – as she..."

"Is the Head of the department for Magical Law Enforcement," Harry finished. He lent back and sighed. "This may sound like a really strange question, but does any one know who I am?"

"What do you mean?" Hermione asked.

"I know my parents names, I know that I have my mum's eyes and my dad's hair. And I have some photographs, but that's about it. Who am I? Where do I come from? What is my history? I know that I have an invisibility clock that belonged to my father, but what does that mean? Is it the only heirloom, or are there others?"

"You don't know?" Tracey asked in disbelief.

"No one will tell me anything," Harry pointed out acidly.

A second later, he was being hugged by Susan.

"Touchy-feely, isn't she," Tracey said.

"Yes," Susan said decisively, before blushing. "This is going to sound weird, but I feel like I've got a new family."

"From what I understand so far, you have," Harry replied. He paused, and shook his head in surprise. "You each seem to have acquired three sisters," he finished.

The four girls in question smiled broadly, although Tracey was rolling her eyes.

They were interrupted by the door opening, and Albus Dumbledore walking out to join them.

"Nice office," he said, his eyes twinkling. "Harry, can I have a word with you?"

Harry nodded slowly, and moved out of Susan's arms. He looked at the four girls and Ron and Hermione. "Can you compare what you know, so you can give me some more details?"

They nodded, and he turned and preceded Dumbledore to the other side of the tower.

He sat on the edge of the Tower and looked at Dumbledore. "What can I do for you, sir?"

"Release Ms Chang, Ms Davis, Ms Bones, and Ms Bell from their pledges to you," Albus said firmly. "Pledges of allegiance like that are not to be played with, and they are putting their very lives at risk."

"By publicly demonstrating that they support me?" he asked in disbelief.

"Exactly."

"Is it not a bit late for that?" Harry asked. "After all, they all just did it in front of the entire school, and I'm sure that Malfoy is already planning on telling his Death Eater scum father."

Dumbledore sighed. "Even so, Harry."

"I'll give them the option," Harry said. "I won't force them to do anything that they do not want to do."

Dumbledore nodded. "Thank you. You do know that you have to go back to the Dursleys, do you not?"

"Why?" Harry asked. He took a deep breath and remembered that Fleur had ordered him to tell Dumbledore what happened. "All my life they have abused me. They kept me in a cupboard under the stairs, did not look after me in anyway, shape, or form, allowed their son to physically bully me, and starved me. At one time, they even kept me locked up for days with a broken arm." He was pretty sure that he was going to have to go back anyway, but he wanted to make sure that Dumbledore could not claim ignorance.

Dumbledore froze and stared at Harry in disbelief.

"So," Harry continued. "Why am I going back?"

"It's the safest place for you," Dumbledore replied, but Harry got the distinct impression he was lying.

No, that doesn't make sense," Harry said. "If that was the case, I wouldn't let me spend any time at all away from here, never mind go to the Quidditch World Cup like you did last year. If I'm safe there, then I must be safe at the Burrow."

"While you can still call home the place where your mother's blood dwells, there you cannot be touched or harmed by Voldemort... Petunia knows allowing you houseroom may well have kept you alive for the past fifteen years. And with Voldemort now back, it is of the utmost importance that you are kept safe."

Harry scratched his head, the headache he had before returning with a vengeance. "That makes very little sense," Harry pointed out. "Does that mean that every time I've been out in the park, or seeing the doctor, or anything, I've been vulnerable? What about when I'm in the garden? And you said Voldemort, what about the Death Eaters? And what about the Floo, Mr Weasley hooked up the Floo so I could go with him last year? And Dobby, Dobby Apparated to and from that house when he tried to stop me from coming to Hogwarts a few years ago. And if Malfoy's House Elf could find me that easily, who else can?"

"Good questions, Harry," Dumbledore sighed heavily.

"And yet you supply no answers." He looked at Dumbledore directly. "How am I supposed to trust you, when your answers don't make any sense?"

"There are things, Harry, that you are not ready to hear."

"That maybe true, but I demand to hear them all the same. If it concerns me, and my life, and forces me to live in hell, then I deserve to know what is going on – if only so I don't do something silly trying to find out what it is. You've allowed me to do a lot of things at Hogwarts that other students have not been allowed to do. Why?"

Dumbledore looked uncomfortable and avoided Harry's eyes.

"In which case," Harry said softly, but as clearly as he could. "I am not going back to the Dursleys."

"And just where are you planning on staying?" Dumbledore demanded.

Harry looked at his Head Master and slowly shook his head. "Why are you being like this?" he asked quietly. "Why are you not giving me answers, and treating me like a six year old. I've been forced to grow this year, and that is because you made me enter this damn tournament. A damn tournament where I had to watch Voldemort take my blood and use it to build himself a new body, a tournament where I watched Cedric executed in front of me with as much care as most people would give to swatting a fly!

"You reap what you sow, professor, and now you have to deal with the consequences. If I had not been in that damn tournament, things would have been different, but they aren't. I've been forced to start growing up early, and one of the things about growing up is taking the responsibility for my actions. I now have four girls out there that are reliant on me personally. I have a whole world that seems reliant on me to kill Voldemort. And out there are the gravestones of James Potter, Lily Potter, and Cedric Diggory, and they all demand the same thing of me. Avenge our deaths!"

"Your parents would not want that," Dumbledore replied.

Harry smiled coldly at him. "But then, as I don't even know my parents, I wouldn't know, would I? But you know what? It doesn't really matter. I'll kill Voldemort, and if they are disappointed when I meet them, then I'll live with it, knowing that I did what I feel is right!"

Dumbledore's pale blue eyes met his directly.

"I meant what I said earlier," Harry said. "Either you are with me, or against me."

"You are too young," Dumbledore pointed out tiredly.

"I might be now, Professor, but I am growing up everyday, and I will not wait for Voldemort to come for me passively. I will be ready for him. But it really is up to you where we go from here. You can stand in my way, destroy any sort of relationship we have between us, or you can help me."

Harry looked at his watch and made a decision. "I'm going to take the first step here. I'll get on the train and go back to the Dursleys, until my birthday. From then, it will be up to you what we do and where we go."

"Thank you, Harry," Albus said, and walked off, a very thoughtful expression on his face.

Harry walked back to his office, and slumped down.

"Why did you agree to go back there?" Tracey asked.

"Especially when it is so bad." The Hufflepuff looked to be going through an internal war as her expression vacillated between anger and compassion.

"Yeah," Katie continued, "especially when you can stay with any of us – especially me."

"I figured I'd show him that I am more grown up," he explained. "But you know, it's not going to be so bad this time."

"Why?" Ron asked.

"Because Fleur taught me how to hide from the Monitoring Charms that the Ministry employs. And as you can see from here, Fleur is brilliant at charms. So I know how to improve my room, and I have the food aspect sorted out as well."

"That's against the law," Hermione pointed out.

"So is child abuse," Harry grinned at her.

"I had to say it," Hermione grinned back. "You certainly would never find me giving you a list of spells to learn and practice," she continued innocently. "Nor would I ever remind you to do all your homework."

Harry looked at his watch again. "Okay, we need to hurry now. We'll meet on the train, and talk on the way back, alright?" He stood and then stopped. "Oh, as I promised Dumbledore, any one want out?"

The four girls shook their heads as one.

"Then let's get to the train!"

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Harry settled down on the seat and sighed comfortably. "You know," he said. "This is the first time that I've ever felt optimistic about leaving Hogwarts."

"It's amazing what a few spells can do for you," Tracey agreed.

"You know what I'm looking forward to?" Ron asked.

Harry looked at him.

"Malfoy's visit," Ron explained. "There are a few more of us this year..."

Harry smiled slowly. "How does everyone feel about a little planning?"

"In what way?" Tracey asked, leaning forward, her eyes alight with interest.

"Experience tells us that Draco opens the door and sneers at us, Crabbe and Goyle stand each side of him. So, when he opens the door, Ron and I will grab him and flip him onto the floor. Katie, Tracie, you two can threaten Crabbe and Goyle – stun them if you need to – Susan, Cho, Draco is yours once he is on the floor."

"What about me?" Hermione asked, looking miffed at being left out.

"You, Hermione, will stand behind Tracey and Katie," Harry said innocently.

"And?" Hermione asked slowly.

"When you step over Draco... miss."

Hermione looked at him and shook her head. "You're going to be handful, Mr Potter," she predicted with a long suffering sigh.

"And that's the way you like me," he grinned.

"I suppose," Hermione said, hiding a smile.

"I like it," Ron said cheerfully. "While we're waiting, does anyone want a game of chess?"

"I will," Susan said softly.

"If you beat him," Harry said, looking at her, "I've got a copy of Helga Hufflepuff's diary that you can have."

"She had a diary?" Susan asked.

"Yep," he replied. "It was gathering dust in an old corner of the library, so I liberated it for future use."

"You stole a library book!" Hermione squeaked.

"Liberated," Harry corrected. "It's fascinating, full of charms that I've never heard off, and haven't been used in centuries. Not that you'd be interested in that, Hermione."

"I don't know about her, but I am," Cho said eagerly.

"I am," Hermione grumbled. "Although I'm not sure I like the idea that you know something I don't."

Harry picked up a magazine and touched his wand to it, turning it into five yellow roses. He passed one to each of the girls and smiled at Hermione innocently.

"Why yellow?" Ron asked, "and not red?"

"Because his lady has been training him," Tracey stated.

Yellow is the colour of friendship, Ron,” Katie told him.

“We really need to talk,” Ron said to Harry.

Harry grinned at him. “Haven’t you got a match to play?”

“If I get some help,” Susan said shyly, “I’ll share the diary.”

What followed probably wasn’t very fair on Ron. It was as amusing as anything that Harry had ever seen, though.

The girls did not play fair. When ever Ron went to make a move, Hermione would lightly brush against his shoulder, or Tracey would undo a button on her shirt, making claims about the heat in the carriage, or Cho would cross her legs, letting her skirt slide up.

Ron, his face an almost permanent red, didn’t know where to look, and as such, it didn’t take long for Katie and Susan to get him in to checkmate.

Harry silently stood and reached into his trunk and pulled out the diary, he then pulled out his wand and cast a duplication charm on it. Without a word he passed one to each of the girls.

In silence, Hermione moved away from Ron, skirts were smoothed down and buttons done up as the five girls opened the books and started to read.

“How the hell do you do that?” Ron demanded. “Not be affected by them?”

The ‘them’ in question all smiled and pretended they weren’t paying attention to the conversation.

“They were playing with you, Ron,” Harry explained softly. “And none of them are Fleur. She can reduce me to a gibbering wreck with a simple look. Of course,” he continued absently, “it was a little easier when I learned to block out the Veela power, after that, she just had to rely on her personality and looks, and believe me, that was more than enough. There was one time, it was late, almost midnight, we were sat outside looking at the stars and talking about Charms, and she would get this look in her eyes that made me feel like I was the only other person on the planet, and if she had asked, I would have fetched her the moon at that moment.”

There was silence in the carriage, only broken by Ron making gagging sounds. From there, there was a remarkable display of teamwork, as Tracey kicked Ron in the shins, and Hermione elbowed him firmly in the stomach. Susan, beating Cho by a microsecond, hugged Harry first, and then stepped back to let the other girls, apart from Hermione, hug him.

Harry shook his head, feeling bewildered again. “I will never understand girls,” he said.

“Me neither,” Ron said, glaring at Tracey and Hermione.

“Chess?” Harry asked Ron, knowing that it would get him in a better mood.

The girls all smiled smugly and went back to their reading.

“Harry,” Hermione called a few seconds later. “How did you block the Veela power?”

“Oh, it was like the *Imperio* us,” Harry replied as he moved his first pawn. “Once you know how to fight that, applying it to Veela power just takes practice.”

“You can fight off the *Imperio* us?” Cho asked.

“He did it in class,” Susan said softly. “We were all impressed.”

Harry shrugged. “Anyone can do it,” he pointed out. “It just takes practice.”

“Actually, they can’t,” Katie said. “You’re going to have to teach us.”

“When Ron’s beaten me,” Harry said, looking down at his rapidly deflating chess pieces, “I’ll see what I can do.”

The carriage was silent, apart from the sounds of the chess pieces smashing into each other – and the sound of Harry’s Queen making loud protests over some of Harry’s moves.

The door swung open, and the sneering face of Draco Malfoy appeared. He opened his mouth to deliver what was no doubt going to be a stunning display of wit and creativity, when everyone started to move.

Harry jumped across the carriage, grabbing Draco’s right hand, while Ron grabbed his left, they both yanked hard, sending the boy crashing to the floor, while Katie and Tracey both stood, pointing their wands directly at Crabbe and Goyle – who froze.

As Draco scrambled around and sat up, he found himself face to face with Ron, Susan, and Cho’s wands, forcing him to lie back down quickly, an expression of fear on his face.

Hermione, doing as she had been told, took a step over him, and lowered her heel right on his crotch, causing the blond’s face to go red and tears to stream down his face.

“Oh, Sorry Draco,” Hermione said politely. “I was trying to get to the door.”

"You filthy Mud..." Draco started, sitting up again.

He didn't get to finish his sentence as Harry whipped his wand out and cast a silencing spell on the boy. "I really don't like that word," Harry said softly, looking at Draco in disgust. He turned to look at Crabbe and Goyle.

"Tracey," he said in a cold voice, "kill Goyle."

"Oh, goody," Tracey said eagerly. "Bye, bye."

"Wait!" Goyle shouted, his eyes going wide.

"Why?" Harry asked. "You follow Voldemort's spawn, you must be on his side, and his side is against my side, therefore you should die."

"But..."

"But what?" Harry asked. "You know that I am Tracey's Liege-Lord, don't you?"

The boy nodded violently.

"As such, I am responsible for her actions, so it will be me in trouble, not her. And let's face it, whose going to try and punish Harry Potter? Sure, Tracey might have a few nightmares, but it's a small price to pay for removing you – and once she has killed for the first time, killing Crabbe will be easier for her."

Both boys were now sweating heavily and looking panicked. "But you're a Gryffindor," they cried.

"I'll let you into a secret," Harry said, leaning closer to them. "The Sorting Hat wanted to be me into Slytherin, but because of the emasculated wonder on the floor behind me, I asked it to put me in Gryffindor."

Both boys went incredibly white. "Please, don't kill me," Crabbe begged.

"Harry," Cho said from the back. "Killing them here would be a little messy, as Tracey would have to use the cutting curse, you might get blood on your robes."

"But it wouldn't be much, would it?"

"There are five point six litres of blood in a human body," Cho pointed out. "And the heart can pump for a several seconds after the head is removed. The blood will get everywhere, and don't expect me to clean your robes."

"Spoilsport," Harry replied. "It looks like it's your lucky day," he told the two boys. "So I'll give you a warning instead. I see you with Draco next year, and I'll have one of my girls kill you – silently, when you are not expecting it."

"But..."

"Run away, now," Harry growled, "or I'll do it myself."

The two boys, finding that Katie and Tracey had stepped back, looked at each other, and run away.

"And as for you," Harry said, turning and facing the prone Draco. "You I'm not going to threaten. Instead, I'm going to use you, as the little messenger ferret you are."

Draco's face went red again as he opened his mouth, but no sound came out.

"When you see Voldemort, and you will, tell him I said 'Hi!'."

Draco nodded fearfully.

Harry reached down and picked up the boy's wand, and holding it in front of his face, he snapped Draco's wand. "I'm sure Daddy will be pleased to buy you a new one," he grinned. "Oh, and tell Lucius that I put certain memories into a Pensieve of Dumbledore's, and we really wouldn't want that information getting out, would we?"

Draco's face took on a confused expression before it cleared and he went white.

"Let him go," Harry said, and stood to one side.

Draco climbed to his feet and opened his mouth to shout at them, but again, no sound came out. He stormed out of the compartment, slamming the door behind them.

Harry collapsed into his seat and took a deep shuddering breath. "Good work, guys," he said softly, looking around. Ron and Hermione were staring at him as if he had grown another head, while the other four smiled back at him.

"What the hell was that?" Ron demanded. "Were you really going to kill them?"

"Of course he wasn't," Tracey said. "If he was, he'd do it himself. Harry would never ask someone to do something he wouldn't do himself."

"And he would never just kill someone," Cho agreed. "You two should know that."

"We should," Hermione agreed. "But how do you four know that?"

"He is our Liege-Lord," Susan said. "We know if he is serious or not."

Hermione sighed and looked disgruntled. "And you're a Hufflepuff," she accused Susan.

"And what does that mean?" Susan asked. "That I'm going to be loyal to Harry and my new sisters? It does, absolutely! And just? I think that what Harry just did was more than just for what he has had to put up with for ages!"

"Sorry," Hermione said, raising her hands defensively. "I didn't mean that quite like that."

"How did you mean it?" Tracey asked.

"Girls..." Harry started.

"No, Harry," Hermione interrupted him. "They're right. I'm sorry, I still not used to this. Yesterday, it was just the three of us, or even a few weeks ago it seemed like the two of us against everyone, and I feel like you lot are usurping our friendship."

"Interesting choice of words," Cho said, lightly putting a hand on both Tracey's and Susan's shoulder, restraining them. "However, none of us have acted illegally, rashly, certainly, but illegally? No. And none of us have any real wish to displace or supersede you either. Sure, this will take some adjustment on your part, and ours, although we have something to help us move along, the fact that we are sworn to Harry gives us a connection that allows us to trust each other in a way that I don't think any of us can adequately explain. I can say that this morning, I would not have even contemplated making plans to spend the summer spending as much time with a 'Puff, a Gryff, and a Slytherin."

"So, this is something you are going to have to deal with. Harry is going to trust us, we are going to be there for him, and we have a magical promise to do so."

Hermione nodded quietly and then looked at Harry. He looked at her back until she smiled at him. And suddenly, everything was alright again.

"What happened?" Ron asked, scratching his head. "I got lost."

"Cho, Susan, Tracey, and Katie are going to go and say goodbye to their other friends," Harry said casually. "And I need a word with a few people as well."

"They are?" Ron asked.

"Yep," Susan said, bouncing to her feet. "I'll see you guys on the platform."

"Is she always going to be like that?" Tracey asked with a sigh.

"Guess so," Cho said. "That girl fits her house so well it's not even funny. Harry, at some stage you are going to have to order her to get a boyfriend."

"What?"

"Cho's right," Katie agreed. "Not right now, but at some time in the future. That girl has a crush on you the size of Hogwarts, but also knows that you are completely safe AND unavailable."

"That doesn't make any sense," Harry pointed out.

"It means that she can be quite happy fantasising about you without having to actually go through the effort of seeing anyone, or having that human contact. She'll be in her safe world and quite content."

"And that's a bad thing, right?"

"Bad for her, yes. She'll never grow like that."

"And I," Tracey sighed, "can not believe that I am agreeing with you, or even caring about her. We'll talk about it later, I need to go and reassure Adrian that he's still necessary, you know how guys are." The Slytherin walked out the door.

Katie and Cho exchanged a smile. "We'll see you later, Harry."

"How guys are?" Harry asked Hermione.

She just smiled at him. "Go and talk to who you need to."

Harry shook his head and made his way up the train. It didn't take him long to hone in on the carriage he wanted. The sounds of laughter could be heard almost half a train away.

Fred and George Weasley were sitting with Angelina and Alicia, along with Ginny and Lee Jordan. "Gentlemen," Harry said. "Might I have one or two minutes of your time, alone?"

“For a man who’s got four of the hottest girls in school, you can have three,” George said, sliding to one side to avoid the elbow aimed at him from Alicia.

Harry rolled his eyes, “Come on, we’ll cast a few charms at the end of the train.”

The twins followed Harry down and quickly set up some privacy spells.

“What’s up, doc?”

“I was wondering if you two were interested in a little bit of business.”

“Oh?” Fred asked, his nose twitching.

“If I remember correctly, you two are poised for expansion, but certain circumstances left you bereft of the necessary funds.”

“Right,” George agreed, his nose starting to twitch as well.

“And with that, I am positive that you two are clearly the two most evil people I’m ever likely to meet.”

“We try,” Fred said modestly.

“And we’ve already picked our sides,” George agreed. “We’re with you.”

“Thanks,” Harry said, a little surprised. “Anyway,” he continued, deciding to bring the flowery speech to an end, it was far too difficult to keep up. He reached into his pocket and pulled out his winnings from the Tri-wizard tournament. “1000 galleons my friends,” he said, handing it to them.

Fred and George’s mouths opened so far that he could see their tonsils.

“You two run the business,” he continued. “I supply the cash, we share the profits.”

“Partners,” Fred said, nodding slowly, his eyes still unnaturally wide.

“Partners,” George said, turning to Fred.

They both turned as one and grabbed Harry’s hands, pulling him into a capering dance as they shouted and spun around and around.

“There is just one condition,” Harry said, through his laughter.

“What?”

“You don’t tell your mum – I’m going to be the silent of silent partners.”

“No problem,” the twins said, still whirling around with him.

“Oh, and one more thing,” he laughed. “Get Ron some new dress robes, Hermione will love you both for ever if you do.”

“Agreed,” they said and finally come to a stop.

“I trust you,” Harry told them, “and I’m not going to interfere with how you do things, but, if you two start having any form of problems, I want to know about them, okay? I’ve got a few connections you probably won’t have thought about them, and I can’t help you if you haven’t told me there is an issue.”

“Ickle Harryikins, all grown up,” Fred said to George.

“I know,” George agreed. “Think we should do something nice for him as a thank you?”

“Like what?” Harry asked warily.

“Give him our little sister,” Fred said brightly. “She’s about old enough to date now.”

“She is,” George agreed. “And we always said we’d let her date someone we trust.”

“And while we might not be able to intimidate our partner, we do trust him with our Gin’s heart.”

“Guys,” Harry laughed. “As much as I appreciate the thought, I don’t think Ginny would…”

“Nonsense,” Fred interrupted, wrapping an arm around Harry’s shoulder.

“She’s still feels something for you,” George agreed.

“And I have a girlfriend,” Harry finished.

“You do?” Fred asked in disbelief.

Harry sighed and looked around, he either trusted the twins or he didn't.

"Fleur," he said simply.

Fred and George looked at each other in shock, before dropping to their knees in front of him.

Harry groaned loudly.

"Harry," Fred said, back on his feet as if he had never moved. "You have to tell us your secret. Getting a babe like that at your age."

"That's the problem," Harry replied. "My age. We're kinda dating but not. Fleur has promised to wait for me to grow up."

"Well that's an incentive."

"And seeing as we can't give you our sister, we're going to have to do something else."

"And I know just the thing," George said, cancelling the spells and dragging Harry back to their carriage. He opened the door and looked around. With a push from Fred and a pull from George, Harry was suddenly seated between Angelina and Alicia.

Fred leaned over and whispered something in Angelina's ear, while George did the same to Alicia.

"That was some speech you gave this morning," Angelina said, dropping a kiss on his cheek. When he looked over at her, he realised he had a prime view down her top.

"It wasn't planned," Harry replied dryly, ignoring both the kiss, and the stares he was getting from Ginny and Lee.

"We couldn't tell," Angelina said, draping her legs over his and cuddling into his sides. She wasn't wearing robes, and the action allowed her skirt to fall down her thighs.

"Not that I don't appreciate the attention," Harry said, mentally swallowing a few times, "but I'm more than slightly suspicious of the sudden attention, and while I'm sure that Lee is enjoying the view as much as I am, I'm not that interested personally, I don't poach."

"Good," Angelina said, "because originally, Fred and George asked us to test that you were telling the truth to them earlier."

"And as we're now very annoyed with them for treating us as objects, we're going to stay like this for the rest of the journey. You may as well enjoy what they aren't going to be seeing for some time."

Harry wasn't quite sure how to take this, or even that he wanted to. He turned and whispered in Angelina's ear, and then Alicia's that he had a girlfriend and that as flattered as he was, he wasn't that interested.

The girls looked at each other, and then him. "Are you sure?" Angelina asked, licking her lips.

He shot a glance at Fred and George, who were grinning at his discomfort.

"Why not," he said suddenly, deciding to get his own back. "Both of you together?"

"Sounds like a plan," Alicia said huskily. "Let's go outside and find somewhere a little more... discreet."

Ginny was looking at him in wide-eyed shock, Lee wasn't far from having a similar expression, but it was Fred and George that made him break the playing and burst into laughter.

"I think we broke them," he chortled.

The twins were stock still, their mouths open, and their faces turning from bright red to pale white.

"We need to talk to Mum," George said eventually, shaking himself out of his stupor and joining in the laughter. "Because we definitely need to adopt Harry."

"Damn right," Fred agreed and handed Harry a book entitled, "201 cleaning charms."

"You should solemnly swear to use this, Harry," George said.

"I will," Harry agreed, getting the hint instantly.

"Now," Fred said, "Can we change seats so that we can have our girlfriends back?"

"Of course," Harry said, standing.

"Oh no you don't," Angelina and Alicia said, pulling him back down. "We're still mad at them, and you smell nice."

George sniffed the air and blinked. "Aftershave as well Harry? We really are going to have to talk soon."

Harry shrugged, it was one of the things Fleur had told him about – and after his first disastrous experiment, just how much to put on as well so that he didn't alert people he was coming from a mile away.

Ginny was looking at him again and he hid a groan. He really didn't like the look. He knew that Angelina and Alicia were playing, and he was fine with that – the youngest Weasley had a much more serious look in her eyes.

"Before we arrive," Harry said, "You all do know how the Ministry monitors wand use over the summer, and how to get around it, right?"

For at least five seconds the only sound heard was the noise of the train as it hurtled toward London.

"Harry," Angelina said quietly. "That's a closely guarded secret, no one knows that."

"I was going to protest about Harry borrowing our girlfriends for a hot threesome," Fred remarked. "But if he knows that, then maybe we should let him."

"Yeah," George agreed.

Both girls shot out of their chairs and slapped their paramours on the back of the head, before sitting back down with Harry.

"You should be careful we don't take you up on that," Alicia growled.

Fred and George grinned unrepentantly at them.

"Okay," Harry said. "Fred, George, go and grab Ron, Hermione, Cho, Tracey, Susan, and Katie. Lee, help them."

Lee look startled at the order, but got up and followed the twins out.

"I'm only going through this once," he said to the others. He stood and looked around, the carriage was too small.

He pulled out his wand and closed his eyes, trying desperately to remember the spell Fleur had taught him. With a whisper, and an intricate pattern, he released the spell and opened his eyes. He smiled; the carriage appeared to have doubled in size.

"Are you sure?" Angelina asked, looking impressed. "We'd dump the twins, wouldn't we?"

"No poaching," Cho said firmly as she entered the enlarged carriage. "Nice charm, Harry."

"What do you mean poaching?" Ginny asked.

"Oh nothing," Cho said airily, to Harry's relief. The more people who knew his secret, the less secret it actually was.

The room soon filled up, Fred and George arrived back last with Hermione and Ron.

"Harry," Fred asked. "Want to explain why Crabbe and Goyle are hiding from Malfoy?"

"Oh, I told them I'd kill them if I saw them hanging around him," he said absently.

"Brilliant," George whispered, impressed.

"It was a good bluff," Tracey agreed. "As he told them that I'd do the actually killing, but as he is my Liege-Lord, he'd be responsible, and who was going to attack the Golden Boy?"

"Lucius Malfoy, Fudge, half the Ministry, Voldemort," Harry reeled off quickly. "But they're far too stupid to think like that.

"But that's now that we're all here for," he continued. "We're here for me to explain how to get around the Ministry's Magic monitoring so we can do magic at home." He paused and looked at Hermione who appeared to be fighting a massive internal battle, even to the extent that she kept making the sounds of the start of words before stopping.

"Yes, it's illegal," Harry said to her, "but imagine how much you can learn if you could do magic for the entire six weeks."

"I hate you," Hermione sighed. "That hit me right where it hurts."

Harry grinned at her. "It was supposed to. Okay, first the big secret. The Ministry can not track who does what spell. They know that magic has been used, but if you are in a magical family, they rely on the parents to tell them."

"A lie?" George asked into the silence. "A freaking lie?"

Harry nodded.

"All this time, we've been told that we can't do magic because it's illegal, and they can't even bloody prove a thing?"

Harry nodded again. "Their standard procedure is to check what the spell was, the time of day it was used, compare it to records of time when children are at Hogwarts and see if it matches. If it doesn't, they Floo the parent and ask why they cast that spell – the parent automatically denies all knowledge."

"It's brilliant," Cho said slowly.

"It does have one more weakness, it can't trace wandless magic."

"How do you know that?" Susan asked.

"I did a bit of it growing up," Harry shrugged. "Accidentally Apparated once, oh, and one time, I vanished a glass window so a friendly snake could escape."

Tracey, Cho, Susan, and Katie all acquired identically smug looks on their faces.

Angelina reached over and prodded Katie, "You can take that look off your face you tart," she teased. "With an underage boy as well."

Katie smiled at Angelina, but didn't say anything.

"So," Harry said, very aware that they were getting near the end of the journey. "It would be much easier if they didn't know that you'd done any magic at all. There is a charm that you can use, but we found a better way."

"We?" Lee asked. "Who else?"

"It was the royal 'we'," Tracey drawled. "You know how modest Harry is."

"Oh, right, sorry," Lee said, nodding.

"Yeah," Harry agreed, feeling embarrassed at his slip up. "I," he emphasised, "found a way to attach the charm to my wand – so as far as the Ministry is concerned the spell hasn't been cast at all."

"Brilliant," Fred whispered.

"Wand," Harry said, holding out his hand to Fred.

Fred pulled his out and handed it to Harry with out hesitation. Harry cast the spell under his breath, and handed the wand back.

"Thanks," Fred said brightly, and used it to create two red roses. He passed one to George, and they both passed them to their girlfriends.

"Don't think this gets you out of it," Alicia sniffed. "We might still kidnap Harry and take him for a wild wide."

"Join the queue," Susan muttered.

It didn't take long for Harry to do everyone else's wands, including Hermione's.

"Remember, be careful," Harry said. "It doesn't protect from *Priori Incantatem*."

"Harry," Lee said, "You know far too much about this sort of thing."

Harry sighed and slumped down on to the seat. "It happened with Voldemort," he whispered. "It forced the last four people he had killed out of the wand. Cedric, an old lady," he paused again, and finished with, "my parents."

"Oh, shit," Ron swore.

"Our brother is right," George agreed.

Harry smiled faintly. "They told me that they'd distract him for a few moments, that was then I grabbed Cedric's body, *Accio* 'd the Portkey and returned to Hogwarts."

There was another few moments of silence, as if no one really knew what they wanted to say.

"Okay," Harry said firmly. "I'm not completely over it yet, but I'm getting there. So, let's change the subject. How do you lot feel about doing some morally irresponsible next year, breaking most of the rules that the Ministry and Hogwarts has, and having a lot of fun doing it."

"We're in," Fred and George said together.

"Don't you two even care what it is?" Angelina asked.

"Nope," Fred grinned cheerfully. "It's no-longer-so-ickle Harrykins. It's got to be fun."

"Yeah," George agreed. "What is it?"

Harry laughed and shook his head. "You two are certifiable. It's a Defence club. Basically, if we get yet-another-teacher-who-can't-teach, we'll find somewhere nice and quiet, and practice offensive and defensive charms, so that if Voldemort and his minions ever come terrorising, they can be sent back to where they came from, hopefully minus a few important limbs."

"Not to be a dampener or anything," Lee said, "but we're going to be doing NEWT level defence next year, what could you teach us?"

"Good question," Harry said, nodding. He looked at his watch. "We've got a few minutes. Stand at the other end of the carriage."

Lee nodded, and looking slightly nervous, moved across from Harry in the elongated carriage.

Rules are simple," Harry said. "Nothing illegal. Everyone else raise a shield, and help those that can't."

Fred, George, Angelina, Alicia, Katie and Cho all cast the same spell, causing a glimmering shield to protect the two sides of the compartment.

"Ready?" Harry asked Lee, his smile at high voltage. He was hiding his nerves; Fleur had taught him that if you gave the impression of confidence, it would sap the other persons.

"Go."

Lee whipped out his wand and cast a stunning spell at Harry. Harry simply dropped to the floor, and sent one back before Lee could recover from his. It smacked straight into the boy, throwing him into the wall. Lessons from Beauxbatons duelling champion had certainly helped his response time.

"Enervate!" Harry said, waking Lee back up.

"Blimey," Lee muttered, as the girls cancelled their spells and he picked himself up from the floor.

"I agree," George said. "But this proves our point."

"What point?" Lee asked.

"That it's simply easier to say yes to Harry than question him. It saves time, effort, and you get to have fun finding out the old fashioned way."

"Oh, right, I'll remember that in the future," Lee replied, rubbing the back of his head gingerly.

There was a shudder through the carriage as the brakes were applied, and the Hogwarts Express started its long deceleration into the station.

Harry looked at the four girls that he was somehow responsible for now. "You four know where I am. I expect you to keep in contact with me, and with each other. If you get in trouble, for any reason, I want to know about it first. No hiding things from me, and you can take that as an order, okay?"

"Yes, Harry," the girls replied in unison.

"Ron, Hermione, I want to know what is going on with you two as well, and as for the rest of you, if you want to contact me for any reason, let one of the others know, and they'll help."

"Yes, Harry," Fred and George said, mimicking the girls tone.

Harry turned to Alicia and Angelina, "And if you two ever want to leave these two clowns, duelling isn't the only thing I'm good at."

"Fred, you're dumped," Alicia said quickly. She stood and jumped at Harry, who caught her, and made himself a firm promise that he needed to work out, because she was much heavier than he had expected.

"So," Harry said to her. "You want to do it here, or go somewhere private?"

"If you do it here, I'm joining in," Angelina said. "You're dumped too, George."

"Here it is then," Alicia said, squirming in his arms, and starting to undo the buttons on her shirt.

He could feel Ron, Hermione, Lee, and Ginny all gaping at him in absolute disbelief. Cho, Tracey, Susan, and Katie were looking amused.

"Oh, if it's going to be like that," Tracey announced, "You can count me in to. I've always wanted to give the Boy-Who-Lived a ride. And if all I have to do to get it is to kiss the two Gryffindors here, so be it."

"Stop!" Ginny shouted. "I don't know what's going on, but stop it." Her wand was out and pointing at Harry, Angelina and Alicia. "I can't believe you'd want to go with these, these," Ginny seemed to be struggling to find the right words.

"Tarts?" Cho offered calmly.

Harry sighed. "Ginny, look at your brothers."

She turned and looked at Fred and George, both who appeared to be completely speechless – for the second time in a few minutes.

"Huh?" she asked.

Susan moved to sit next to her, gently taking her wand out of her hand. "Harry, Angelina and Alicia are still teaching your brothers not to take things for granted, or offer things, even in jest, that they don't mean."

"But..."

"But Harry, Angelina, and Alicia aren't going to do anything. If they were, they wouldn't do it here. It's all designed to play with Fred and George's mind."

"But Harry... he's not comfortable around girls."

“Harry discovered the big secret boys his age don’t normally find out,” Cho said.

“What’s that?”

“That girls are people too,” Harry said, lowering Alicia to the floor. He walked over and knelt in front of her, so he could look her in her eyes. “We’re playing, Ginny, that’s all.”

“Although that’s the second time he’s got us,” Fred said with a pout. “We’re going to have to get revenge now.”

“If I was to tell you that I know that James Potter had a nickname of ‘Prongs’ would that change your mind?” Harry asked them.

“You’re kidding,” George asked, his eyes going wide.

Harry shook his head and turned back to Ginny. “One of the things I learnt this year, Ginny, is that it’s no good to hide myself. I’ve got a personality too, and I can tease and joke with everyone else.”

The train jerked to a halt, and the noise level picked up from outside.

Ginny blushed furiously. “I’m sorry,” she said meekly.

He smiled at her and lightly kissed her forehead. “Don’t worry about it; everyone needs someone to tell them they’re getting out of hand. And on that note, I’ll see you all when I can. I’m off to grab my trunk and meet the Big Bad Muggle of the South.”

Cho and Hermione laughed, but most of the others didn’t seem to have a clue what he meant, so he shrugged and backed out of the door.

It didn’t take him long to get out of the platform and find his Uncle.

“Uncle Vernon,” Harry called loudly, attracting as much attention as he could. He hugged the older man, pounding him on the back as hard as he could. He could feel Vernon whimper in pain, and grinned.

“Aunt Petunia,” Harry continued, hugging his Aunt, who froze completely in his embrace.

“Dudders! I almost didn’t see you there, you’ve lost weight. Been cutting down on the pies?”

Dudley gaped at him.

“Come, my beloved relatives,” Harry continued loudly. “Let’s get going, we don’t want to cause a fuss. Bring my trunk, Dudders, there’s a good chap.”

Dudley’s eyes went even wider, before he wobbled off to do what Harry had told him.

Harry wrapped his arm through Vernon and Petunia’s and started walking off. “Now, now,” he whispered to them. “You don’t want to make an embarrassing fuss in front of all these curious people, do you?” Vernon’s face was bright red and he was shaking hard, but he did what Harry told him.

Once inside the car, Harry pulled out his wand and looked at his relatives. “*Lumos*,” he whispered, and his wand lit up. “Listen carefully,” Harry said to his furious looking guardians before they could splutter out their protests. “This summer, things are going to be different. We’re going to go home, I’m going up to my room, and you are going to lock the door and not bother me again until it’s time for me to leave.

“I can do magic now, the Ministry has given me special approval, so I don’t need you at all. The only reason I am going with you, is so that you’re safe for the rest of the year.”

Vernon looked like he was about to have a heart attack.

“And if you shout, I’m going to emasculate you on general principle,” Harry finished.

Vernon opened his mouth and then shut it again. “You mean that we won’t see you, have to do anything for you, or even feed you?” he asked, his eyes flashing.

“Correct,” Harry nodded. “Oh, and I obviously won’t be doing chores for you, but frankly, getting fat-boy to do them would help him lose weight.”

“Hey!” Dudley complained. “I’m not fat, it’s glandular, and I’m the Junior Heavyweight Inter-school Boxing Champion of the Southeast.”

“The noble sport,” Vernon added, approvingly.

“Good for you,” Harry said cheerfully. “I see all that bullying you did as a child and probably still do has paid off for you. Still, we can hope that you at least learn something from it.”

Petunia growled at him and he smiled. “So, do we have a deal?”

“You promise?” Vernon snarled.

“Absolutely. I’ll even make sure that none of the neighbours notice anything different.”

Vernon went silent as he mulled over the proposal.

“Oh, I should probably add here that the murderer who killed my parents is back.”

“What!?” Petunia gasped.

“Voldemort has returned,” Harry said again. “And from what I can tell, he’s got a real grudge against Muggles. Something to do with abuse growing up and being locked in a cupboard.”

There was an absolute silence from the front of the car.

“Daddy?” Dudley asked.

“Shut up,” Vernon roared at him, he looked worried as he put his foot down and sped down the A3 toward Guildford at ninety miles an hour, as if he could outrun the idea.

Harry grinned to himself and looked out the window.

“So we’re safe if you’re at home?” Petunia grunted.

“Think of me as a generator,” Harry offered. “Once in a while I come along to charge the batteries that are keeping you safe.”

Petunia nodded and went silent again.

“Dad,” Dudley said after a few minutes of silence. “Can we stop?”

“No,” Vernon grunted.

“But Dad...”

“I said no.”

Harry could feel Dudley glaring at him with hatred and laughed to himself. After facing Voldemort, Dudley’s petty attempts at intimidation, or in fact, even Vernon’s, didn’t really match up.

The scenery flew by as Vernon turned from the A3 on to the A247. It was another forty minutes before they arrived in the picturesque village of Little Whinging.

Vernon pulled on the drive way, and Harry hopped out of the car, in a good mood. He walked over to the boot of the car and lifted his trunk out, easily. With a cheerful whistle he followed Petunia into the house.

“I’ll see you in a few weeks,” Harry said to his relatives, and walked up to his room.

It looked just like he remembered it – like it would need some serious work before it could be called a rat hole. With the door firmly shut, he got to work. His first step was simply to open his trunk, release Hedwig and pull out a book of Charms.

He flicked through the pages until he found the first spell that looked useful. “*Minimus Ego*,” he whispered, and felt the room around him grow.

He looked around the room and nodded in satisfaction. The first step was to make himself a lot smaller, and now that he was only around seven inches tall, the room looked huge. With another look into his spell book, he started reducing everything else in size, and creating new furniture for him to use.

The room was divided into five parts, a library area with a nice fire (unfortunately he had no way to hook it up to the Floo network), a bedroom that looked suspiciously like his dorm room in Gryffindor Tower, a place he could do the exercises he promised himself that he was going to do, a kitchen, and a bathroom that resembled the Prefects bathroom he’d enjoyed at Hogwarts.

With a smile of satisfaction he walked over to the bed and collapsed in complete exhaustion.

When he woke up it was still light, and it was with surprise that his watch confirmed what his stomach had been complaining about. He’d been asleep for a long time. Over thirty-six hours. He hadn’t realised just how tiring it was to create things like he had been doing.

The spells themselves were relatively simply, the problem was that it took an almost perpetual draw on his magic to maintain them.

“Dobby!” he called.

“Harry Potter sir is being ready for breakfast?” Dobby asked, appearing with a pop.

Harry nodded, and a few seconds later he had a breakfast in front of him that rivalled anything he would have got at Hogwarts.

“Hogwarts elves are being happy to be able to make food for the great Harry Potter,” Dobby said excitedly. “We is being taking it in turns.”

“That’s brilliant, Dobby,” Harry said. “I can’t thank you, and the others, enough.”

Dobby blushed and bowed deeply, before popping away.

Harry smiled to himself as he dug into the food. He wondered why he hadn't done this last summer. Dobby had been ecstatic when he had proposed the idea before the end of term.

With breakfast out of the way, he tried to decide what to do next. His list of things to do included starting to exercise, do his homework, practise duelling as well as he could, make a charm so that anyone entering his door was shrunk automatically – the idea of being stood on was not a promising one. With a smile, he abandoned all of that and started to write a letter to Fleur.

It was only after he had screwed up his attempt for the fourth time that he realised that writing a love letter was bloody difficult, as the last thing he wanted to do was come across as a love-sick teenager, no matter how much he might actually be one.

With a sigh, he picked up the book Fred and George had leant him. "I solemnly swear that I'm up to no good," he said, tapping it with his wand.

The letters on the books changed and blurred, before coming back to clarity.

"A Boys' Guide to the Mysterious Creatures known as Girls."

Harry blinked and then laughed. Fred and George had really given him something of interest here. He opened it up eagerly and read the first line.

"Wilcume Freomæg."

He looked at it, before realising, with a feeling of embarrassment, that there was a translation further down the page. The next page was a list of contributors, starting with Alric Gryffindor. He scanned the names as he went, finding Sirius' and James' name, but not Remus'. He wasn't surprised to see that Peter Pettigrew was not mentioned. The last two names on the list were Fred and George's.

He turned to the first page and started to read the translated text.

Welcome to a guide to that mysterious and beguiling creature known as woman. As every male knows, understanding the female mind is beyond the reach of even the most powerful wizard (and believe me, my father tried).

So, rather than try, I have started this book, with the hope that, through the ages, this will be passed on, and the combined knowledge of our attempts, our failures, our successes and our humiliations.

The rules are simple.

- 1) Never, ever, ever, let a Professor read this book!
- 2) Never, ever, ever, let a girl read this book!
- 3) If you learn something new, add it to this book – share the knowledge, that way we are all richer.
- 4) When you leave Hogwarts, on you find your love (or even, have memorised the book) find someone new to pass it onto.

Harry smiled, looked at the contents, and quickly skipped to the page entitled "Love Letters."

An hour of study later, he started to write again.

My Lady,  
It's amazing to me how I can miss someone I've known for such a short time so very much.  
I am at my relatives' house. I am warm, safe, and with the help of a house-elf, well fed.  
I did as you told me, and stated in no uncertain terms what I have been through here to Professor Dumbledore. I then agreed to come back here. I'll explain the reasons – and lack off – I was given when we can next speak freely.  
My relatives were a little surprised by my new found confidence – as was I. We have agreed a compromise. I'll stay in my room, they'll not bother me. I also mentioned Voldemort's return.  
So, as far as my life here goes, I am the happiest I've ever been.  
I know it's only been a few days, but it feels like forever. Please, let me know how you've been, and what you are up to, and more importantly, that you are safe!  
And let Gabrielle know that I'm thinking about her as well.  
Harry

"Here, take this to Fleur," he said, rolling up the parchment and handing it to Hedwig before he could change his mind.

Hedwig hooted cheerfully, nipped at his ear, and flew out the window.

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Exercising was hard, Harry decided, as he sunk down into a very hot bath. He was used to playing Quidditch, and dodging dragons, but running for more than two minutes left him out of breath. It made him realise that he had good muscles in the necessary places for playing, that was it – and he was going to have to work on that.

Dobby had been unbelievably pleased at Harry's huge appetite, and had literally wept when Harry had asked for seconds. The elf had started to bring the cook of the day to meet him, so that Harry could say thank you in person.

He climbed out of the bath reluctantly, dried himself, and got dressed in a pair of shorts – the fire kept his room hot enough that he didn't need to

wear anything else.

He was absurdly grateful when Hedwig flew to him, and offered him her leg. He smiled and unrolled the letter from Fleur eagerly.

My Lord,  
Seeing you walk away from me was wrong. Every instinct I had wanted to grab you and kiss you in front of every single witch and wizard there. I will not let that happen again.  
The journey back to Beauxbatons was spent with Madame Maxime and Gabrielle, and my darling sister was a wonderful distraction. I have told her everything, and she prattled on endlessly about what ever came into her head.  
Gabrielle and I are home now, in our apartment in Paris, and I am looking to the future. There is a chance that I can get a job at Gringotts. Now that I have had time to think about what happened these last few weeks, I am convinced that I made the correct decision. Despite the hardships we both face, I have faith that we will overcome, and at the end, get the reward that we both will share.  
I know we didn't talk much about my past, I did not want to make our time together sad, but I think that I can tell you now.  
Dumbledore and the others picked well, when they chose Gabrielle as the person I cared about. Until you, Gabrielle has been my life for three years. It was then that our parents died. They were on holiday in Africa, and well, we still aren't sure what happened, but it was fatal. I took over as Gabrielle's guardian, despite my young age at the time. Veela laws worked in my favour in this case.  
Gabrielle now lives with me at Beauxbatons during the year and at home with me during the summer.  
I miss Mama and Papa every year, and I know that you understand.  
And now, I miss you as well.  
Write back when you can,  
Love, Fleur  
P.S. I had Gabbi take a few pictures of me for you – every male should have a picture of his girlfriend.

Harry smiled and placed the letter on the bed, turning to the photo. The first one had Fleur standing in front of a fireplace; she was smiling at the camera, and running her hand through her long silver-blonde hair.

He glanced at the second one and instantly dropped it.

With a shaky hand, he picked it up again and groaned. While Fleur had looked beautiful in the first one, this one was almost torture for him. She was standing in front of a swimming pool, wearing a silver two-piece bikini, and blowing him a kiss.

Without a shadow of a doubt, he knew that he had a new memory for his Patronus.

He shook his head and turned it over, in an elegant cursive scrawl, Fleur had written, 'yes, this was taken for you alone, Harry.'

He smiled to himself and moved over to his table to write a reply, when there was an urgent rapping on his window.

He looked out, and while he could see that it was raining, he couldn't actually see anyone. He didn't feel a threat, so he opened the window and stepped to one side. He could hear a rustling, so he shut the window again and closed the curtains tightly.

There was a sound, and an Invisibility Cloak fell to the floor, revealing a very wet Tracey Davis.

"Tracey?" he asked.

"Hi," she said confidently, but he could tell that something was wrong, very wrong.

"Tracey," he said softly. "As your Liege-Lord, I order you to tell me what is going on."

She looked at him, and for a second he thought that she was going to say no, but then her face changed, and she burst into tears.

He took a step forward and pulled her against him, hugging her tightly.

Tracey seemed to collapse, as if all the energy had been taken out of her.

He gently moved her over to a chair, and sat down, draping her across his lap and letting her cry herself out as he stroked her back.

"You're all I've got now," she whispered after a while.

"What happened?"

"I lied to you," she admitted in a small voice.

"Oh?" he asked, keeping his voice level.

"I didn't pledge my allegiance to you for power, but so that I had an escape route if things went wrong at home this summer. I was afraid."

"Of your parents?"

She nodded and sniffed. "They are Death Eaters," she almost spat the words in distaste. "They wanted me to become one as well, and," she paused as if the next idea was too horrific to contemplate. "They told me that they had arranged for me to be married to Theodore Nott."

Harry smiled faintly. "And you said?" he prompted.

No,” she replied immediately. “They were not happy, they shouted at me for a while, and then they,” she struggled to continue.

“They did what?” he asked softly.

“They put the *Imperio* us on me and ordered me to accept Nott’s proposal.”

Harry took a deep breath and struggled to keep a tight reign on his temper.

“Only it didn’t work properly, my vows to you meant that I would not, could not, be engaged to another. When they realised this, they cast me out. They disinherited me, and took away everything I had.

“I grabbed what I could, stole my ex-fathers cloak, and rode my broom... and here I am.”

Harry hugged her tightly, not really sure what he should be saying – if anything. He could feel her cry against her, and knew that he was seeing something that it was very unlikely that anyone else ever would.

He reached onto the table and used his wand to summon some tissues which he passed to her.

“Thanks,” she mumbled. “So, what am I going to do?” she asked him, as she sat up, but didn’t move from his lap.

“What do you mean?” he asked.

“I’ve got no where to go – no family, no money, nothing.”

“Oh,” Harry said, grinning in a teasing manner. “I thought you meant about your parents.”

“Harry, I’m not in the mood to play games,” she said wearily.

“I’m sorry,” Harry replied. “Honest, the other things are already sorted.”

“They are?” she asked.

“Of course,” he nodded. “You’re going to stay here with me until my birthday, and then you’ll be with me where ever Dumbledore sends me next. As for money, I’ve got enough for both of us, including your Hogwarts fees, so there’s nothing to worry about then, and as for family, you have me, and you have the others as well. We’ll look after you.”

Tracey blinked and looked at him. “Excuse me?”

“What are the responsibilities of a Liege-Lord?”

“To look after and care,” Tracey whispered.

“Exactly,” Harry agreed. “Did you ever doubt that I would not live up to my side of the bargain?”

“But it wasn’t fair,” Tracey protested. “I tricked you!”

“I wouldn’t say tricked,” Harry disagreed. “More that you didn’t give me time to do any research – but you know something?”

“What?”

“Even if I had known, I would have still said yes.”

“Thank you,” she said, hugging him for a second, and resting her head on his shoulder.

“About your parents,” he started.

“They are not my parents,” Tracey said firmly. “They are Death Eater scum, nothing more, nothing less. You are my family now.”

“Okay,” Harry agreed. “That makes it easier on me. When was the last time you ate?”

“Breakfast,” she shrugged.

“Dobby!” Harry called. As soon as the elf appeared, Harry ordered a full meal for Tracey, and the ecstatic elf vanished and returned shortly with the plate full – and an evening snack for Harry.

“You have a house-elf?”

“Dobby is a friend,” he corrected gently. “He agreed to make sure I was well fed this summer, and he’s co-opted the rest of Hogwarts elves to help.”

Tracey nodded as she started to eat, and the conversation paused.

When she had finished, she looked a lot more like her normal sense, if still a little damp.

“Sorry,” she said quietly.

“What for?”

“Crying on you like that.”

He smiled at her, “Do you feel better?”

She nodded again.

“Then it was worthwhile. Locking up emotions inside you can be dangerous Tracey, it can lead to nightmares, as your subconscious tries to deal with something you will not acknowledge on a conscious level.

“Fleur said that to me after I broke down on her shoulders.”

Tracey nodded thoughtfully. “Despite everything, I had hoped that they wouldn’t go through with it – but with Voldemort’s return, they were eager to join again – and they wanted to use me as proof that they were loyal – and to punish me for my actions at Hogwarts.

“There is no way in hell I was marrying that toad.”

Harry laughed softly, “I don’t blame you.”

Tracey stretched and yawned. “But I’m too full, and too tired to cry anymore.”

“The bathroom’s through there,” Harry said, pointing to a door. “Why don’t you have a hot bath, then get nice and dry, and I’ll get you a bed ready.”

“Can I borrow one of your t-shirts?” she asked. “I’ve not got any clothes.”

“We’re going to have to go shopping tomorrow,” he said with a frown. “My clothes aren’t exactly the best – cast offs from the whale.”

He offered her a t-shirt and she looked at it, and then shook her head, as she entered the bathroom.

He laughed softly and used the same spell he had earlier to create a bed for her – he hadn’t planned for a guest, and hoped she didn’t mind sharing the room – he was far too tired tonight to rearrange everything.

Tracey joined him, wearing a simple button down blouse that barely reached the tops of her thighs.

He looked at her curiously.

“That’s a strange expression for a good looking half-naked female,” Tracey pointed out – her voice was starting to return to normal, as was her attitude.

He smiled at her, and walked over to his bed, handing her the two photos. “Fleur sent me these earlier, I was about to reply when you arrived.”

Tracey smiled at the first and then looked at the second.

She looked at him, and then at the photo again.

“Okay,” she muttered. “So it’s not a strange expression. If she hadn’t made all this possible, I’d hate her,” she grumbled. “No female should be able to look like that, ever.”

Harry laughed softly. “Sorry,” he apologised. “I didn’t mean to compare you to her.”

“Sure you did,” Tracey grinned, climbing into the new bed. “I’d be upset, but it means that I can sleep in comfort tonight, knowing that you’re going to be dreaming about a girl in France, and not the mostly-naked girl a few feet from you.” Once she was under the covers, she wiggled a little, and her shirt and bra soon made their way to the floor.

He walked over and sat at the edge of her bed, and lightly stroked her hair. “I promise, Tracey, that I’ll look after you as long as you need it. You’re family, and in the end, family is all I have.”

She looked up him, her defences completely down again. “Thank you,” she whispered.

“Sleep well, Tracey,” he whispered and kissed her forehead, before retreating to the bathroom for his own nightly routine, and slipping into his bed.

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Harry woke up with the sunlight streaming into his window and stretched. He was loving sleeping in a real bed, but wished he hadn’t pushed himself quite so hard the previous day – he was sore in places he didn’t know he could be sore.

“Morning,” Tracey’s sleepy voice rasped across the room.

“How are you feeling?” he asked, fighting a yawn.

“Better,” she said. “Thank you, Harry.”

"You're family, Tracey, you're stuck with me now."

"That's actually reassuring."

Harry swung his feet out of bed and stood.

"If you're not going to be shy, I'm not," Tracey said, and climbed out of bed.

Harry turned and to look at her and felt his face go bright red, and he swallowed a few times, unable to look away.

"Thank Merlin for that," Tracey said in relief. "You are still a teenager, and I am attractive."

"Can you *please* put a top on?" Harry croaked.

Tracey smirked cheerfully. "What, you don't like my breasts?" she asked as she shrugged.

Harry opened his mouth to reply, then stopped, realising that saying he didn't would be a pretty big insult. Especially as they were the first breasts he'd ever seen. With no idea of what he could even think of saying, he shook his head and turned around, feeling somewhat guilty for his reaction – that was still obvious even now – to someone who wasn't his girlfriend.

"You're thinking about Fleur, aren't you?" Tracey asked softly.

He nodded, still not looking at her. He felt her arms wrap around him, and was relieved to see that she was wearing a shirt again.

"I'm a little sorry, Harry," she said.

"A little?" he asked.

He could hear a smirk in her voice, as she replied, "Yeah, a little. I needed an ego boost this morning, and you gave me it. Don't worry about Fleur, I'm going to write to her when you do, and explain a few things – she won't blame you."

He nodded and relaxed a little.

"And you know," she continued, "it's not a crime to be aroused by looking at a pretty girl – especially when she takes her top off."

"I feel like I was being disloyal to Fleur."

"You really are an innocent Harry, and I think it's going to be our job to keep you that way. You're uncorrupted, in a good way. You're not like the other boys, probably because of your upbringing here. But don't worry, Harry, I'm going to help you, so will Susan, Cho, and Katie – especially when I tell them about what you've done for me."

"I won't forget this, Harry, you didn't have to do what you did last night, and most of the boys I know would have expected much more than a simple thank you."

She reached around and gently kissed him on the cheek. "I'm going to have a shower and wash my hair. You write to your girlfriend, but don't send it until I can add a few things – and trust me, my Liege, I won't betray you."

He closed his eyes and relaxed a little more. "You know," he whispered softly. "I've been hugged more in the past few weeks than I have in the rest of my life."

"Get used to it," Tracey advised, "because the others are a lot more touchy than I am. Or perhaps, I was, I like hugging you."

"Go and take a shower," he said.

"Forgive me?" she asked, using the same quiet voice she had the night before.

He turned so that he could look at her. He reached up and lightly stroked her hair. "Always," he said simply.

She smiled at him, and turned toward the bathroom. A minute later he heard the sound of the shower.

"Dobby," he called.

The house-elf appeared with a pop.

"Can you do me an extra favour?" Harry asked.

Dobby nodded eagerly.

"Can you take Tracey's clothing and get them cleaned as quickly as possible."

Dobby actually squealed with pleasure. "Cleaning elves were beings jealous of cooking elves," he explained eagerly. "Harry Potter want clothes cleaning as well?"

Harry laughed and nodded. "I'm going to take Tracey and get some new clothes today," he said, "so there should be more to do."

“Cleaning elves will be so happy,” Dobby said, and popped away.

He was back before Tracey was out of the shower – he had no idea what took her so long, and suspected it was the sort of thing that he would be happier not knowing about.

He got dressed himself, a little amused by the fact his clothes felt better than they ever had, and sat at the desk to write to Fleur again.

“So,” Tracey asked as she walked out of the bathroom. “Just how come you have a suite here, there isn’t enough space.”

“There is if you’re only a few inches tall.”

Tracey blinked and looked around. “Charm on the window?”

Harry blinked. “Dobby?”

The house-elf appeared with a pop.

“I don’t remember actually doing the magic to charm the window,” he said.

Dobby flushed. “Harry Potter was very tired,” Dobby explained. “Dobby just did a little here and there.”

Harry dropped to his knees in front of the elf. “What else did you do?” he asked.

Dobby turned an even brighter red. “Dobby got handy elves to help, fixed plumbing, changed beds for Hogwarts bed, decorated, and generally finished things off.”

“Thank you,” Harry said solemnly. “We really appreciate it.”

Dobby looked fit to burst and popped away with glee.

“I need to reassess them,” Tracey said. “Loyalty seems to go a long way when it’s not forced.”

“I’ve found that,” Harry agreed.

“Go and get your shower,” Tracey said. “I’ll add the bits I want to your letter to Fleur.”

Harry nodded and walked into the Bathroom. It already smelled different – more feminine, and he guessed he was going to have to get used to it.

The shower was hot and long, and it allowed him to think about just how he was going to get the money he needed. The obvious thing was a trip to Gringotts, but going to London seemed like a really stupid way to spend a day. As much as he wanted to be independent, he didn’t think that was the way to go.

He decided to write to them and see if he could get some cash, and for the emergency stuff, he’d borrow some from Dudley.

He jumped out of the shower and towelled himself down, pulling on his clothes again, and nodded at Tracey as he picked up his wand and unlocked the door so he could leave.

He walked into Dudley’s bedroom and sighed. The corpulent boy was still asleep. He smiled to himself and cast a silencing spell before waking him up with a rush of water to the face.

The swear words Dudley used to announce his return from a deep sleep had Harry taking notes – there had to be a time when that sort of vocabulary would come in useful.