

## **Happily Ever After Introduction**

“It’s time for bed,” Hermione said sternly.

“Tell us a story first, Grandma,” Sebastian begged.

“Yeah,” Samantha agreed. “We’ve been good all day!”

“What about when you got ice cream all over the kitchen?” she asked with a frown.

The two children turned to face their grandfather.

He coughed. “That might have been my fault,” he confessed.

“Oh, Ron,” Hermione sighed. “Okay, one quick fairy tale before bed. What do you want? Hansel and Gretel?”

“No,” Samantha said quickly. “Tell us the story of Sleeping Handsome.”

Hermione raised her eyebrows.

“That’s Sleeping Beauty,” Sebastian protested. “That story is boring. My teacher told it to me.”

“No, it’s not,” Samantha retorted. “It’s the Wizard version, and all my friends say it’s the best story.”

“Really?” Sebastian asked. “Then tell us that one, Grandma.”

Hermione smiled slightly, and settled back in her rocking chair. “If you sit very quietly, I’ll tell you the real story of a Prince and his Princess, and how they changed the world.”

“Yay!” the kids cheered together, before sitting down on the floor, pulling blankets up to their chins.

“A long time ago,” Hermione started.

“How long?” Sebastian asked.

“Over a hundred years,” Hermione responded. “Now, no more questions, or it will be straight to bed.”

The two children mimed locking their lips shut and throwing the keys away.

“Now, a long time ago, in merry old England, there lived an evil wizard, and his name was Voldemort.”

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# Happily Ever After

## Chapter 1

Harry felt his feet slam into the ground and his injured leg gave way. He fell forward, letting go of the Triwizard Cup at last. He raised his head.

“Where are we?” he said.

Cedric shook his head. He got up, pulled Harry to his feet, and they looked around.

They had left the Hogwarts grounds completely – they had obviously travelled miles, perhaps hundreds of miles, for even the mountains surrounding the castle were gone. They were standing instead in a dark and overgrown graveyard. The black outline of a small church was visible beyond a large yew tree to their right, and a hill rose above them to their left. Harry could just make out the outline of a fine old house on the hillside.

Cedric looked down at the Triwizard Cup and then up at Harry.

“Did anyone tell you the cup was a Portkey?” he asked.

“Nope,” said Harry, looking around the graveyard. It was completely silent and slightly eerie. “Is this supposed to be part of the task?”

“I dunno,” said Cedric. He sounded slightly nervous. “Wands out, d’you reckon?”

“Yeah,” said Harry, glad that Cedric had made the suggestion rather than him.

They pulled out their wands. Harry kept looking around him. He had, yet again, the strange feeling that they were being watched.

“Someone’s coming,” he said suddenly.

Squinting tensely through the darkness, they watched the figure drawing nearer, walking steadily toward them between the graves. Harry couldn’t make out a face, but from the way it was walking and holding its arms, he could tell that it was carrying something. Whoever it was, he was short, and wearing a hooded cloak pulled up over his head to obscure his face. And – several paces nearer, the gap between them closing all the time – Harry saw that the thing in the person’s arms looked like a baby ... or was it merely a bundle of robes?

Harry lowered his wand slightly and glanced sideways at Cedric. Cedric shot him a quizzical look. They both turned back to watch the approaching figure.

It stopped beside a towering marble headstone, only six feet from them. For a second, Harry and Cedric and the short figure simply looked at one another.

And then, without warning, Harry’s scar exploded with pain.

It was agony such as he had never felt in all his life. His wand slipped from his fingers as he put his hands over his face. His knees buckled, and he fell to the ground and could see nothing at all. His head felt as if it were about to split open.

From far away, above his head, he heard a high, cold voice say, "Kill the spare."

A swishing noise and a second voice, which screeched the words to the night:

*"Avada Kedavra !"*

Acting on instinct, Harry dived to the right, crashing into Cedric's legs, knocking the boy to the floor. Harry yelped as the pain in his legs flared.

"That was the Dark Lord," Cedric cried, his eyes wide in shock.

"Not quite," the high pitched voice said, "but soon, soon I will be. You missed, Wormtail, you incompetent fool."

"I'm sorry, Master," the voice that had cast the spell snivelled.

"Wormtail?" Cedric whispered, a scared look on his face.

"My parents' betrayer," Harry muttered as he scrabbled his fingers through the lank grass, searching for his wand. "You wouldn't know a healing charm, would you?" *There it was!*

Cedric nodded and muttered under his breath, pointing his wand at Harry's leg.

"Well," the thing in Wormtail's arms said. "I'm sure my servant won't miss again. Kill him."

"*Accio Cup!*" Harry yelled, pointing at the Triwizard Cup. It flew toward him, but as it was about to bump into him, he was pulled back by a curse; he watched with a sigh as Cedric caught it automatically and the Hufflepuff and the Cup both vanished.

Harry rose to his feet and shook his head, trying to clear his mind. He concentrated, repeating a mantra that the pain was nothing, over and over again. His wand rose shakily to point at Wormtail.

"How sweet," Voldemort hissed. "The boy is trying to fight me. Capture him."

Wormtail cast a spell directly at Harry, who dove to one side and returned a blasting spell.

"Die!" Harry yelled at the person responsible for his parents' deaths.

Wormtail ducked in turn, and the spell missed him, striking a stone cauldron which split in two, splashing a silver-tinted fluid everywhere.

"No!" Voldemort yelled in anguish.

“Master, I’m sorry,” Wormtail said, falling to his knees.

Harry didn’t hesitate and sent another curse, a stunner, at Wormtail. This one hit him cleanly, knocking him out. Voldemort fell out of Wormtail’s arms and hit the ground with a cry of distress. The pain in Harry’s head faded to a manageable level almost immediately.

Harry walked over and looked down at Voldemort, who was tangled in the dark fabric of the robes. He appeared like a baby crossed with a snake, twisted and scaly.

A hissing sound attracted Harry’s attention, and he swung, a cutting curse on his lips before he could think.

The curse hit a large snake, decapitating it instantly.

“No!” Voldemort yelled again, this time with an undercurrent of pain in his voice.

Harry looked down at him, relieved that Voldemort looked the way that he did. Harry would have no reservations about killing this *thing*.

“This is for my parents,” he muttered as he cast what he hoped to be the last spell.

Voldemort’s hand reached out; grasping the wand that Wormtail had dropped. “*Imperio*,” he whispered weakly.

The spell Harry cast collided with Voldemort’s spell, connecting the two wizards with a golden light.

Harry frowned and pushed more magic into the spell, trying to make it touch Voldemort.

The golden beam split into several strands of light, although the wands were still connected, and a golden cage of light surrounded them.

Without warning, a shape appeared from tip of the wand in Voldemort’s childlike hand and a ghostly *something* emerged from its tip, the dense shadow of a head, quickly followed by arms and torso, assembling into an old man Harry had seen only in a dream. His ghost, or his shadow, or whatever it was, stood up and surveyed Harry and Voldemort, and the golden web, and the connected wands, with mild surprise, leaning on his walking stick.

"He was a real wizard, then?" the old man said, his eyes on Voldemort. "Killed me, that one did... You fight him, boy."

But already, yet another head was emerging; this head, gray as a smoky statue, was a woman's. Harry, both arms shaking now as he fought to keep his wand still, saw her drop to the ground and straighten up like the other, staring.

The shadow of Bertha Jorkins surveyed the battle before her with wide eyes.

"Don't let go, now!" she cried, and her voice echoed as though from very far away. "Don't you let him go, Harry – don't let go!"

She began to pace around the inner walls of the golden web as Frank's shadow joined her, both whispering words of encouragement to Harry.

The smoky shadow of a young woman with long hair fell to the ground as Bertha had done, straightened up, and looked at him ... and Harry; his arms shaking madly now, looked into the ghostly face of his mother.

"Your father's coming ..." she said quietly. "He wants to see you ... it will be all right, Harry... hold on...."

And he came, first his head, then his body. Tall and untidy-haired like Harry, the smoky, shadowy form of James Potter blossomed from the end of Voldemort's wand, fell to the ground, and straightened to stand next to his wife. He walked close to Harry, looking down at him, and he spoke in the same distant, echoing voice as the others, but quietly, so that Voldemort, his face now livid with fear as his victims prowled around him, could not hear... "Hold on son, hold on, and listen to your mother!"

Harry nodded and took a deep breath. He could feel Voldemort trying to break the connection, but he wouldn't let him, not now. "I won't let you down, Dad – not now I've got you back."

"We are not *really* here," James said sadly. "We are but echoes of the people we were, but even then, we are so proud of you, my boy. Of the life you have led and what you have done." He paused for a second. "Although I am a tad disappointed. I would have liked more pranks while you were at school," he finished with a wink.

"My beautiful son," his mother whispered. "I am so very proud of you. We are here to help you end this."

"I was trying to kill him," Harry said in confusion.

Lily smiled sadly. "You would have merely delayed him, Harry. He has separated his soul – look."

Harry looked carefully at Voldemort. Four shimmering silver beams of energy seemed to shoot out from the centre of his body. Three went in different directions, while the fourth went from Voldemort's heart to Harry's forehead.

"You need to snip the links, Harry. Once you do that, he can be killed."

"How?" Harry asked, almost unwilling to look at the beams. He didn't want to lose a second of time with his parents.

"Reach out, darling, reach out with your magic and cut the threads. You already cut one of the links when you killed the snake."

Harry nodded and did as his mother commanded, reaching out to his left, snipping the first strand he reached.

Voldemort wailed in agony, and Harry smiled.

“Well done,” Lily said, beaming with pride. It was an expression that filled Harry with warmth. “Make sure that you do the one connected to you last, as that is the most important one.”

Harry nodded, and made quick work of snapping the other two. Each time he did, Voldemort cried out and the connection between them weakened.

“It’s been a privilege,” Bertha said, as she bowed in front of him. “Seeing him meet his end like this, at the hands of a fourteen year old boy, makes everything worthwhile. Thank you, Harry.”

She moved away, and Frank Bryce approached him, echoing her sentiments.

“Harry,” James said. “When you’re done here, you will have access to our vaults. I want you to spend the money on wine, women and pranks, and waste the rest. You’ve earned a lifetime’s worth of luxury for what you have done today. Make Remus get some new clothes, and get Sirius to teach you how to be an Animagus.”

“I will, Dad.”

“I love you, never forget that,” James whispered.

Harry nodded, tears running down his face, trying to listen to his father and focus on keeping Voldemort pinned with the beam between the wands at the same time.

James took a step backward.

“I always wondered what you would look like when you were older,” Lily whispered. “My beautiful boy is already a man. Your father is right, Harry. Live life from now on. Do what you will. I know you will never be hurtful or cruel. Have fun, help people when you can, but know that you have done more than any one else could have. You have defeated the Dark Lord for the final time.

“I can’t tell you what it was like carrying you inside me – I had a wonderful, visible proof of the love that your father and I shared. And you were everything I ever wanted, and so much more. I couldn’t be prouder of you – every expectation we ever had of you, you have exceeded.

“I love you, Harry James Potter, we both love you, and not once did we ever regret protecting you. You have lived up to our memories and so much more. Do not ever let anyone tell you otherwise.”

“I won’t,” Harry whispered.

Lily moved forward and he felt himself embraced by ghostly arms.



“As you cut the last thread, it will hurt,” Lily whispered. “And we will disappear forever, but Voldemort will be dead.”

“I don’t want you to go.”

“I know,” James said, putting his arm around his wife. “But we still live through you. Everything you do will make us proud and you will know that we will always be watching you.” He paused. “Except when you start dating and get to the heavy side of things, then we’ll give you some privacy.”

Harry laughed through his tears.

Lily looked proudly at James and kissed him on the cheek.

Harry smiled at his parents and took a deep breath.

“I love you. I miss you terribly.”

“We love you,” James and Lily said in unison.

“Goodbye.”

“Not goodbye, only farewell for now,” Lily whispered.

“And it should be a bloody long time before we meet again,” James added, although the tears running down his face belied his light words.

Lily elbowed James firmly in the stomach.

Harry smiled; somehow seeing his parents, acting like that was the thing he needed just before finishing this.

He took a deep breath and cut the thread.

The pain smacked into him, but it was nothing compared to the agony of watching his parents fade out of view.

Voldemort shrieked as a final surge of energy streamed through the spell connection between them, and his wand exploded in his hand. The golden cage began to dissipate. Before it went entirely, Harry raised his wand and pointed it at the twisted creature one final time. “This ends now,” he whispered. “*Reducto!*” There was an explosion and Harry went flying backward; his head connected sharply with a tombstone, and he knew no more.

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The Portkey slammed Cedric to the ground at the edge of the maze, and he barely kept his footing. A babble of sound rose, and cheers from the Hufflepuff stands, where his Housemates assumed he’d won the Tournament and started celebrating. Headmaster Dumbledore, however,

knew instantly that something was wrong, and hushed the crowd

“Cedric,” the Headmaster said. “Where is Harry?”

Cedric blinked and raised his wand to his throat.

“Listen up,” he yelled, a Sonorous charm ensuring that everyone could hear him. “We were taken by a Portkey to a cemetery. Someone called Wormtail was there, as was V-V-V-Voldemort.”

There were shrieks of fear from the audience. “I saw Voldemort,” he repeated, suddenly unafraid of the name. “He tried to kill me, but Harry saved my life!” He looked about frantically. “Harry is duelling Voldemort *right now!* We have to help him.”

“The Dark Lord is *not* back,” Minister Fudge retorted, fingering his bowler hat.

“Are you calling my son a liar?” Amos Diggory hissed as he walked over to Cedric and towered over the rotund politician.

“I would be dead if it wasn’t for Harry, you slime ball,” Cedric yelled.

Fudge took a step back from the angry young wizard and his father.

“Point me, Harry Potter,” Cedric called, throwing his wand in the air. The wand pointed southwest.

“Accio Nimbus!” Cedric yelled. “I’m going to find Harry and help him before it’s too late.”

“Wait,” Dumbledore shouted. He was suddenly radiating magic and authority. “Order, to me. I’ve dropped the anti-Apparition wards.”

Next to Dumbledore, several of the Professors appeared, followed by former Professor Lupin, some of the Weasleys, and a number of people Cedric had never seen before. A black dog bounded out of the stands, moving next to Dumbledore, who absently stroked him.

“We know Harry is that way,” Albus stated. “Fifteen mile Apparation, keep going until we fin...”

“Look,” a bald headed man in an Auror’s uniform shouted, pointing to a bright magical light in the distance.

“Everyone,” Albus snapped, “Apparate to the light”

Albus vanished, as did the group standing next to him, including Fudge. Large portions of the adult crowd vanished as well.

Cedric whispered, “We’re coming, Harry, don’t die,” as he focused on the distant glow and Apparated.

It was the longest he'd ever managed to go in one jump, and he arrived to see a large crowd of wizards standing around, staring at something inside a golden dome.

"See the face of the Dark Lord," Dumbledore's voice rang out, "see what Harry has reduced him to!"

In the centre of a golden dome was an ugly scaly creature the size of a baby. From its hand, a golden beam connected with Harry; from its body, two silver lines emanated.

Dumbledore walked over to the dome and started to cast some spells. He gasped loudly. "I don't believe it," he muttered. He turned to face everyone. In a loud voice, he said, "Those silver lines are connections to Voldemort's Horcruxes. They are containers for Voldemort's soul, which was why he didn't die the first time that Harry defeated him."

Cedric watched as Voldemort wailed in agony as the second to last strand was cut.

"Come on, Harry," Dumbledore called in excitement. "You can do it!"

"Go on, Harry," Cedric found himself yelling in encouragement. He could hardly believe that he was present at Voldemort's death, a once in a lifetime opportunity.

There was some cheering, as they watched Harry's mouth move, and the connection between the Dark Lord and Harry seemed to weaken.

"Go on, get him," one of the Wizards shouted. "You can do it, Harry."

Almost like at a Quidditch match, others took up the shouts, entreating Harry to continue to fight, to free them from the tyranny of Voldemort.

There was a loud bang and a sense of pure evil washed over them for a second.

Severus Snape and Mad-Eye Moody both yelled in pain and collapsed, each clutching their left arms.

Cedric watched in horror as Harry flew back, colliding against a headstone. The light of the golden dome flickered and then went out.

No one moved for a second. Then Dumbledore ran, with speed surprising for an old man, into the center of the blasted cemetery, and cast a diagnostic spell on what remained of the ruined body. "Voldemort is dead," he announced loudly, before running over to Harry. He was the second person to arrive at Harry's side.

The cheers from the crowd were tempered with worry for the boy they had just seen do the impossible.

Cedric knelt by the two fallen professors. Before his eyes, Moody seemed to change.

“Professor McGonagall,” he called.

McGonagall moved over to him and gasped in shock. “Barty Crouch, Junior,” she whispered. “But how ...?”

“Is he dead?” he asked.

She reached down and touched his neck, before nodding.

“Professor Snape too?”

She nodded again and sighed.

Cedric looked down, “Snape was a Death Eater?”

McGonagall nodded.

“There’s another one dead over here,” someone shouted.

Cedric rushed over, checking the body’s left arm, pushing one of the Aurors out of his way. It too had a Dark Mark.

Cedric looked up. “Harry’s defeated the Death Eaters all at one go,” he shouted in glee. “We’re free. He won!”

The cheer that went up was the loudest that had been heard for thirteen years, and was the start of a party the like of which had never been seen.

But for a certain group of people, the party never really happened.

In fact, it never really even began

Harry was moved carefully from the site of his victory to the Hospital Wing at Hogwarts, but nothing Madam Pomfrey could do caused him to wake. The Weasleys, all of them, along with Dumbledore, McGonagall, Cedric, Cho, Fleur and her sister, kept vigil and waited for the Boy-Who-Lived to wake up from his coma.

They would have a very long wait.

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***Colloportus: Make a flick with your wand and shout; it will lock any door...***

***Skunkruck was the leader of the first Goblin revolution...***

***Transfiguring a piece of wood into a chair is a relatively simple...***

***The Cannons have a new Seeker and have actually managed to win a few...***

*I'm a free man, Harry, and it's almost like the...*

*We've got jobs at the Ministry, seems weird, doesn't it...*

*I'm getting married soon, to Fleur...*

*Horcruxes are very dark magic, and a way of splitting your...*

*Mimulus mimbletonia resembles a small grey cactus...*

*Now, to cook an omelette, you start with...*

*I did it; I got the highest marks...*

*We won the house cup again, not that we really care...*

*We're in love, we're getting married ...*

*The legislative body of the Wizengamot...*

*The best way to kiss is to...*

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The first thing he felt was a pair of lips against his and a weight on his chest. Automatically, he slid his arms up and held the weight against him and began to kiss back. It was awkward at first, but he felt like he picked it up quickly, as he kept his lips firm and matched her movements with his own. A distant part of his newly conscious mind sincerely hoped that this was a girl.

He could feel her wiggle against him, and as it was a movement he wanted her to do again, he lightly moved his tongue against her lips. He didn't have a clue who he was kissing, but had no desire to stop and actually find out. This was a lot of fun and even the slightly strange taste in his mouth didn't put him off.

Eventually, the form pulled away, breathing hard.

“What do I have to do to get woken up like that again?” he asked breathlessly.

The girl giggled.

“Play your cards right, and I'll see what I can do,” she replied, with just a hint of an accent.

He opened his eyes slowly, somewhat relieved that the kisser was indeed a girl. He smiled as the girl shifted, sitting over his stomach, and he swallowed a gulp. She wasn't just a girl; she was an incredibly beautiful girl. She had long blonde hair with a touch of silver to it, the cutest button nose, lips that looked slightly swollen and in need of another kiss, and the deepest brown eyes he'd ever had the privilege to look into.

“You are beautiful,” he whispered as he tried to work out who she was. She looked a little like Fleur.

“Thank you,” she said with a grin. “You’re not so bad yourself.”

The girl looked to be around sixteen or seventeen, and he felt his eyes go wide as he looked down. She was wearing a white button-up shirt that did very little to hide the fact that puberty had been very kind to her.

“Wow,” he whispered.

The girl laughed. “Play your cards right,” she repeated, “and maybe you’ll get to see more.”

That promise had an instant effect on a part of his anatomy, causing him to blush. “Whatever game you name, I’ll study hard - so I can win,” he promised.

Her delighted laughter echoed around the room.

“Not to put a dampener on what has been my best awakening in hospital yet, but, erm, who are you?” He looked around the room and realised that he wasn’t actually in the Hospital Wing, as he’d expected. The bed was a hospital bed, true, but the room was obviously a private bedroom, with several comfortable chairs, presumably for visitors, drawn up near the bed. The lamps in the room were lit and it was dark outside the windows.

The girl frowned softly and reached to one side. She pulled her arm back and presented him with a small bottle. “This is a calming potion,” she whispered. “Take it; you’re going to need it.”

He looked at her, and then the bottle, and then further down at his chest. He blinked, realized he could see the pattern on his pyjama tops clearly although he wasn’t wearing his glasses, and took half the potion quickly. He felt it slide down his throat, filling him with a warmth that was nowhere near as effective as one of the kisses from the girl in front of him.

The girl took a deep breath. “You are in Hogwarts, in rooms that have been assigned to you. It’s eleven in the evening on Monday the thirteenth of September, in the year two thousand and two.”

Harry blinked.

He blinked again, unsure what else he should be doing.

“And my name is Gabrielle Delacour.”

Harry nodded slowly. “This I why I needed the calming potion, right?”

She nodded. “I suspect you would not be taking this lying down if you did not.”

He grinned suddenly. “I dunno, lying down seems pretty good right now.”

She grinned back. “Do you remember defeating Voldemort?”

He nodded. “I cut the links to his soul, but the last one was connected to me. It hurt a lot to cut it. Then I blasted him.”

“When you hit him with the blasting curse, it caused an explosion. You flew backwards, hitting a tombstone which knocked you unconscious. You’ve been in a coma ever since.”

“For eight years?”

He moved, and she slid off him. He sat up and walked to a mirror and looked at himself. The face he saw was not the same face that he had seen that morning. This face looked like it would need to be shaved on a regular basis. His body was not the same either; he appeared to have grown up successfully while unconscious.

Gabrielle looked at her watch and winced. “Now’s probably not the right time to mention this, but I was only able to disable the monitoring wards for thirty minutes, and that time is almost up. The whole planet is going to go insane when it finds out its hero is awake.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “So, we should get out of here then?”

“Asking me to elope, already?”

Harry nodded. “Okay, you’re beautiful, a great kisser, and you’ve somehow managed to wake me. I saved you a few years ago, so we’re even, right? I think this is a great way to start a relationship.”

Gabrielle giggled again, a tinkling sound that reminded him of water tumbling over rocks.

“You make it sound so tempting,” she confessed. “But if you move out of this room, the whole of Hogwarts will lock down.”

“Damn,” Harry pouted. “So, I could spend the next few minutes asking questions...”

“Or...?” Gabrielle asked.

“Or I could kiss you again.”

“And?”

“Screw the questions,” he smirked as he moved back over to the bed, and climbed in. Gabrielle instantly straddled his waist again.

“My, my,” she whispered as she scooted down. “Someone’s a big boy.”

Harry blushed again, but that didn’t stop him from kissing her thoroughly once more.

It was only the blaring of a fanfare that stopped him.

“That’s the alarm, right?” he muttered against her lips.

“Yes,” she sighed.

“No more kissing?”

“Not until you’re answered a few questions, and I’ve been royally told off for breaking every rule on my first day here.”

Harry grinned and shifted to one side. “So, if you won’t elope with me, can we at least go out together?”

“I didn’t say I wouldn’t elope,” she pointed out, “only that it would lock Hogwarts down. And yes, I’ll go out with you.”

“Excellent,” he said cheerfully, mentally sending out a ‘Yes!’ to his father, along with an image of the now-grown-up Gabrielle.

“How long does this calming thing last for?”

“If you drink the rest, it will last the remainder of the evening.”

Harry instantly downed the last of it. “Well, do you want to be famous?”

“I’m Gabrielle Delacour. I already am,” she said.

“You’re about to get a lot more famous, then,” Harry smirked as he shifted to one side. “Sit.”

She nodded and sat next to him.

As the door opened he sank back down and closed his eyes.

“Miss Delacour,” Albus almost roared, “*what* do you think you are doing?”

“I’m,” he heard Gabrielle start to say, and he felt he could just detect a hint of humour in her voice.

Harry could almost detect more people entering the room.

“Gabrielle!” a voice he did remember shouted, before launching into a furious diatribe in French.

“What’s going on?” a voice that sounded like Hermione demanded. “I felt the wards going off and used the emergency Portkey!”

“We were just going to find out,” Albus’ voice cut through the general chatter.



“What, exactly, are you doing, Miss Delacour?”

Harry slowly reached out and touched her leg, wanting her to pause.

“I’m...” she said, and this time he could hear the laughter.

“This is not ze laughing matter,” Fleur yelled.

“I dunno,” Harry said sleepily as he opened his eyes and sat up. “I think it’s pretty funny.”

There was an absolute silence in the room. Now that his eyes were open, he could see the Weasleys were all there, looking a lot older, as were Padfoot and Moony, and Professor McGonagall.

A wicked idea sprang to mind as he spotted his wand on the table beside the bed. There was a clear pathway between him and the doorway. He carefully took Gabrielle’s hand. She seemed to know what he was thinking, as she shifted.

Around the room, everyone was staring at him; some of them were opening and closing their mouths like fish, but no words were coming out.

“Now!” he yelled, as he grabbed his wand and leapt out of bed, making a run for it, dragging Gabrielle with him – not that there was much dragging involved, for she was moving as fast as he was.

They exploded out of the door before anyone else could move. He turned, slammed the door shut, and shouted “*Colloportus* .” The door slammed shut with a strange squelching sound.

“That will only slow them down for a minute,” said Harry. “We need to go somewhere.”

“Where?” Gabrielle asked.

“Maybe Dumbledore’s office? Although it’s not really public enough.”

Gabrielle giggled again. “It is the last place they’d look, though?”

There was a muffled sound from the other side of the door. “Run!”

Still laughing, the two of them sprinted down the corridor.

“Where are we?” Harry asked. He’d never seen this part of the castle before.

“Professors’ quarters,” Gabrielle replied. “You’ll recognize things once we get around this corner.”

They both ran around it and skidded to a halt. Gathered before them seemed to be the entire student population of Hogwarts.

“Bugger,” Harry muttered.

“Too right,” Gabrielle agreed.

He heard a door slam open behind them.

“Look, it’s the Goodyear Blimp,” he shouted, pointing behind the students. Almost as one, the entire crowd turned to look.

He pulled Gabrielle to one side and they vanished down a corridor. “I can’t believe that worked,” he panted as they ran. As they got to the Entrance Hall, the doors to Hogwarts slammed shut.

Harry shrugged, escaping wouldn’t be anywhere as near as fun as what he had in mind. He guided them into the Great Hall and locked the doors. “Not quite Dumbledore’s office, but ... Are you shy?”

“What?” Gabrielle asked, as she tried to control her laughter.

“Shy, modest, you know, wouldn’t want anyone to see you in your bra?”

She shook her head. “Not even slightly. Why?”

There was a thump at the door.

“Take your shirt off, quick,” he ordered as he pulled her over to the Hufflepuff table, which was nearest to the door.

Gabrielle shrugged and did exactly that.

“Bloody hell,” Harry whispered. “You *are* gorgeous!” He’d never seen a woman that looked this good before, although admittedly, his experience with brassieres was limited to the times he’d done Petunia’s laundry, and they hadn’t been anywhere near as lacy.

Gabrielle grinned at him and deliberately shrugged her shoulders. “Now what?”

“You promise to do that again without a bra?” he asked.

“Play...”

“Your cards right, I know,” he interrupted with a teasing grin. He lifted Gabrielle onto the table with ease, and laid her flat on her back. Crawling on top of her, he lowered himself so that his chest was touching hers. “Perfect,” he whispered.

“Forget the card game,” Gabrielle muttered, “just kiss me.”

Harry laughed and did that, as the noise against the door increased in volume. “Having fun?”

“The most that I can remember,” Gabrielle whispered against his lips. “Do you know what you’re doing?”

“My first line, yes. Everything else after that, not got a clue. I’m planning on just winging it.”

“That’s what I wanted to hear.”

Gabrielle’s legs had somehow ended up wrapped around him, and as he looked down, he could see that her knickers matched her bra. This was getting better and better.

There was a resounding crack and the doors to the Great Hall disintegrated. Behind them, Albus Dumbledore was radiating magic. Next to him, with their wands raised, were the same people who had been in his bedroom, and behind them was an even larger crowd of students and Professors.

“Do you mind?” Harry drawled casually. “We were trying to have a private snog, and as gorgeous as Gabbi is, I’m not about to show her off to the vaguely curious, so if you would just please leave, we’ll get back to what we were doing.”

He could feel Gabrielle shake with laughter under him as they looked at the dumbfounded expressions on faces of their audience.

“Fred,” a lone voice asked. “Have we ever pulled a looker like that?”

“No, George,” another voice replied. “Nor have we been caught quite like this in front of the entire school, although we did come close a time or two.”

“Good times,” George sighed.

“Indeed,” Fred agreed. “Damn, but it’s good to have you back, Harry.”

Harry grinned at them. “I’d shake your hands, but, well, they’re occupied at the moment.”

“Oh, we understand,” George grinned, “however, I don’t think you’re going to be able to get away again.”

“George,” Harry pointed out slowly. “*Getting away* was never the plan. I wanted to prank the entire school!”

There was thud to one side as Sirius dropped to his knees and started to laugh hysterically, tears pouring out of his eyes.

Fred and George were the next to laugh, closely followed by Ron, Charlie, Bill, and Ginny.

Some of the students started to laugh as well, and even Professor McGonagall was smiling widely. Hermione was still glaring at him, even if her lips were twitching, but it was Professor Dumbledore who reassured him the most. His eyes were twinkling like never before.

Harry smiled and waited until the laughter showed a sign of slowing, "Okay," he shouted. "Everyone about-face; I'm the only person who gets to see my girlfriend topless!"

Dumbledore nodded and turned around, and he stared at everyone else until they did the same.

Harry reluctantly rolled off Gabrielle and helped her up. She reached for her shirt and moved it over her shoulders.

"May I?" Harry asked.

Gabrielle smirked at him and removed her hands, allowing him to do the buttons.

"I've never done this before," he whispered with a wink, as he managed to accidentally rub the back of his fingers over her chest.

"And you're sticking to that excuse?"

"Damn right," he agreed. "Ready to face the firing squad?"

She nodded.

"You're not going to leave me, now, are you?" he asked softly.

"Only if you want me to."

"I don't," he grinned. "Is that going to cause problems?"

"With me? No. For them? Probably."

"Excellent." He leaned against the table and took her in his arms.

"Okay, you all can turn around again," Harry announced. "So, Sirius, you're looking remarkably mature, what the hell happened to you? Remus, you look like a lawyer, please tell me you've not joined the Dark Side. And Professor Dumbledore, purple? Where are your polka dots?" Harry grinned and pointed his wand at the Headmaster, casting another spell. The Headmaster's robes turned a shade of fluorescent yellow with black stripes.

Gabrielle whispered in his ear, and he grinned and cast another spell to make the stripes rotate.

"If I hadn't heard Fred and George talking earlier, I'd swear that they all lost the ability to speak in the last eight years," Harry said casually to Gabrielle.

"They were quite ready to shout at me earlier," she reminded him.

"Oh, yeah. Oh, and I was going to make you more famous, wasn't I?"

She nodded.

He grinned and hopped onto the table, looking at the people behind his old friends and professors.

“Ladies and gentlemen, you’ll be delirious to know that I’ve finally awakened from my little nap, and that without the help of the gorgeous Gabrielle Delacour, I’d still be sleeping away the finest years of my life. However, as you can all guess, I’ve been out of the loop, and would like an evening to catch up with my nearest and dearest, so I hope you won’t mind if we leave you for now. We’ll have plenty of time to make friends in the morning, so if you’ll excuse us.” He pointed at the bits of door and shouted “*Reparo!*”

The door flew back into one piece and blocked the outside again, to audible groans from the students. Only the Headmaster’s group had actually stepped inside the Great Hall.

Harry dropped down to sit on the table and pulled Gabrielle around to sit in front of him. He leant a little on her, drawing strength from her presence.

“So,” he said to the still quiet group in front of him. “Anyone want to tell me just what the hell has been going on for the last eight years?”

“Harry? Is it really you?” Hermione asked slowly.

“If it’s not, I hope they catch the other guy quick, before he writes my name on a lot of checks.”

“But…” Ron said, only to stop and gape at him again.

“What they are trying to say,” Gabrielle said with a tone that made it clear she was rolling her eyes, “is that they never thought that you would awaken again, and that if you did, you’d lie in bed like a good little boy and let them all get used to the idea.”

“So you’re saying that the escaping, the pranking, and the kissing wasn’t what was expected?”

“No.”

“Okay. Can we go back to the kissing while they adjust themselves?”

“Sure.”

“NO!” Fleur’s voice rang out. “No more kissing!”

Harry pouted at her. “Hey, I saved her life once, doesn’t that mean she owes me some sort of Wizarding debt?” he asked.

“I hadn’t thought of that,” Gabrielle replied. “Oh, Harry,” she said dramatically, her left hand going to her chest. “Take me - I’m yours.” Her mock swoon was perfectly executed.

“STOP IT!” Hermione roared.

Harry looked at her. “Do you think it’s the grey hair that’s making her grumpy?” he asked the

room at large.

“Harry James Potter!” Hermione yelled.

“Sirius Tiberius Black,” Harry yelled.

“Yes?” Sirius asked. “Wait, my name isn’t Tiberius, and why am I being shouted at?”

“Oh, I thought we were playing a game,” Harry said innocently. “I thought you’d pick someone next.”

“Oh, right. Remus Argyle Lupin!”

Hermione cast a spell at Sirius that he dodged by diving to the floor, and yelled, “The next person to say anything gets cursed!”

Everyone went silent.

“Harry,” she whispered at him.

He nodded.

“How are you feeling?”

He shrugged.

“Do you know what year it is?”

He nodded again.

“How do you feel about that?”

He looked at her, a little frustrated, as he tried to work out how to answer her.

“Hermione,” Professor Dumbledore said quietly.

Hermione turned and glared at him. She looked at his robes, shuddered, and cast a spell to put them back to the way they were before. “Yes?”

“You might want to allow Harry to speak,” he pointed out gently. “You did say you’d curse him if he said anything.”

Hermione blushed bright red and turned back to Harry. “You can speak now.”

“Thank you,” he said quietly. “I’m fine at the moment.”

“How can you be fine!?”

“Because my very new, very beautiful, very smart, sexy, intelligent girlfriend obviously planned ahead, and fed me a calming potion before telling me anything.”

“Oh,” Hermione said quietly. “That was a good idea.”

Gabrielle snorted eloquently.

“I’ll bet you have a few questions,” Hermione said.

“More than a few,” Harry agreed. “But at the moment, I’m a little wary of, well, all of you. You all look a lot older than I remember, and that should be really freaking me out at the moment, so, I’d appreciate if we keep the hugging to a minimum.”

“You don’t see to have that problem with Gabrielle,” Fleur pointed out.

“True,” Harry agreed.

“It makes sense though,” Hermione said thoughtfully. “She is part-Veela and they are descended from birds, a long time ago. When she woke Harry up, she probably reverse imprinted on him somehow, causing him to trust her more than anyone else.”

Harry could see the others nod slowly.

“Gabrielle, how could you?” Fleur asked, deep disappointment in her voice.

“Whoa,” Harry interrupted. “Hermione, sometimes a cigar is just a cigar.”

“What?” Ron asked, looking blank. “You want to smoke?”

“Haven’t you got him out of that habit yet?” Harry asked Hermione.

Ron slowly started to blush.

“It means,” Harry continued in a dry tone of voice, “that Hermione is reading far too much into this. Look, when I woke up there was this gorgeous girl kissing me. I don’t know about you guys, but I’ve not had enough gorgeous girls wake me that I’m blasé about it. As she was the one that woke me, and was prepared for my questions, I made the decision to trust her, and besides, have you taken a good look at her?”

“She is not a piece of meat, Harry,” Fleur said primly.

Gabrielle snorted again. “Says the old maid,” she muttered.

Harry grinned and hugged her tighter to him. “So, being about eight years behind schedule, I decided not to waste any time worrying about little things and got the girlfriend thing nailed down first. I think that has to be a record, coma to girlfriend in less than four minutes, but hey, *someone* had to do it.

“But, I am now getting hungry, so let’s talk and eat,” he suggested.

“Great idea,” Ron agreed.

“Just one more thing,” Harry said. “To all of you, I might have been gone for eight years, but to me, it was just yesterday, so I have no real need to reconnect with any of you at the moment. I suspect when this potion wears off, I’ll start to get really freaked by the rings on Hermione and Ron’s hands, and the way Fleur seems draped over Bill, and even the way that girl whose hair keeps changing colour seems to be hanging on to Moony’s hand for dear life. But as it is, what surprises me most is that Snape isn’t here, dragging everyone down with his vampiric demeanour and tombstone teeth.”

“I’m afraid that all the marked Death Eaters died with Voldemort,” Albus Dumbledore said quietly.

“I killed Snape?” Harry demanded in shock.

“I’m afraid so,” Hermione said gently.

“All right!” Harry yelled as he jumped off the table. “That one’s for you, Dad,” he shouted in glee, before grabbing Gabrielle and waltzing her around the Great Hall, relishing the way she moulded her body to his, put her arms around his neck, and let him lead.

He finished with a dramatic dip and looked over at the expressions on the faces of the others. They ranged from highly amused to mildly disappointed.

“So,” he said, “anyone want to explain why I can cast spells I never learned, and just how I seem to have grown several inches, why my chest has muscles I’ve never seen before, why said muscles didn’t atrophy during my incapacitation, just why I seem to have swallowed a dictionary, why I don’t look twenty-three, why I don’t need my glasses anymore, and how I knew how to dance Gabrielle around the room, when the last time I checked, I couldn’t dance my way out of a paper bag?”

“You’re almost a lot more adventurous than I expected,” Gabrielle added from her dipped position.

“Nah, I’ve always been adventurous,” Harry grinned down at her. “You comfortable like that?”

“Not sure, it’s kinda nice being held up like this. Think you can keep holding me?”

He nodded.

She closed her eyes and let go of his neck to move her hands over her head, arching her back so that her hands brushed the floor, before she slowly raised her legs so that she was balanced on the arm he was using to support her.

“Gabrielle!” Fleur yelled.



She sighed and opened her eyes at Harry. "I trust you."

He nodded, not exactly sure what had happened there.

She rolled off his hand comfortably and stood, taking his hand. "I think it's time to pay the piper," she sighed.

"How about I promise to tip him well tomorrow, and we go off and dance all night."

She laughed and shook her head. "It's not fair to the others."

"I guess," he sighed. "Dobby?"

"Harry Potter sir is AWAKE!" the house-elf shouted as he appeared with a pop.

"And hungry," Harry agreed.

Dobby looked torn. Harry took pity on the elf and dropped to his knees, holding out his hands.

Dobby hugged him tightly, sobbing against him.

"It is good to see you again, Dobby," Harry said gently.

Dobby nodded fervently, too overcome with emotion to say anything.

"So, you think you could whip me up a large meal? You remember what I like, right?"

Dobby nodded furiously and blew his nose on the t-shirt he was wearing.

"Get a few of the other elves to bring up drinks and snacks for the others, but I want you to cook mine."

Dobby beamed with absolute pride, nodded and popped out.

Harry stood, absently taking Gabrielle's hand again. "What?" he asked, at the looks he was receiving.

"They're a little surprised about how you handled Dobby," Gabrielle said.

"I'm going to get irritated if they don't start to talk for themselves soon. This lot here are human and capable of rational thought. They can empathize with what I am going through; Dobby can't."

Gabrielle nodded and they walked to a table, sitting down comfortably.

"Okay, let's start with Fleur. What are you doing here?"

"I married William," Fleur explained. "Three years ago."

“Congratulations to you both,” Harry said calmly. “That explains the draping. So, Remus, who’s the insecure blonde?”

“This is my fiancée, Nymphadora Tonks.”

“Don’t call me Nymphadora though, it’s just Tonks.”

“Right,” Harry nodded. “So, what have you got to be insecure about?”

“I’m a Metamorphmagus, not insecure.”

“Right,” Harry drawled again. “And hiding behind a mane of hair that keeps changing colours isn’t a sign of insecurity?”

Tonks shook her head no while she blushed, but her hair stopped changing colour.

“Thanks,” Harry said. “The rapid changes were giving me a headache. So, Remus, are you one of those blood-sucking fiends?”

Remus laughed and shook his head. “It is damn good to see you awake, Harry. And no, I’m not a lawyer.”

“Then you dress like that on purpose?” Harry asked. “Tonks, can’t you do anything about it?”

Tonks shook her head. “I kinda like it,” she said.

Harry rolled his eyes. “So, Sirius, no hot chick?”

Sirius blinked and then shook his head. “Not one that I’d bring here,” he grinned.

“So you’ve been cleared, right?”

He nodded. “I’m an Auror now,” he said proudly. “Mind you, not that there’s much to police; you took care of that.”

“One does what one can,” Harry said, grinning. “We need to have a chat later; there are a few things I need from you in private.”

Sirius grinned back and nodded.

“So,” Harry continued, looking down at the group. “How are the cauldron bottoms, Percy?”

“Regulation thickness,” Percy replied solemnly. “However, you’ll no doubt be delighted to hear that I have recovered from my recto-cranial inversion.”

Harry laughed and saluted Percy casually. “Still working at the Ministry?”

Percy nodded. “Fudge’s assistant.”

“That tosser is still in charge?” Harry asked in disbelief.

“That is a longer discussion for another day,” Dumbledore said quietly.

“Right,” Harry agreed. “I think I need to perform my own emergency operation before someone bursts,” he said as he released Gabrielle’s hand and walked over to Molly Weasley.

She looked at him for a second, before bursting into tears and hugging him tightly.

He lightly patted her back and winked at Mr Weasley. Mr Weasley smiled back at him and nodded.

“Air’s becoming an issue, Mrs Weasley,” he said quietly into her ear.

She reluctantly released him and smiled through her tears. “Thank you.”

“I live to serve,” he said, before pausing. “Actually, that was the old Harry. I think I’ll need something else to live for now.”

“Like what?” Sirius asked.

“I like the sound of ‘Live to find out what Gabrielle’s clothes look like on my bedroom floor.’”

“Ohh, sounds delightful,” Gabrielle agreed.

“Gabrielle!” Fleur shouted.

“Do I have a get-out-of-being-shouted-at-free card at the moment?” he asked.

“It does appear that way,” Minerva McGonagall said slowly.

“Hey, Professor,” Harry greeted her cheerfully. “You don’t look like you’ve aged a day, you look years younger.”

“Why thank you, Harry,” she replied, looking pleased.

“In fact, any younger and Gabbi wouldn’t stand a chance.”

He let loose an internal whoop of joy as McGonagall blushed.

“Charlie,” he greeted the next Weasley.

Charlie nodded.

“Is it true what Ron said?” he asked.

“What?”

“That your love for Dragons dares not speak its name?”

Charlie blinked and then shot a glare at Ron. “No!”

“Oh, I’m sure Ron’s had that sort of thing nagged out of him by now, right, Hermione?”

Hermione sighed deeply, although her lips were twitching.

“Fred, George, we’ll talk in private as well.”

“Okay, Harry,” they said in unison.

“Professor,” Harry greeted the Headmaster.

“Harry.”

“Still as nutty as a fruitcake?”

“Nuttier.”

“Wonderful,” he grinned. He turned to Ginny. “Wow, you grew up nice,” he said. “And an engagement ring as well.”

She nodded shyly. “Neville,” she explained, as she blushed.

“Good for you,” Harry said cheerfully. “So, I guess that just leaves you two,” he said to Ron and Hermione. “The last I saw of you, Ron was being a jerk and you had only recently shown the entire school that you were female.”

Ron and Hermione both blushed.

“So, married, huh?”

They nodded.

“Pay up,” Harry turned and looked at the twins.

“Damn.”

“We thought you’d,”

“Forgotten.”

“You bet on us getting married?” Hermione demanded.

“In his first year,” George said as he handed over a galleon.

“We thought you wouldn’t be able to stand Ron at all.”

Harry smiled and hugged Hermione, who burst into tears. He smiled slightly and pulled Ron into the hug as well, letting them get rid of their emotions. He could hear some of the others snuffle as well.

As far as he was concerned, he'd closed his eyes and everyone had grown. Ron was now well over six feet tall, and even Hermione was closer to his height – and that was without mentioning the fact that she had way more curves than he remembered.

Not for the first time that night he mentally thanked Gabrielle for the calming draught, because without it, he'd be going seriously (or should that be, Sirius-ly? he wondered to himself) nuts about now.

With a loud pop, Dobby appeared with a tray covered in food, and every single one of Harry's favourites was there. Other elves appeared carrying trays with snack food and drinks.

Harry gently broke away from his friends and walked back over to Gabrielle. "Thanks," he said to Dobby, who smiled massively, bowed until his nose almost touched the floor, and popped out.

He lightly took Gabrielle's hand for a second and placed it on his leg, before he started to dig in, and it took nearly all of his willpower not to eat like Ron used to.

"Hermione," he said between bites. "Want to give me the Reader's Digest version of what happened to me?"

She took a cup of tea and leaned against Ron – something that still slightly freaked him out, despite the calming potion.

"After Cedric returned and alerted us, Professor Dumbledore and most of the adults Apparated to the graveyard, and arrived in time to witness the end of your duel."

"Yeah, I was a bit lucky there," Harry agreed. "*Priori Incantatem* occurred and shadows of Voldemort's victims ca... Okay, how the hell do I know that?"

Hermione blushed. "I'll get there in a minute," she promised. "After Voldemort was pronounced dead, there was a rather large party for most of the country, apart from us. We couldn't believe what you'd done, and that you were in coma.

"Professor Dumbledore bought you back to Hogwarts, where Poppy cast a lot of spells on you. You were in a magical coma and we couldn't tell why. The bump you had on your head wasn't enough to cause it."

"I had part of Tom's soul forcibly ripped out of me; cheeky bastard was powering himself from my magic through the scar. When his Killing Curse backfired the first time, he had a microsecond to act, and that was what came to his mind.

"So when I was cutting the links to his soul, I made sure to do mine last."

Hermione's eyes were wide. "Of course," she said. "The magical backlash would be unbelievably painful, especially as your body had grown used to the constant pressure."

"It made every curse I'd ever been under feel like a summer breeze," he agreed. "I put it all into that last Blasting Curse. I guess I overcooked it slightly."

"Anyway," Hermione continued. "We put you under a stasis spell while we tried to work out what was going on."

"So I was in a form of suspended animation?"

"Exactly," Hermione agreed. "We finally took you out two years ago when we hadn't found anything. We felt that the only chance would be for you to wake up naturally, as every spell we had tried had failed."

Harry nodded and moved onto his second dish.

"I discovered a spell that would allow us to talk to your unconscious mind," she continued, looking away modestly. "So, those of us whom we trusted agreed to spend some time with you to see if we could teach you all the things that you'd missed."

"So that's why I'm thinking that I know a better recipe for Cottage Pie? And why I seem to know exactly who the fourth Goblin leader during the second rebellion was?"

"Exactly," Hermione agreed.

"Who do I thank for the kissing instructions?"

Sirius raised his hand, closely followed by every male in the room, including Professor Dumbledore.

"And for the Kama Sutra instructions?"

"That would be us," Fred and George said.

Gabrielle stood and walked around the table, where she dropped a kiss on their cheeks. "Thank you," she said quietly.

Fred and George both blushed a violent Weasley red and looked down.

Harry laughed as Fleur glared at her younger sister.

"And we continued to wait," Hermione said softly. "While you were out of stasis, we made sure that you were as healthy as could be. We used potions to fix the problems of not moving for so long and to ensure you went through puberty properly, and we all visited you once a week to read and talk to you. We got on with our lives, but we never forgot you."

Harry smiled slowly. "Okay, let me just say that getting on with your lives is the best thing you could have done. If you hadn't, I'd be kicking your arses now. But, thank you. I can remember hearing your voices when I was unconscious, and I appreciate it more than I can ever say. It's going to be as big an adjustment for you as it will be for me. What happened with Riddle changed me -- for the better I hope, but we'll have to wait and see on that."

He finished off the second dish and reached for a bowl of strawberries covered in ice cream. "So, in a nutshell I'm twenty-three, with the body of a seventeen year old, and the memories of a fourteen year old packed full with the accumulated knowledge of our side's finest?"

Hermione nodded slowly. "I estimate that your mind is probably around the seventeen mark."

Harry nodded. "As is my confidence. Tempus!" The floating figures indicated that it was now close to one in the morning. "So, I think that before we break up for the evening, we need one more story."

"Yes," Hermione agreed as she glared at Gabrielle. "Just what did you do tonight?"

"What you all failed to do for the past eight years," she sniffed, "and just what I promised to do."

"You did," Fleur whispered in shock. "But you forgot..."

"I *never* forgot," Gabrielle said with an undertone of scorn in her voice. "I asked to help you."

"And we told you that you were too young," Hermione muttered. "There was nothing you could do to help."

"Exactly," Gabrielle agreed. "Fortunately, I've never been good at listening to other people. So while you were wandering down dead ends, I did my own research."

"Wait," Harry interrupted. "What promise?"

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# Happily Ever After

## Chapter 2

“I should start back at the beginning,” Gabrielle said as she shifted closer to Harry.

---

*Eight years previously*

She couldn't understand what the fuss was about. Sure, Harry was fighting Voldemort somewhere, but why were they all worried? Harry would surely defeat the evil man and then everyone would have a wonderful party. The very thought that Harry might fail didn't even occur to her.

As everyone started to Apparate away, she grabbed hold of Fleur and hitched a lift before her sister could object.

She looked on in awe as Harry fought the weird scaly creature. If it wasn't for the aura of pure evil she felt it giving off, she would have wondered why everyone was so scared of it.

There was a bright flash and Harry flew through the air, ending up crumpled against a tombstone. All the stupid adults seemed to be too shocked to move, so she started to run toward the boy. She could hear the Hogwarts Headmaster say something, but her English wasn't good enough to understand what he said. She reached Harry before anyone else did.

Harry was flat on his back, his eyes closed, and a small smile on his face. He looked at peace and she smiled happily. She'd known he wouldn't die; everyone *knew* that the hero lived happily ever after.

As the others gathered around the fallen boy, she examined his friends and came to the decision that none of *them* were beautiful Princesses. The girl with her arm around Cedric was pretty enough, but she was crying like a hosepipe, and there was no way one could be a drippy Princess. The bushy-haired girl clinging on to the red-headed boy was certainly not pretty enough to be a Princess either. She smiled at the thought of the red-headed boy who had been acting all *boy* over her sister – Harry had never acted *boy* over Fleur – and speaking of which, her sister was far too old for Harry – she was an *adult*, as Fleur kept reminding her.

The smaller red-headed girl was cute in her own fashion and it was obvious that she had a crush on Harry, but her clothes weren't nice enough for a Princess, and she lacked a certain air of gravity – Princes and Princesses had it, and others didn't.

Gabrielle looked down at herself. All of her clothes were expensive, she was incredibly pretty, and with long blonde hair and deep brown eyes, she was by far the most Princess-looking girl here.

That decision made, she kept quiet, understanding instinctively that if she didn't, someone would try to take her away -- for her own protection, or some other crummy excuse. She never

understood why they would do things like that, when it was obvious that she wanted to know what was going on, but she'd learned to accept the strange and unpredictable behaviour of everyone around her.

They transported Harry back to Hogwarts, and she kept hidden in the crowd as they all moved to the Hospital Wing.

The nice nurse who'd checked her out after the second task took control of Harry's care, ordering everyone out.

They all gathered in the Great Hall and she sat quietly next to her sister, aware that it was coming up to her bedtime. She was prepared to cast a Princess-sized fit if the suggestion was even made that she should go to bed before reaching some sort of closure.

Despite the worry, she could see that a lot of the adults were very relieved. After all, Harry had defeated the evil creature-thing and they no longer had to worry about that, and by the sounds of it, every one of the evil creature-thing's followers had died as well – which was a good thing. They deserved it for being stupid enough to follow someone like that Voldemmonkey fellow.

It seemed obvious to her that if you wanted to make changes, you followed a guy who could do it without doing things like killing people -- unnecessarily.

You found a handsome Prince and followed him. Everything would then be good; you'd get to rule and everyone would love you – and that was much better than everyone hating and fearing you.

She had learned early on that a smile and an innocent look got her a lot more sweets than a tantrum. The whole Prince and Princess bit was the same thing, just on a bigger scale.

She eventually drifted off into sleep, leaning against her sister, who really wasn't that bad, despite being nearly as old as Professor Dumbledore.

She didn't say much over the next few days, as everyone got ready to leave. She just smiled a lot at the adults and they let her hang around Harry. They were so easy to manipulate – she just had to act how they expected, rather than how she really thought.

She wandered up behind Ron and Hermione and listened in to their conversation.

“They don't think he's going to wake up,” Hermione said.

“But he has to,” Ron complained. “We've got to have a killer party and celebrate it. He did it, Hermione!”

“I know, I'm so proud of him I could burst.”

“You don't... you know, fancy him?”

Hermione seemed to sigh. “You're asking that *now*?”

Ron blushed. “Yeah, well, you know.”

“No, I don’t know,” Hermione said bluntly.

“I like you,” Ron said in a rush.

Hermione nodded and sighed, and then she smiled. “For some reason, I like you too.”

“You do? Not Harry?”

“Not like that, no.”

“All right,” Ron cheered. “Erm, fancy going out with me?”

She nodded, and Ron leaned over and kissed her on the cheek.

Gabrielle used every bit of willpower she had to not vomit on the spot. Still, she was happy for them, and it got them both out of her way, and as a bonus, it looked like Ron had somehow picked up some courage from Harry having defeated Voldemort.

As Ron and Hermione were now looking at each other with googly-eyes, she slipped past them and looked at the bed. It didn’t take her long to work out a way to climb onto it and sit next to him.

“Hi,” she said softly in French. “I’m Gabrielle, but you can call me Gabbi. You were really brave and rescued me during the Tri-Wizard Tournament, which means that you’re the Prince, which makes me the Princess. So, don’t worry about being asleep, I’ll be helping to wake you up and we’ll talk properly when you do.” She leant over and kissed him on the cheek.

“That was very sweet,” Fleur said with an amused tone in her voice.

“I’m *going* to help,” Gabrielle said firmly.

Fleur smiled, and translated the words into English for Ron and Hermione. Hermione smiled and said, *via* Fleur, “Thank you, but we don’t need your help. We’ll find out the way to wake him soon enough.”

Gabrielle gave some thought to throwing a fireball at the girl who, she concluded on the spot, was some sort of evil step-sister, but nodded instead and jumped off the bed, burying her face into her sister’s robes. She was pretty sure that everyone would think she was upset, which was what she wanted. She didn’t want them to see that she wasn’t even slightly upset – it was predictable, after all, that they would react that way. Their opinions were generally meaningless.

If they didn’t want her help, she wouldn’t give it to them. She’d find the answer on her own, and then she’d claim her Prince.

When she got back to her room in France, she carefully reread all her fairy tales, three times. The Princesses in the stories seemed to fall into two categories – Princesses aged sixteen and older

who got married to Princes and Princesses under sixteen who did stupid things with frogs. Looking carefully at the pictures of the girls in the first category, she then figured out that there was something *they* all had that *she* lacked. They all had boobs!

Not once did a Prince fall in love with a young girl who didn't have boobs yet. Every Prince seemed to think that girls under sixteen were not real people with thoughts and feelings.

She did the maths. Seven years, two months and five days until she was sixteen. Why, that was almost forever!

As a last resort she pulled out her book on Veela magic for the first time, to see if there was anything in there.

There wasn't. What was the point in being a Veela if you couldn't even get your Prince early?

Well, if she was going to wait, she might as well do something productive while waiting.

She walked downstairs.

"Mama?" she said, smiling as cutely as she could.

"What do you want, my dear?" her Mama sighed.

"English lessons."

Mama blinked. "Really?"

She nodded and looked as angelic as she could, forcing her eyes wider than normal and putting a pleading expression on her face.

"Of course you can."

"Woo-hoo!" Gabrielle yelled, as she jumped into the air in celebration.

"I don't want to know, I really don't," Mama muttered.

The next four years of Gabrielle's life were filled with important things: encouraging Fleur to fall in love with Bill so that she had someone on the inside track with her Prince; learning English, properly, unlike her *ancient* sister who still mispronounced things; going to Beauxbatons; and finding that puberty was deliberately teasing her, playing hard to get.

It was shortly after her fourteenth birthday that certain things began to change. During a trip to see her sister, she spent a few minutes, spread out over a number of days, dropping some subtle hints. Sure enough, shortly after that Hermione and Professor Dumbledore agreed that her Prince should come out of stasis and that they would try and fix him so that he would grow up properly.

It would be no good if *she* was all grown up, complete with boobs, and *he* was still a little boy.

She'd waited this long, there was no need to wait any longer while she put her efforts into finding a cure.

It only took a few questions here and there to find out what treatments everyone had tried with him, and what they were still planning to do.

In the year before her W.O.L.V.E.s, the French equivalent of the O.W.L.s, she checked over everything that had been done so far, to make sure that no one had made any mistakes. The extra studying was worthwhile, as it actually helped her get the top marks of her year.

Her parents had been so proud that they'd promised her any reward she wanted, and that was when the final details fell together. She asked to transfer to Hogwarts for her final year, ostensibly so that she could see what life was like in a different magical culture.

Her parents had been thrilled – especially as Fleur was nearby to look after her if needed – as they thought the educational benefits would be enormous.

She spent her final year in France delving deep into magical history, trying to find some precedent for what had happened to Harry. As far as she could tell there was nothing, and it wasn't until close to the end of the school year that the answer suddenly hit her --during a literature class.

The professor had been droning on as normal, but she mentioned off-hand that a lot of Muggle fairytales had been based on things that had really happened in the Wizarding World.

Without hesitation, she ran out of the class, into the Headmistress' empty office, and took the Floo home. Luckily, both her parents were at work.

She dashed into her bedroom and turned the room upside down, searching for her book of fairy tales.

She eventually found it under her desk, propping up one of the legs, and threw herself on her bed, re-reading them.

She couldn't believe the answer was so simple. It had been staring her in the face for the last eight years.

She returned to Beauxbatons to face the music – two weeks of detention and the loss of her Prefect badge. It wasn't a big problem; the detentions were with another pupil, a boy pupil she decided would be perfect for teaching her how to kiss. She felt very little for him, but he had the information and technique she needed.

She allowed him a few smouldering kisses and dated him until the end of school, then broke up with him.

She felt like vibrating all summer as she prepared to go to Hogwarts and claim her Prince. She managed to persuade Mama that her old clothes just didn't fit anymore – especially around her bust – and used that opportunity to get adult underwear; a lot of very nice adult underwear.

Finally, after over eight years, she was on the Hogwarts Express, going to Hogwarts. She attracted a lot of attention; after all, she was Gabrielle Delacour and part Veela, but she really didn't have time for that.

As a transfer student, she had been sorted last.

“Ho, ho, ho, what have we here?” the Sorting Hat asked.

“Gabrielle Delacour,” she responded silently. “Gryffindor, please.”

“Slytherin would be a much better fit for you,” the Hat pointed out.

“Only an idiot would be sorted into Slytherin if she was truly sneaky,” Gabrielle pointed out. “It's like carrying a flag around for the rest of your life saying ‘be wary of me.’ A true Slytherin would be in Gryffindor.”

“That's the most sneaky and downright manipulative thing I've ever heard,” the Hat replied in an impressed tone. “Seeing as I can see your thoughts and plans, I'll tell you that you are not the first person in recent times who has asked not to be put in Slytherin, even though it was for different reasons.”

“Harry?” she asked.

“You are a bright one, aren't you,” the Hat said happily. “You're going to shake things up.”

“Me?” she asked innocently. “Not really, I'll just be following my Prince.”

“Riiiiight,” the Hat said slowly. “If it wasn't for the fact that you are a nice person, I'd be shouting out warnings left, right and centre about you.”

“I'm just determined,” Gabrielle said sweetly.

“And manipulative,” the Hat added. “You have Gryffindor!”

Gabrielle smiled as she heard the Hat shout out “Gryffindor!” She placed it down on the chair.

“Gabrielle,” the Hat called.

She turned back to it.

“When you get your Prince, come back and see me,” it said.

“I will,” she responded, and enjoyed the bemused looks on the face of all the staff. They didn't have a clue what was going to happen later tonight.

After the feast – the food *was* better than she remembered – she went up to her dorm room and retired to bed early, pretending to be a little overwhelmed with going to school in a different

country.

Once inside her four-poster bed she charmed it shut and changed into nicer clothing, the sort of thing that she hoped that her Prince would like.

Every minute seemed like an hour as she waited for her new roommates to go to bed so that she could sneak out. Eventually everyone seemed to be asleep, but she cast a sleep charm on them, just in case.

She pulled her broom out and flew out the window and around to Harry's room. She knew exactly how to block out the alarms; after all, she'd dropped enough hints about which ones to use.

He was still lying on his back, but looked much healthier than he had a few years ago. The potions and charms had worked their magic on him, and he finally looked like a Prince.

Now that she was fully grown, it was a lot easier for her to climb onto the bed and straddle him.

"Hi Harry," she said softly. "It's time for you to wake up; your Princess is here and everyone really needs you."

Without hesitation or doubt, she leaned down and kissed him, gently, and felt no surprise at all when he started to kiss her back.

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Harry looked at Gabrielle in total awe as she finished her story. He slowly looked away from her and looked at the faces of the others, gauging their reactions. It was the look of chagrin and horror on the faces of certain people that made him laugh.

"What?" Gabrielle asked.

Harry looked at her and shook his head. "I don't think they were ready to come to the realisation that everything they've done over the last eight years has been finely orchestrated by you."

Gabrielle shrugged and smiled. "I didn't do anything *much*, just a suggestion here and there."

"Professor Dumbledore likes to think of himself as the master of manipulation," Harry said with a grin. "And he's been totally outfoxed."

Gabrielle flipped her hair back over her shoulder and smirked. "My Prince," she said.

"We could have woken him up earlier," Hermione said in horror.

"Not without me you couldn't," Gabrielle said firmly. "It needed a Princess, and no one else would have fit the bill. I *am* the Princess."

"But it doesn't make sense!"

“Nor does waving a stick in the air and having spells work,” Gabrielle agreed.

“I am *not* as old as Dumbledore,” Fleur said, before launching into her third rant at Gabrielle in French.

“Is now a good time to admit I can speak French?” Harry asked.

Fleur blushed a bright shade of red.

“And I’m guessing that you were the one to teach me,” he finished.

She nodded.

“Well, it’s been an emotional night,” Harry said. “So, why don’t we go to bed and meet up in the morning. Sirius can bring his inappropriate girlfriend so I can meet her, and we’ll all be a lot more awake and able to deal with what we’ve learned today. You’ll have had the chance to get used to the idea that I’m awake and cheerful.”

“I think,” Albus said slowly, “that I completely agree.”

Harry stood up. “I’m okay in my room again?”

“Of course,” Albus said.

“Night then,” he said, and walked out with Gabrielle. As soon as they got out of the door, he whispered, “Run for it, before they realise we’re going there together.”

Gabrielle laughed and followed him at a sprint, back to his room. As they entered, he cast a locking spell on the door, looked at Gabrielle, and cast a few more just in case.

“Tired?” he asked her.

“Not even close.”

“Me neither, but I think we need to talk.”

“Yeah,” she agreed. “A lot has happened.”

“And you left a lot out in your little story.”

“I did it on purpose,” she agreed.

“You *did* hint at it.”

She nodded. “Nobody’s had any fun in the last eight years; everyone is so boring and straight. It’s like the fun got sucked out of everyone with you being unconscious.

“Hermione and the others want you to launch a career in politics instantly so that you can push



forward their boring agenda of taking yet more fun out of life.”

Harry frowned. “That doesn’t sound like fun.”

Gabrielle nodded in agreement and sat cross-legged on his bed. “The problem I have now is that I don’t know what to do about it. I’ve been kinda hoping that with you awake, you’d know what to do to make things fun again.”

“What about the Weasley Twins?”

“They’re working for the Ministry; they couldn’t find any jobs anywhere else. Even Zonko’s has closed down.”

“And Sirius is an Auror,” Harry said. “So, on one side I have all my old friends who want me to go into politics, and on the other, I have my new girlfriend who wants me to blow off my social responsibilities and have fun – with her.”

Gabrielle nodded, a slight look of fear on her face.

“Do you know the last thing my father said to me?” he asked rhetorically.

She shook her head.

“Do you like wine?”

“I’m *French*,” she pointed out, as if that answered everything.

“I was told to spend his money on wine, women, and pranks, and after that I could waste the rest of it. You’re a woman, and you like wine, so if I manage to prank the country, I’ll be doing exactly what Dad wanted.”

“Really?” she asked hopefully.

He nodded.

Gabrielle cheered with pleasure and bounced off the bed and into his arms. She kissed him firmly. “So, what’s the plan?”

“You haven’t got one?”

She shook her head. “All of my planning was to get to this point; I was hoping that you’d be able to take it from here, and I’d just help.”

He nodded slowly. “What would you have done if things hadn’t turned out this way?”

She looked at him blankly. “Not turned out this way? Of course things were going to turn out this way. There was never any chance of it not doing so.”

“You have an amazing amount of faith.”

She smiled brightly. “Where would we be without faith?”

He shook his head. “So, I think we need to go to Gringotts first.”

“The bank? Why?”

“Because we’ll need money, and we’ll need it under our control before anyone thinks of taking it from me, ‘for my own good.’”

She nodded. “I’ve got some we can use, but I can’t access *my* inheritance until I’m eighteen. How do we get there?”

“Your broom?”

“It’s a Lightning Bolt,” she said proudly, pointing to the corner where it was resting against a wall. “Latest model - first super-sonic broom with anti-air pressure charms.”

Harry blinked and fell instantly in love as he looked at it.

“Cool, let’s go,” he said eagerly. He paused. “Actually, I should probably get dressed first.”

“I don’t know,” Gabrielle replied. “Your pyjamas *are* pretty cute.”

Harry laughed and undid his top, throwing it casually on to the bed. Gabrielle looked at him and smiled slowly. “Oh yes,” she whispered, “definitely a Prince among men.”

Harry felt himself blush, and turned to quickly pull on one of the outfits he found in the large cupboard next to his bed. “A green t-shirt would look nicer,” Gabrielle called. He nodded and put the blue t-shirt back and pulled out the green one. After a pair of jeans, socks and boots, he turned.

“Perfect. Let’s go.”

He followed her to the corner and hopped onto her broom, feeling her sit behind him. He raised it up slowly, and almost hit the ceiling. Ducking reflexively, he rammed it back down to the ground.

“You drive,” he said, climbing off. It had been a lot more responsive than he had expected.

Gabrielle laughed and scooted forward. “Hold on tight, sweetie, and I’ll show you what you’ve missed these last few years.”

He wrapped his arms around her. “Your hair smells amazing.”

“Thank you,” she replied as she manoeuvred them out of the room, and once free, she slipped it into high gear, racing away from Hogwarts.

“Woo-hooo,” Harry cheered.

“Wait for the boom,” Gabrielle yelled as she pushed the broom faster. As they flew over Hogsmeade, there was a loud bang before everything went quiet.

“We’re now doing Mach One,” Gabrielle said. “The charms have kicked in, and it’s perfect for long distance travel. The first production version of this broom had noise suppression charms so you couldn’t actually hear the sonic boom, but everyone complained that not hearing it took away part of the fun, so they modified them. It took them a while to get it right because Muggles started to report hearing the booms, so they had to make sure that only we could hear them.”

“So it should take us what, around forty minutes to get to London?”

“Not quite as fast as Portkey, but a lot more fun.”

“Damn right,” Harry agreed. “What’s your favourite colour?”

“Blue, it looks the best on me. Why do you ask?”

“Well, I figured that we’d done the snogging part already, so I may as well get to know you, if you’re going to be my girlfriend.”

“True,” she agreed. “My favourite perfume is Chanel Allure, I like English and Italian food, as well as French of course, but I don’t like Indian food or anything spicy. I’m five foot seven and 127 pounds. I’m a C cup, 35-24-35, I play Chaser at Quidditch, and people tell me that I’m more than slightly focused at everything I do.”

Harry whistled slowly. “It’s a bit bizarre that I know what those numbers mean,” he said. “They seem to have done a lot to ensure that there were no gaps in my education.”

“Yeah,” Gabrielle agreed. “I had a little chat with Sirius about that sort of thing, reminded him that as a godfather, it was up to him to make sure you knew what made girls tick. The twins did it off their own bat.”

“Any idea what I am now?”

“Five-eleven, 160 pounds.”

“Am I still growing? I always wanted to be six foot tall.”

Gabrielle laughed and shifted so that she was resting against his chest. He relaxed as well, enjoying having her close.

“This is strange,” he said softly. “To wake up finding that I’ve lost eight years, but only two and a bit of them actually count. That all my friends are all grown up and mature. That I’ve grown up and gone through puberty without noticing it, and here I am, flying at the speed of sound, holding a beautiful girl.”

“It’s going to hit you tomorrow,” Gabrielle said softly. “I think we should get somewhere to stay overnight, so I can go through it with you.”

“Not my friends?”

Gabrielle shook her head. “They love you,” she stated firmly. “But they are also eight years older than you are now. And those are the some of the most important formative years. You’ve had a bit of it, and I tried to make sure you got a well rounded education, but there was a limit to what I could do. I am the same age as you, and more than anyone else, I’ve looked at this as to how it has affected you. So, we’ll go somewhere, put up a load of charms, and you can shout, yell, blow things up, yell at me for being a sneaky manipulative bitch, and get as much of it out of your system as you can.”

“Yell at you?” Harry asked.

“You’ll need to do that as well,” Gabrielle said. “If we’re going to have a good relationship, you’ll need to get that off your chest.”

“So it’s not *totally* a fairy tale then?”

She turned her head and smiled at him. “That depends on who I’m talking to.”

“I don’t think I’m worth what you did.”

“Of course you don’t,” she agreed, “if you did, you wouldn’t be you, and I wouldn’t have done it.”

“Did that sentence make any sense?”

“Only if you are me.”

“Right. So, how did you wake me?”

“With a kiss,” she responded innocently.

Harry snorted. “You can pull the other one now; you were exaggerating in there.”

“Damn, you can read me already?” She sighed slightly, before craning her head around to give him a quick kiss on the cheek. “That’s probably a good thing.

“I *did* tell the truth about where I got the idea from. Sleeping Beauty really did happen in Germany close to a thousand years ago. She was poisoned, magically, and she slept for over a hundred years. The rest of the community decided to sleep with her, and put themselves and her into stasis. When the handsome Prince -- who actually wasn’t a prince at all -- he was just an average wanderer who was a genius at Potions, heard about her, he cut his way through the vegetation to get to her, and spent a year examining her.

“After a lot of trial and error, he came up with a potion that would knock her out of her sleep and

return her to life. From there, it was a simple process to bring her out of stasis and give her the potion.

“Being a true Princess, and as bright as a button, she woke up, and after finding out that everyone else had gone into stasis with her, she had no real problems – all her friends and family were just how she remembered them – she acted quickly, told everyone that the wanderer was a Prince from a far away land, that he had awakened her with a kiss, and that they were in love. And of course, they lived happily ever after.

“So, it took me another four weeks to track down the potion, as it was named something obscure, and it was in German, and I’m truly thankful for translating charms. It then took another two weeks to actually brew the damn thing, as Potions is not my dish normally. I mucked it up four times, but I finally got it right, fed it to you, then decided that the Princess had it right anyway, and kissed you.”

Harry tightened his arms around her. “Good call. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” she said brightly. “Now, we’re heading into London, so I’ll knock us out of Mach One, and bring us in slowly.”

Harry leant forward with her, more than happy to be holding this somewhat strange blonde in his arms. The buildings below were rushing past at an almost scary speed.

“How do they use these in Quidditch?”

“Carefully. A lot of the players can’t handle it. You kick it into high speed and you’re out of the stadium before you can blink. It’s almost too fast. But some of the Seekers are getting the hang of it.”

“I’ll need to practice.”

“Sorry sweetie, but I think your Seeking days are over. You’ve grown up now.”

“What?”

“You’ve no longer got the right physique for it. You’d need to either bulk up a lot, like Krum, or lose some weight. But you’re still an amazing flyer, with brilliant broom control. You’ll be great as a Chaser.”

“Dad was a Chaser.”

“Then it’s in your blood. I’ll teach you.”

Harry sighed. “Okay, this is probably wrong, but I think I’m more upset about not being able to be a Seeker as I am than I am about anything else.”

“I’m sorry,” she whispered quietly. “I know this thing seems so unfair, after all, you defeated

Voldemort. Why did you have to then spend over eight years unconscious? What sort of reward is that?”

Harry sighed and buried his face in the back of her neck, inhaling slowly. “Perhaps,” he said, just audibly, “not such a bad one.”

He felt her hand pat his, before she said, “Hold on, swooping down on Diagon Alley --now!”

Harry tightened his hold around her waist and she did exactly what she had said, slipping the broom to the side and down, pulling to a stop before the doors of Gringotts.

He took a deep breath and hopped off. “So, ready to explore?”

“Absolutely,” she said, picking her broom up and shrinking it so she could put it down the front of her blouse.

Harry turned and banged on the huge doors.

A grate slammed open. “We’re closed,” a voice snarled, before the grate shut again.

Harry smirked and banged again.

“You deaf?” the guard demanded as he opened the grate again. “Come back when we’re open.”

Harry shook his head in amusement and banged again. As the grate slammed open, he shoved his wand into the guard’s face. “I suggest,” he growled, “that you tell Grappleagus that I want to talk to him, and stop acting like goblins actually stop work just because it’s four in the morning.”

The guard frowned. “Take your bloody wand out of my nose.”

“But it’s such an easy-to-hit target,” Harry complained. “I could shrink it if you’d like?”

“I’ll get him,” the guard said. “Enter and stand where I tell you; wouldn’t want the alarms to go off.”

“Absolutely,” Harry agreed, “because I’d be forced to cast a nose-shrinking charm in my shock.”

The guard sniggered and opened the door. “You’re all right, for a wizard.”

“You’re not bad yourself, for a goblin,” Harry said as they walked in.

“What’s with the chick?”

“She’s mine,” Harry responded. “I’d just *shrink* your nose. She’d cut it off and feed it to you slowly, and that would just be for starters.”

“Good choice,” the guard said approvingly. “I’ll be back in a two ticks of a gnome’s hat.”

“Chick?” Gabrielle asked, as the guard scurried off.

“Goblin term for Veela, comes from your bird heritage, not meant the same way as humans.”

“Why was he impressed that I’m more violent than you?”

“Goblin mating rituals are complicated, but the most violent females tend to get the best mates. Having a violent mate actually makes me more respected. I’m guessing that Bill’s the one that told me all of this.”

“Could have been Fleur,” Gabrielle said. “She worked for Gringotts before she married Bill.”

“This way,” the guard shouted.

Harry put his arm through Gabrielle’s arm and walked toward the goblin. “Don’t stand on the white tiles.”

“Why?”

“The white tiles have just changed colour slightly, I think he’s just turned an alarm on. We don’t want to lose face at the moment.”

Gabrielle nodded and he could feel her match her steps to his precisely as they walked smoothly across the chequered floor. As they reached the disgruntled looking guard, Gabrielle swung around and punched the guard hard in the nose, causing him to fall backward onto a white tile.

A bright light filled the hall, and a magical bubble caught the goblin and raised him high into the air. From all around, more goblins poured out and looked in surprise at the guard – who was laughing hysterically and rubbing his nose.

He waved his hand casually, and a couple of other goblins moved quickly to disable the traps and get him down.

He landed as gracefully as a stout goblin could and walked back over to them.

“I should have taken your warning,” he said to Harry. “You are both welcome in Gringotts.”

Harry smiled proudly at Gabrielle, before looking at the goblin.

“Harry Potter and Gabrielle Delacour. Exactly what are *you* doing as a security guard?”

“Huh?” Gabrielle asked.

“You just punched Grappleagus, the Manager of Gringotts, Europe.”

“Oh.”

The goblin shook his head. “It’s a good thing, Miss Delacour.”

“Gabrielle,” she corrected, with an enchanting smile.

“Violent *and* manipulative,” the goblin sighed. “If she had a bigger nose and sharper teeth, she’d be perfect. How did you recognise me?”

“Your gold watch, it’s quite famous.”

“And I thought all us goblins look alike to you.”

“The same way us humans look the same to you?”

“Touché,” he agreed. “So, the last thing I knew, you were unconscious.”

“I woke up.”

“Evidently. What can Gringotts do for you?” he asked, as he led them into a room with a couple of comfortable looking couches.

“You can tell me what restrictions there are on my vaults.”

“What makes you think there are any?”

“Logic. I woke up around five hours ago, and my partner in crime here tells me that my friends have a very boring career mapped out for me, and I’d think that my having unfettered access to my own money might cause problems for them.”

“There is a restriction that you are only allowed access to what’s in your trust vault, unless Albus Dumbledore says otherwise.”

“How nice,” Harry said with a small smile. “Is there any basis in law for that sort of restriction?”

“You *have* been in a coma for eight years,” Grappleagus pointed out. “I believe that would make you only fourteen.”

“However, I was born in 1980,” Harry pointed out, “and basic maths would state that I am currently over the age of majority.”

“Quite,” the goblin agreed. “As the manager, I’m supposed to say something along the lines of ‘it’s for your own good’.”

“Tell me, how has business been over the last eight years?”

“Tricky,” Grappleagus said slowly.

“Tricky tends to be a euphemism for downright disastrous,” Harry said to Gabrielle. “Why?”



“There has been a period of great conservatism,” Grappleagus sighed. “People have been unwilling to take risks and have been *saving* all their money. Hardly anyone is taking out loans or starting new businesses. We’ve tried to stimulate the economy with interest rate cuts, but people just don’t seem interested.”

“So I’m guessing you have a lot of very clever people sitting around twiddling their thumbs?”

The goblin nodded solemnly.

“From what my parents implied, I gather I am quite wealthy?”

The goblin snorted. “You think I’d have answered the door if it had been anyone without money?”

“No, not really. So, here’s the situation - I’m going to want to open at least two stores relatively quickly, and hire a lot of people with a slightly different mindset. I just need to get the two principals involved first. Can you get some people to find me some property? I don’t want to lease, I’d prefer to buy outright. Next, I want to know about investment opportunities, the more bizarre the better. If it’s straight and boring, I’m not interested. Let’s see what money we can make by kicking the world back into a more open environment.”

Grappleagus bared his teeth. “This is not what I expected to happen tonight.”

“I’m sure it’s not,” Harry agreed. “Can you answer a vague question without delving into client confidentiality?”

“Possibly.”

“Does the Noble and Most Ancient House of Black have significant assets?”

“You could say that,” the goblin confirmed.

“And would I get a similar response if I asked if said assets were under-utilised?”

The goblin merely bared his teeth again.

“Thanks,” Harry said, as he considered what he could do about that. It was so strange to see Sirius looking good, but even older, and with more grey hair. It was kinda frightening.

“I think the calming potion is wearing off,” he said softly.

“Grappleagus,” Gabrielle said. “Do you have any human quarters here? I thought the potion I gave him would last longer. I think Harry’s about to crash.”

“Crash?”

“I gave him a potion to keep him calm when he woke up so he wouldn’t worry about what he has missed in the last eight years. It’s wearing off, and I think he’s going to break down.”

The goblin took a long look at Gabrielle. "I'm interested in your story."

"Most people will be," she grunted. "I'll tell you about it later. Right now I need Harry somewhere safe so he can let loose at me."

"At you?"

"He's found out a lot tonight about how he came to be like he is, and he needs to get that off his chest."

"You're a brave one, aren't you?"

Gabrielle smiled briefly. "Yes. Now, the quarters?"

"You can stay here," Grappleagus said. "The walls are charmed for privacy. Open the doors when you want something. We'll even find some of that garbage you humans eat."

"I'm only part human," Gabrielle retorted, "but I've tried the stuff you eat, and I'd prefer setting fire to my throat."

Grappleagus laughed and got to his feet. "I'll have a guard outside to make sure you're not disturbed. Don't worry about damaging anything in here; I'll take it out of Potter's vault."

Gabrielle smiled and stood, ushering the goblin out the door. "Thanks," she said quietly.

"Look after him," the goblin whispered back, not quite low enough that Harry couldn't hear him. "His just being awake is going to kick off a huge party that will be great for business."

"I know," Gabrielle agreed, and shut the door firmly.

"Everyone's changed," he whispered, sinking down into a couch.

"Harry," Gabrielle said softly. "Give me your wand. I can handle you, but not if you can use magic."

He nodded and handed over his wand without a second thought. A second later he was in her arms, sobbing, as everything hit him at once.

His friends were -- *old* .

Everyone he knew was different - was changed. Ron and Hermione were married -- married! Ginny was engaged to Neville of all people – it meant that even Neville was older and different! Everything and everyone he took for granted yesterday had moved on, and he hadn't.

Or he had – his head was filled with knowledge that wasn't his, and his body didn't really feel like his either – the constant ache of hunger he'd lived with all his life was gone, and he was taller.

He moved forward as she pulled him, resting his head on her chest, and continued to cry as she stroked his hair.

He wanted things to go back to how they were, but at the same time, he didn't. He wanted the eight years he'd lost, but didn't want to go through them. He wanted to be the age he was physically, with all the experiences that he *should* have experienced.

He wanted to have seen Bill and Fleur get married, to have seen Ron and Hermione finally go out on a date, to have seen what life was like in the Wizarding world without the threat of Voldemort hanging over his head.

"Harry," Gabrielle whispered. "I know it's not the same, but I have a Pensieve with every major event you've missed over the past eight years in it."

He sniffed and looked up at her. "Really?"

She nodded. "I wouldn't be surprised if the others do as well. I know you've missed so much, but you were always there with us, I promise."

He nodded and rested his head back down. "I don't know what I want," he said softly. "I don't like everything being so scary here, but I don't know if I want to go back, either."

"There is no going back, Harry," Gabrielle said. "There is only going forward and onward. And as harsh as it seems, you have a simple choice: you can accept it and move on, or you can let it defeat you."

He nodded slowly, not ready to acknowledge her words yet.

He could hear her heartbeat increase as she asked, "Do you want to talk about me now?" in a nervous voice.

He raised his head and looked directly into her eyes. "Did *you* put me in that coma?"

"Of course not," she said with a frown on her face.

"Oh, boo-hoo," he said sarcastically. "I've had a drop-dead gorgeous girl dedicate eight years of her life to making sure that when I wake up, I'd have as easy a time as possible – the same girl who finds the potion that wakes me up, and does so with a potion to help me start to deal with it before anyone else finds out – the same girl who kisses me and wants me to have fun, as long as it includes her, rather than decide what I should do for me. Yeah, that's really hard for me to handle, Gabrielle. Heartbreaking; just like winning the lottery and catching the Snitch in the World Cup final in the same day."

Gabrielle giggled. "But I did kinda manipulate everyone, including you."

"By making sure that I was educated and continued to grow?"

“I could have made the suggestion earlier,” she confessed faintly. “It was selfish of me.”

“A little,” he agreed, “but it does mean that I can still have at least one more year at Hogwarts before I have to leave. So you’ll excuse me if I find it difficult to work up any rage against you at the moment. The only person I’m mad at is Voldemort, and hell, I killed him already. Everything else is just more shit that happens to Harry Potter, right?”

“Not any more,” Gabrielle said firmly.

He sighed and put his head back down, unwilling to stop the tears than were running down his face.

“What did you mean by the Hogwarts thing?”

He could feel her shift and the lights in the room dim, leaving them in a bare twilight.

“I want another year at school, doing everything I thought about before I was wiped out.”

“Like what?”

“Playing Quidditch, finding broom cupboards where I can snog my girlfriend, pranking anyone I can, sneaking out of school and getting a little drunk in Hogsmeade, crash-studying for exams and staying up all night drinking coffee.”

“I didn’t expect those dreams,” she said softly. “Most people dream about the end of school, not the start.”

“Yeah.”

“You *do* know you have a girlfriend who is quite willing to do that, right?”

He chuckled. “And will get me into so much more trouble than I could on my own.”

“Is that a bad thing?”

He half-laughed, half sobbed, “No.”

“Do you still want to date me?” she said softly.

He didn’t even bother to say anything as he looked at her.

She blushed very faintly. “I’m not sure how you’re going to react. You might want to find someone else.”

“Are there many beautiful blondes with determined personalities, who happen to have picked me, lying about?”

“There might be,” she muttered. “You *are* famous.”

“And if I remember correctly, I said I’d do something about that.”

“You were also on a calming potion then,” she pointed out. “And slightly manic.”

“The manic is me, not the potion,” he sighed. “You know about *Priori Incantatem*?”

“Yes.”

“When it happened, my parents – well, echoes of my parents – came out of Voldemort’s wand.” Her arms tightened around him as she listened silently. “My parents told me that they were proud of me – it was the first time I could remember hearing that said to me.

“They told me that I’d done my part now and that I was to have fun for the rest of my life – that I’d done all that anyone could ask of me.”

“Good advice.”

“I think,” Harry said with a small laugh. “That they’d be proud of me right now. Well, Dad would anyway.”

“Why?”

“If I’m going to have a crying session, I’ve found the right person to do it with. Dad would be so happy that I’m leaning on someone like you.”

“I’ve heard about him,” she smiled. “And seen Sirius in action. One day, Sirius will find someone like Lily, and a thousand people will laugh at him.”

Harry took a deep breath. “I can’t go back, can I?”

“No. The past has gone, Harry. All you can do is explore the future.”

“Will you explore with me?” he asked softly.

“For as long as you want me.”

“Are you uncomfortable?”

“No. Why?”

“I’m getting tired, and I don’t want to move.”

“Then don’t,” she whispered. “Go to sleep, sweetheart, I’ll be here for you.”

“Thank you, Gabbi,” he whispered, and closed his eyes.

He wasn't as tired as he had said, but he didn't want to talk anymore. He just wanted to allow all of the thoughts to wash over him without having to do anything with them. He was starting to accept what had happened, and realised that it could have been a lot worse. So many of his friends had done so much for him; standing by him for eight years. Ron and Hermione had not forgotten him, had not abandoned him, but had spent an incredible amount of time with him, and even if they did look older, they were still the same people inside, people who had always been there for him through hundreds of nights of conversation in the Common Room, through thick and thin.

Sure they had argued, but who didn't have arguments? And besides, they kept life from being too boring.

He didn't think that Sirius would have changed that much, but then, he didn't really know him that well, and he was going to have the time to do that now, but as an adult to an adult, not an adult to a child.

Remus was looking much better than he had been, and was obviously happily employed now and dating a girl who could change shape to resemble anyone else; neat trick, that.

Ginny was now engaged – that wasn't too much of a shock, as he didn't really know her that well as an individual. It was strange to see that she was grown up when she had been younger and smaller than him – she was still shorter, though.

Fred and George seemed to have calmed down – a thought which was frightening in its own right, as was the fact that they worked for the Ministry now.

As for Cho, his long-time crush on her was gone, but that wasn't exactly a problem. He hadn't really known her back then, and well, as pretty as she was, she couldn't hold a candle to Gabrielle.

Dumbledore actually looked younger, and he figured that was due to the pressure of Voldemort having been removed. The same was true for McGonagall.

Molly and Arthur had more grey hair, but they didn't appear that different, and their responses to him hadn't changed.

Fleur wasn't exactly someone he knew either, but she seemed happy with an older Bill, so that wasn't an issue either.

Charlie he hardly knew at all, so again, not a problem.

It came down to the fact that it was his peer group that he had missed out on, and he was going to have to try to make a new one, while redefining his place with Ron, Hermione and the others.

About the only thing he knew was that he had paid his debt to society and from now on he was going to have the sort of fun that he felt he should have in the Wizarding World.

And that left the girl whose very nice chest he was currently resting on. She was spoilt, slightly snobbish – he hadn't forgotten her comment on Ginny's clothes – and extremely manipulative.

She was also gorgeous, smart, seemed to genuinely care for him, and wasn't afraid to do anything – even visit the traditionally hostile area that was Gringotts out of hours – and she was very quick learner – punching Grappleagus had been an act of genius, getting them more warmth than Bill or Fleur's teaching would have indicated.

And he felt comfortable with her. Even now, after crying his heart out, she was still holding him and stroking his back. It felt like he had known her for a lot longer than the few hours since he had woken up.

He breathed a little deeper and finally drifted off into a sleep, the last nagging thought that perhaps everything wasn't as bad as it seemed.

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Harry inhaled deeply and his nostrils filled with a light airy scent that made him smile.

“What do I have to do wake up with you every morning?” he asked quietly.

He felt her laugh softly. “Play your cards right....”

“One day,” he said, as he shifted so that he could look at her, “you're going to have to tell me just what card game that is.”

“How are you feeling?”

He took a deep breath. “Surprisingly good. Thank you.”

“You're welcome,” she replied with a smile. “You did kinda let me down last night. I'd been preparing for you to shout at me for months, and there you go, letting me off the hook by not acting as I expected.”

“If you still feel guilty, I could arrange some penance,” he suggested.

“Oh?”

“Kisses – lots and lots of them.”

“Deal,” she grinned, and kissed him. “Okay, we need to have a late breakfast, do whatever we have to do with the goblins, and get back to Hogwarts. You know, I don't even know what classes I'm missing this morning.”

“Are you all right?” he asked softly.

She tilted her head and looked at him. “Yes. I've never slept with a boy before. I liked it. It makes me feel wanted and needed. I'd've been happy to stay like this for as long as needed.”

Harry dropped a quick kiss on her lips. “Play your cards right,” he grinned.

She laughed as he rolled off her and she wandered over to the door.

“Can you get us some breakfast,” she asked the guard, “and invite Grappleagus to eat with us if he fancies a snack – and if he does, get him to bring a potion.”

The goblin nodded and turned to walk off. Gabrielle pulled out a comb and started to comb her hair.

“I thought you could use Veela power for that.”

Gabrielle sniffed. “That is just a rumour spread by jealous human women. Veela power guarantees a good facial structure and good skin – a good start, if you want; but beyond that it’s up to the Veela to look after herself. There are fat Veela and spotty Veela, just like with humans. The only Veela you have seen are Fleur and the cheerleaders at the World Cup, right?”

He nodded.

“Fleur works as hard as I do and the Veela at the world cup were professional cheerleaders.

“Of course, all Veela have the allure. It is quite funny to see men falling over a pug-ugly Veela.”

Harry laughed. “We should see if we can replicate the effect. It would be fun to prank some of the boys at school into following Filch.”

Gabrielle pulled out a small notepad and wrote it down. “If you don’t write it down, you’ll forget,” she said. “And good ideas often get lost that way.”

The door opened and Grappleagus wheeled in a trolley with three plates on it. Next to the plates was a jug, a couple of glasses and a small potions vial.

“Morning,” the goblin said. “Sleep well?”

“Yeah, I had a few home truths told to me, so I’m on to the acceptance stage now. I’ll feel better when I’ve misdirected everyone enough so that I can spend the next ten months at Hogwarts and run things from there.”

The goblin nodded and took one of the plates, sitting opposite them.

Gabrielle picked up a fork, walked over and swiped some of the goblin’s food.

“Time to test your bravery,” she said. “Goblin food needs to be tasted once in your lifetime.”

Harry nodded and opened his mouth, accepting the fork.

To start with it was tasty, but that was before the spices hit. He could feel thick smoke come out of his mouth as he stumbled toward the table. The smoke started to obscure his vision as he grabbed the potion vial. He downed it in one go and fell to his knees.



“I need that recipe,” he croaked.

“Excuse me?” Grappleagus asked.

“The recipe; we’ll open a restaurant serving stuff like that. People will come for miles to test their bravery on the cooking.”

“Are you serious?”

“I’m always serious when my throat has been set on fire,” he whispered hoarsely. “In fact, to really make it special, I know just the person who will learn how to cook it.”

“Who?” Gabrielle asked.

“Dobby, a house-elf friend of mine.”

“Let me get this straight,” Grappleagus said slowly. “You want to open a restaurant with a house-elf chef cooking goblin food.”

“Yes,” Harry confirmed. “That stuff has a mighty kick; it will be a knock-out. If it goes well, and it will, we’ll open some Muggle restaurants as well, and franchise it out. There are lots of Muggles who think pain is a flavour.

“Speaking which, what sort of banking facilities do you have with the Muggle world?”

“Very little. We exchange gold for their money through intermediaries, but not much else.”

Harry pulled his own plate off the trolley and settled down next to Gabrielle. “I’m disappointed,” he said. “All that money out there and you’re ignoring it.”

“In case you haven’t noticed, we *are* goblins, and don’t exactly fit in.”

“Then hire some humans to start with, trust them to get things moving, then learn how to use computers and the Internet, get into credit cards and the like, and improve your banking services. Being reliant on just one small market is always a bad idea, and there are over five *billion* Muggles out there waiting to enjoy goblin banking.”

“That’s goes against long standing tradition.”

“Tradition is the lazy man’s excuse for sitting on your arse,” Harry sniffed dismissively. “Hire some recently graduated Hogwarts students with good marks, preferably Muggle-born. It will save them from dead-end jobs in the Ministry, and start you off and running. They can teach you how to use computers and the Internet, and you’ll soon start running the world.”

“You make an interesting point,” the goblin mumbled.

“Good, because my fee for this consultancy is reciprocal help from you.”

“If this works out, we’ll be working free for you for the rest of your life.”

“And doesn’t the thought of that much gold fill you with glee?”

“It does, Harry, it does.” He stood abruptly. “I’ve got a bank to turn around. Feel free to drop in and talk to anyone you need, they’ll give you their advice.”

“Thank you,” Harry smiled. “We’ll finish our breakfast and pop down to my vault before we get out of your hair. The first product you need to develop is a better way to carry money around. The magical bags are far too clunky.”

The goblin looked amused, nodded, and walked out.

“How much of that was you, and how much of that was what you were taught?”

“Mainly me, I think,” Harry said. “It comes from having a Muggle background and spending evenings listening to good ol’ Vernon complaining about credit card fees.”

Gabrielle put her plate down. “What was the other reason for wanting the recipes?”

“Pranks, obviously,” he grinned, finishing his own food off. “Let’s get some cash and get out of here.”

They walked out of the meeting room, waylaid a passing goblin, and were soon on their way down into the bowels of Gringotts.

“Nice,” Gabrielle said as she looked around the huge vault.

“If you see anything you like, grab it,” Harry said as he vanished toward what looked some large bookshelves.

“It’s bigger than ours,” Gabrielle called.

“If your family is rich, why was Fleur working for Gringotts?”

“She has a big thing about earning her own way,” she explained.

“What about you?”

“I’m quite happy being a Princess. And like all smart Princesses, I know that you can make a lot more money when you use what you already have. One day I’ll sit down with Fleur and we’ll compare what we’ve made.”

“You seem very competitive.”

“I love my sister, but she’s so *boring* and *strait-laced*. She’d get rid of her Veela heritage if she could. She has all the advantages in the world and she wants to be *normal*. She fits in perfectly

with this world. Changing the subject, how much money do you think we'll need?"

"I'd get a couple of hundred Galleons; we can always come back and get some more if we need it. That should give us enough for having fun, anything we need to buy, and for anything that takes our fancy," Harry said as he scooped up a pile of gold. "The books here are mainly history books. We're going to have to find my family library for the good stuff. There should be a property inventory near the door. We'll grab that and spend next weekend looking at homes."

"First you ask me to elope, and next you're planning on looking at houses with me; you do work fast, don't you."

Harry laughed. "Are you telling me you're not interested?"

"I didn't say that."

*Jeconais*  
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# Happily Ever After

## Chapter 3

Harry and Gabrielle arrived back at Hogwarts at lunchtime, and they were surprised to see what looked like an impromptu press conference taking place on the Great Lawn, with a huge crowd of wizards and witches standing in the sun.

“You think that’s for us?” Harry asked.

“Yep. Want to ignore it?”

“Nah, let’s get the party started. It will postpone the thorough yelling-at we’re going to get.”

“Can you handle this?” As she asked the question, her voice changed, losing its normal brashness to a tone that he was starting to realise was only ever used with him.

He hugged her tightly as she swung the broom. “New chance, new Harry,” he said, before whispering additional suggestions in her ear.

Gabrielle laughed and pushed the broom down, kicking it into high speed, timing it just right so that the sonic broom occurred directly over the crowd. Harry had a brief glimpse of people diving to the floor before they were past the crowd and Gabrielle was circling the castle.

At the front of the crowd was a dais bearing a table with Albus, Hermione, Ron, and the others looking uncomfortable behind it. In front of them, in ranks of chairs on the grass, were the press, followed by the Hogwarts students and everyone else.

Gabrielle pulled the broom to a dramatic stop in front of the table, and they hopped off.

“Sorry we’re late,” Harry yelled cheerfully. “Our invitation got lost in the post.”

“Where have you been?” Hermione demanded. “We knocked on your bedroom door for hours!”

Gabrielle smirked. “We were busy and didn’t want to be disturbed,” she purred seductively.

“Gabrielle!” Fleur yelled.

“Is it just me, or does she have a really limited vocabulary?” Harry asked softly, ignoring the yelling of the press behind him. “So, I’m guessing they want me to say a few words?” he asked.

“I’ve done a speech for you,” Hermione said, offering him a couple of sheets of paper.

“Thanks,” Harry said as he took it and scanned through it. It was very good, but not what he wanted to say.

He climbed on the table and grinned cheerfully. “Ladies and gentlemen, it’s good to see you. In

fact, after eight years flat on my back with my eyes closed, it's good to see *anything* .

“For those of you wondering why I chose now to wake up, I'd advise you to take a quick look at my girlfriend. She's definitely worth waking up to. But remember, I did say a quick look. I get jealous.”

Gabrielle stood and curtsied for the press photographers.

“So, rather than have me rabbit on at you for hours, I'll take some questions.”

The noise that rang out from the crowd was indecipherable.

“Gabrielle?” Harry asked.

She rolled her eyes and vaulted the table. “Quiet!” she yelled, her voice reaching the far end of the field without the need for a *Sonorus* charm. “I'll pick people at random. You have one question each. Make it a good one, because poor ones will be ignored.

“Right, you first.”

“Malcolm Selby, the *Quibbler* . Mr Potter, how do you feel that you're awake?”

“I feel fantastic,” Harry said, using a *Sonorus* charm to protect his throat. “It's testament to the fantastic care and attention that I got from my friends and the amazing staff at Hogwarts that I feel very few ill effects from what was, for me, an eight year nap.”

“Lavender Brown, *Witch Weekly* . Are you really off the market already?”

“Lavender,” Harry said with pleasure. “You've grown up nicely. Yes, one of my first priorities on waking up was getting a girlfriend, something I wasn't very good at before my nap. I asked Gabrielle, who was kind enough to say yes.”

“Can I ask *you* a question?” Lavender asked Gabrielle.

“No,” she said as she moved on and pointed at another journalist.

“Stephan Lund, *Daily Prophet* . Can you tell us what happened the night you defeated Voldemort?”

“I'm sure you know most of the story, that the Triwizard Cup was a Portkey. I ended up duelling Voldemort, and found that when he tried to kill me as a baby, he actually used the scar on my forehead as a Horcrux. So, to defeat him, I had to cut the connection between us.

“My headaches and the pain I felt whenever I was near Voldemort were symptoms of this. So, when I cut the thread connecting his soul to me, I suffered a massive magical backlash, and it has taken this long for my body to get used to being on its own.”

“George Carmichael, from the *Ministry Newsletter* . Do you feel guilty about all the innocent people who died when you killed Voldemort?”

“That’s a ridiculous question,” Gabrielle interjected before Harry could reply. “Anyone who’s done even the slightest bit of research on the Dark Mark will know that it could only be received by someone willing to accept it – the whole point of it was to ensure loyalty, and there had to be some loyalty there in the first place for it to work. Every single person who had the Dark Mark had sworn themselves to follow Voldemort and as such, they deserved to die. No matter how much money they had spent bribing their names clear after the first time Harry defeated Voldemort.

“And if I remember my history correctly, the *Ministry Newsletter* spouted all sorts of propaganda to allow Death Eaters to claim erroneously that they were under the Imperius, despite massive bodies of evidence against them. Now, exactly why was it so important for you to try to interrupt what should be the start of a party with such a potentially libellous question? Is there something we need to investigate about your own beliefs? Did you believe what Voldemort was doing was correct, but you didn’t have the convictions to stand up for yourself?”

Carmichael, who had been stepping back away from the furious witch, tripped and cowered on the floor.

“I will expect the other journalists here to do some investigative research,” she said, just loud enough to be heard, before she turned on her heel and walked over to the next person.

“Aimée Mallery, *Le Mundial* . Mr Potter, what do you intend to do now?”

Harry smiled. “As far as I’m concerned, I only defeated Voldemort yesterday, so I’m thinking a massive party is in order. But as these things take some organising, with Professor Dumbledore’s permission,” he paused and looked at the Headmaster, who had no choice but to nod, “we’ll have a charity ball here on Saturday. Tickets will be available to the public, with all proceeds going to charity. And to ensure that everyone has an equal chance, we’ll accept people’s owls asking for tickets and hold a raffle.”

There was a roar of approval from the massed ranks.

“Okay, one more question,” Harry said, “as we all need to get to work, and I’m sure you can appreciate that I need to reconnect with my friends.”

“Brad Gilbert, *Daily Prophet* Sports Reporter. Are you going to take up a professional Quidditch career?”

“I’m not even sure if I can handle the new brooms,” Harry said with a laugh. “And I’m not exactly the right build for a Seeker anymore. I might see if I can have a little success as a Chaser, but whether I’m good enough even to get on a Hogwarts team, we’ll have to see.

“I’d like to thank you all for coming out, and for your support during my little nap. I hope to see

as many of you as possible on Saturday, and for those who can't make it, my apologies."

Harry turned and jumped off the table as the crowd behind him started to clap and cheer and he strolled into Hogwarts. Gabrielle caught up to him quickly and attached herself to his arm.

He walked straight up to Dumbledore's office, aware that he was being followed. The door opened when Dumbledore caught up with them, and they walked straight in and across to the private meeting room, taking seats on one side of the oval table.

Dumbledore sat at the head, McGonagall next to him, and Flitwick the other side. Ron and Hermione sat opposite, and the others quickly found places.

"That was fun," Harry said, before turning to Gabrielle, "and you, my dear, were magnificent." He kissed her firmly.

"Harry, why didn't you use my speech?"

"Because it wasn't what *I* wanted to say," Harry explained. "It was a wonderful speech, and would have gone down brilliantly, but they weren't my words. I didn't feel what you had written, and I didn't want to lie to everyone out there, especially not so many people that had come out just to see me. It wouldn't have been right."

"Oh," Hermione said, a slightly surprised expression on her face.

"Can I ask what you did last night?" Dumbledore asked.

"Well, I was wide awake," Harry said cheerfully. "So Gabbi and I hopped on her broom and went and had a nice chat with Grappleagus. He's a nice guy, even if his taste in food is warped to Spain and back. That reminds me, Sirius, which of the Potter properties would the library be in?"

Sirius blinked. "No idea. James and I never really talked about that sort of thing."

"Looks like our house-hunting is still on," Harry said in a stage whisper to Gabrielle.

"But the bank was closed last night," Ron pointed out.

"Gringotts, close? When there's an important client on the outside wanting to do business? Never. They were happy to open up for me, even gave Gabbi and me a place to catch a nap after I broke down."

"Oh, Harry," Molly said.

Harry smiled at her. "I'm getting used to it now. It's harder for me with Ron, Hermione and Ginny, as they were my age. Everyone else looks the same, just a little older. Ron was a scrawny lad and Hermione didn't have any cleavage to speak of the last time I saw her. Nor did Ginny, for that matter. The twins haven't changed much, and most of the others look pretty similar, kinda how I'd have imagined you all to look without the pressure of Voldemort."



Ron, Hermione, and Ginny were all blushing furiously.

“So, after grabbing some cash from my family vaults, we flew back and arrived in time for the press conference.”

“Your vaults?”

“Yeah, the goblins said something about it not being allowed, but I wasn’t paying much attention, and really, there’s nothing they could do. I was born in 1980 after all, and simple addition states that I am over seventeen now, so there was nothing legal they could do. There is no provision in law for what happened to me.”

“Oh,” Hermione said slowly.

“So, is it too late to sign up for the school year?” Harry asked Dumbledore, who appeared shocked by the question.

“Excuse me?”

“Well, I’ve got no qualifications at all, and I’ve missed the O.W.L.s, so I’ll need some time to catch up to make sure I pass my N.E.W.T.s. I can hardly become a productive member of society if I’ve not got any qualifications, can I? I mean, say I wanted to go to work in the Ministry? No one would hire anyone with only four years of school under their belt and no exam results. People would laugh at me.”

“I didn’t think you’d want to stay at school, Harry,” Hermione said.

“I loved Hogwarts, and this time I get to do it without the threat of Voldemort hanging over us all.”

“I think that is a wonderful idea,” Filius said jovially. “I don’t suppose you’d want to be re-Sorted?”

Harry grinned at him. “Think you can handle me?”

“It would be a challenge, Harry.”

“No poaching, Filius,” McGonagall said sternly. “I’d be delighted to see you at Hogwarts again, Harry. To take into account your rather unusual situation, I’ll allow you to use the Gryffindor Head Boy room, although the standard rules will apply to you.”

“Of course,” Harry agreed cheerfully. “I have no intention of breaking any rules.”

Sirius snorted loudly.

“You should get that looked at,” Harry advised him offhandedly. “Now that’s settled,” he said, ignoring the rather stunned look on the faces of his friends. “Sirius, where’s your better half

then?”

Sirius groaned. “I was bluffing. I’ve not really got anyone at the moment.”

Harry sighed. “So, Remus, if you’re not a lawyer, what are you doing these days?”

“Teaching, Defence, here.”

“Woo hoo!” Harry cheered. “That’s brilliant news.”

“Thank you,” Remus said dryly.

“Charlie, how’s Norbert?”

“He’s fine, he’s even starting to show interest in lady dragons.”

“Cool. That reminds me, I must go see Hagrid later.”

“Hagrid no longer works here,” Dumbledore said. “He’s relocated to France.”

“Madame Maxime?”

“Indeed.”

“I’ll bet that was a wedding to remember,” Harry said slowly and sighed. “So many memories I missed,” he turned to Gabrielle. “You get that one?”

She nodded. “I was a bridesmaid.”

Harry smiled and took her hand. “Fred, George, we’ll need to meet in private straight after we finish here. I’ve heard all sorts of disturbing things, and we’re going to get to the bottom of them.”

Fred and George exchanged a nervous look.

“So,” Harry said slowly. “I’m hoping this is going to be the last time we’re all on such tenterhooks around each other.”

“It’s still a rather large shock to see you like this,” Ron said slowly. “It’s brilliant, don’t get me wrong, mate, but we’ve been talking for years about what would happen when you woke up, and the last thing we expected is this confidence, this, well, exuberance you’re showing.”

“In other words, you didn’t expect Gabrielle.”

“Exactly,” Ron agreed, staring at her.

Gabrielle fluffed her hair and shot an innocent look at him.

“She’s dangerous,” Ron said flatly.

“Extremely,” Harry agreed happily. “She’s also my girlfriend,” he added proudly, “and I’m still getting used to that idea.” He grinned at Ron, “And much easier for me to ask out than Cho.”

Ron laughed, “I’d almost forgotten about that. You know she and Cedric broke up?”

“Really?”

“Yeah, he’s the Seeker for the Wanderers now. She’s playing for the Harpies.”

“Wow, are they that good?”

“No, they are as bad as they always were; you were just a freaking genius in comparison,” Ron said with a snort.

“Oh, right,” he smiled. “I’m going to have to learn to play Chaser now.”

“Yeah,” Ron agreed. “I’ll bet you’ll be good at it though, and I want to play you at chess again. I spent enough time talking about it to you; you should be able to give me a great game.”

“Sounds like a great idea,” Harry said. “And Hermione, not even slightly interested in the Potter library?”

Hermione smiled at him. “Do you have any idea what’s in it?”

“Nope,” he replied. “But from what I’ve heard, it rivals Hogwarts’.”

“When you find it, I’ll be there,” she promised.

Harry smiled at both of them, somewhat relieved that despite their age, they still had the same base personalities – they would still be friends.

“Anyone got any questions for me?”

“Many,” Fleur sighed. “But none I could get past my sister.”

Gabrielle smiled angelically at her.

“Brat,” Fleur muttered.

“Percy, are you here on behalf of the Ministry?”

“I might have forgotten to mention to Minister Fudge that you were awake, and he rarely turns up at the office before lunch, anyway. He’s going to have a bit of a surprise when he gets in.”

Harry grinned. “Have you ever thought of a different career?”

“A few times. Why?”

Harry winked at him. “I’ve got a few plans. When they’re a bit more formalised, we’ll talk more. You still with Penny?”

He nodded. “And under rather heavy pressure to formalise our relationship,” he said, with an oblique look at his parents.

Harry laughed. “I’ll have to meet with Penny soon, never really did get to know her.”

“And she wants to meet you. She wasn’t on your access list, although I will admit to consulting her for some ideas about what to talk about.”

“Cool,” Harry said with a cheerful grin. He looked at his watch. “I think we’re going to need to do some smaller group sessions now. Percy, Gabbi and I will pop around to your place for dinner tonight, is that okay?”

“We’d be delighted.”

“We’ll start with the five of us for a bit,” he said, indicating himself, Gabbi, Sirius and the twins, “then after that, we’ll talk to Professor Dumbledore, and finally Ron and Hermione and I can go off on our own.”

Ron and Hermione nodded.

“Molly, Arthur, Bill, Fleur, Charlie, we’ll come around to the Burrow after dinner with Percy. Ginny, if you want to be there, bring Neville.”

“I’ll have some hot cocoa ready,” Molly promised.

“Professors, we’ll talk about my joining the usual classes tomorrow morning?”

McGonagall and Flitwick both smiled at him.

“Remus, Tonks, lunch tomorrow? Bill, Fleur, meet up after that?”

The four in question nodded.

“Sirius, Fred, George, you’re with me.” He stood, reached for Gabrielle’s hand and walked out the door, down the stairs and out of Hogwarts.

Gabrielle moved closer and slid his arm around her.

He followed a path that he had taken many times before, one that he had walked what seemed like twenty-four hours ago, yet he had not trod for so many years.

He pulled to a stop next to the lake and looked out for a second. He smiled briefly as one of the

Giant Squid's tentacles broke the water. Some things didn't change, and that was vaguely reassuring.

"Harry?" Sirius called softly.

He turned and looked at the older man and sighed. "I'm disappointed in you."

"What?" Sirius demanded in surprise.

Harry slowly sat down, his back against a tree. Gabrielle sat between his legs and rested her back against his chest. He slid his arms around her, and inhaled deeply. "An Auror? Working for the Ministry? What happened to Padfoot, the prankster, the most legendary Marauder?"

"You're Padfoot?" Fred gasped.

Sirius blushed slightly and nodded.

"But you're one of our heroes!"

"Remus is Moony, and my dad was Prongs," Harry added. "We won't talk about Wormtail, for obvious reasons."

"Wow," George whispered in awe.

"So, what happened to you two?" Harry asked, changing the subject abruptly.

"We couldn't make it go," Fred said sadly. "We tried, but we could never seem to save enough money to get a shop, and well, people seemed to lose interest in pranks, so no one would lend us the money."

"So we got a job working for the Ministry. We're sanitation experts."

"Trash men?" Harry demanded.

They nodded sheepishly.

"And you haven't got a strange attachment to the job?"

"Not really. It pays the bills, and allows us enough time to keep our hand in, for old times' sake."

"Right, listen up. You two are going to go in tomorrow morning and resign immediately. You are then going to meet up with my goblin advisors, where you'll sign a business contract with me. We, my friends, are going into partnership. I'm providing the capital, and you two are providing the ideas, tentatively valued at 33% each of the enterprise, which is your outlay.

"When you have signed that, you will choose a property to work from, and start hiring. You'll need an accountant and a solicitor, the last one to cover your back, in case items go wrong.

“We’ll give you a few months to build enough products, and you’ll get the same salary you’re on now during that period, and of course, all the materials will come from the company.

“When we’ll ready, we’ll launch a range of Harry Potter pranking products as well as everything else, and we’ll start raking it in.

“When we’re on a firm financial footing, we’ll put our heads together and try to come up with something we can sell to the Muggles. There are a lot more of them than there are of us, and we’ll need to be able to exploit that – along with their cash.

“Any questions?”

Fred looked at George.

George looked at Fred.

“Are we allowed to build our own private shrine to you?” George asked softly.

“No.”

“Your girlfriend seems to be standing between you and a hug.”

“I know,” Harry agreed with a grin. “But in this one case, I’ll allow it.”

Gabbi laughed softly and stood smoothly, allowing him to get to his feet.

Fred and George both pounced on him, grabbing his hands and whirling him around and around merrily. “We can’t thank you enough,” they said together. “We knew things would change when you woke up, but this? This is far beyond our wildest dreams!”

“We won’t let you down,” Fred promised.

“I know,” Harry smiled.

“George, isn’t our hated boss at work at this moment?”

“He is indeed!”

“Sounds like someone who wouldn’t appreciate a good prank,” Harry interposed.

“Exactly,” Fred cheered. “Harry, we’d love to stay and worship, but we have jobs to quit and bridges not just to burn, but to eradicate entirely!”

“Go, have fun. We’ll talk tomorrow.”

The two bounced off, literally jumping with happiness.

“They’ve not been like that for years,” Gabrielle whispered as she hugged him from behind.

“You’re already changing the world.”

“Why are you disappointed in me?” Sirius asked.

“Exactly what are you doing with the Black fortune?”

“Huh?”

“The Noble and Most Ancient House of Black, that family that you are the head of – what are you doing with it?”

“Nothing! I wouldn’t touch a penny of that diseased money!”

“I thought you had more imagination than that,” Harry sighed. “Don’t you want revenge?”

“What do you mean?”

“You’re going to hire a manager for the money, and you’re going to build Muggle orphanages, you’re going to make Black properties into tourist attractions, a school for Muggle-born children, anything we can think of that will make your dearly departed roll in their graves!”

“I think I love you,” Sirius whispered in awe. “You’re a genius.”

“He’s taken,” Gabrielle pointed out calmly.

“Not like that,” Sirius groaned.

“Do you *like* being an Auror?”

“It’s not as exciting as I’d hoped,” Sirius confessed. “I only took the job because Albus suggested it.”

“In that case,” Harry grinned. “It’s time for *Lord Black* to hit High Society. Your philanthropy will open many doors, and if you think you’re going there alone, the years have really played with your marbles.”

Sirius winced. “But those parties are always boring!”

“Which is why we’re going to liven them up,” Harry said slowly, as if talking to a six- year-old.

“Oooh, oh!” Sirius said as his eyes cleared. He looked at Harry straight. “When you were unconscious, a lot of us didn’t quite know what to do. It didn’t feel right celebrating with you not there, and we just kinda fell into roles and stayed there. It is so good to see you like this, and well, you’re just like what would have happened if you’d combined Lily’s brains with James’s ideas, insanity, and charm.”

Harry smiled lightly. “Which, when you consider that I *am* their son, makes a lot of sense. So,

are you going to do it?"

"And turn down an order from the Son of Prongs? Are you kidding?"

"You are going to have to get a girlfriend," Harry pointed out. "I've got one. You *do* like girls, don't you? Because if you'd prefer boys, that's fine, but I'd like to know about it."

Sirius glared back. "I've got a few girls I could ask," he admitted.

"Excellent. I've got someone in mind to take care off all the details for you; I'll send them around to see you tomorrow."

"Do I want to know who it is?"

"Not until I've asked them."

Sirius shook his head and laughed. "I've not felt this free for years," he shouted. "I have to go tell Moony!" He jumped into the air and was in his dog form before he landed. He bounded off, barking merrily.

Gabrielle squirmed around and kissed him deeply. "This is what I dreamt of," she whispered. "You're taking charge and just fixing things, but I didn't dare dream you'd do it so easily."

Harry shrugged lightly. "I've got eight years to catch up on, and for two of those years I was kind of awake and aware on some level of what was going on. I get flashbacks occasionally of people talking to me."

"Shall we go to Dumbledore's office?" Gabrielle asked. "My Pensieve is in there, for safe keeping, and very well warded against uninvited viewers. You can see Olympe and Hagrid's wedding."

Harry nodded and slid his arm around her waist, holding her close.

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Dumbledore was sitting in a low armchair; Ron and Hermione were to his left, sitting together on a loveseat, there was a second loveseat to Dumbledore's right, and a coffee table in the middle. On the table was a tea set with five cups.

"Before we start," Gabrielle said as they entered the headmaster's office, "I think Harry deserves to see some of the memories I've been saving for him, to help him acclimatise further."

"Or do you just want to pass him some message before we talk?" Hermione asked quietly.

Gabrielle smiled brightly at her. "You're the genius, not me."

"Right," Hermione said sourly. "I don't suppose you'd allow us to look in as well?"



“Sure, but the first part is for Harry only.”

“Should I be worried?” Harry asked.

She shook her head and led him over to the side. She could see Dumbledore wave his wand, and her Pensieve appeared, next to the Headmaster’s Pensieve.

“I’ll come out and get you in a minute,” she said to the others, before looking at her boyfriend. “Ready?”

When she opened her eyes again, she was at the start of the memory she wanted to show him.

It was Olympe and Hagrid’s wedding.

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Gabrielle looked at herself in the mirror and sighed. Here she was, eleven years old, and she *still* didn’t have any boobs. It just wasn’t fair, and no matter how she looked at herself in the mirror, they didn’t seem to grow.

At least her legs were starting to show signs of gaining curves. Her face was slowly starting to mature as well, which was a good thing, as she was starting to get a hint of what she would look like when she reached Fleur’s ancient age.

She looked at her knickers in the mirror and sighed. She had yet to persuade her mother that she needed real lingerie. Still, the hearts were kinda cute.

“Gabrielle, are you ready yet?” her mother shouted through the door.

“Five minutes,” she shouted back, and reached for her white tights. One day she was going to be able to wear stockings, with garters, preferably for her Prince, but for now she had to stick with tights.

She pulled them up before pulling the bridesmaid dress over her head and doing up the zipper. She stepped into a pair of low heels and surveyed herself again. She looked good, like a little angel. She smiled before practising some of her favourite looks. Her most effective one at the moment was wide-eyed confusion.

She reached down and picked up a tiara, placing it on her head. There, a perfect Princess, albeit one without either her Prince, who was sleeping a few hundred miles away, or boobs, which were something the Prince was undoubtedly going to want.

She very carefully reached up and moved her tiara so it was slightly off-centre and walked out.

“There you are,” her mother said. “Don’t you look wonderful?”

She smiled innocently.

“You’ve not quite got your tiara on straight. Here, let me do it.”

“Thank you, Mama,” she said softly.

“You’re very welcome, my dear,” her mother said.

Gabrielle smiled. It hardly took any effort on her part to make her mother happy, and it was definitely worth doing to see that look on her face.

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Gabrielle looked at her boyfriend’s face and smiled. He was blushing, but seemed amused as well. She hadn’t been worried about showing him the memory of her mostly naked, but had been a little concerned that he wouldn’t get the point of what she was trying to show him. That, yes, she was manipulative, but she wasn’t evil with it. Allowing her mother to fuss always made her happy, so if she just happened to make sure that she wasn’t perfect, surely that wasn’t a bad thing.

She slipped out of the memory smoothly and looked over at the three people waiting patiently. She could tell that they didn’t trust her, and she didn’t blame them. They’d learn sooner or later that she was going to win – she always did – and that the only ulterior motive she had involved her Prince, and a fairy tale ending.

“Ready?” she asked them.

They quickly joined her, and she fell back into the memory, snuggling into Harry as she watched the wedding again.

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Gabrielle looked around the old house with her hands on her hips. These events always seemed like so much work for her, because she knew that no one would be able to get anything done without her.

She decided to start with Madame Maxime, and walked to the left quickly, absently bypassing guests who might want to talk to her. Being sneaky was almost second nature for her.

Olympe was sat in a large chair, staring at a mirror, only half dressed. She was alone, and seemed a little depressed.

Gabrielle moved a chair behind the large professor and stood on it, and started to brush the half-giantess’s hair. “The Hall looks really pretty,” she said innocently.

“I’m glad,” Olympe replied with a half smile on her face.

Gabrielle smiled back encouragingly. “I like Hagrid,” she said. “He treats me like a grown-up.”

“He is good with kids,” Olympe agreed.

Gabrielle rolled her eyes internally. Obviously, the subtle approach wasn't going to work. "Will I be able to babysit when you have children?" she asked.

"Children?"

"You are going to be married, and married people make babies, don't they?"

"Married people who aren't running a school," Olympe said sadly. "I like doing what I am doing."

Gabrielle kept brushing the hair carefully, hiding her amazement that people couldn't see the obvious, even when it was handed to them on a plate. "Then Hagrid can raise them. He likes babies."

Olympe froze. "He does?" she half asked, half stated.

"Of course," Gabrielle said absently. "He was telling me the other day how much he likes newborns, and you do know how proud of your job he is. I thought you'd already talked about it."

"No," Olympe said softly.

"Wait 'til you see all the pretty flowers," Gabrielle said, changing the subject to something more mindless before the Headmistress started to get suspicious. "I'm going to steal one later for my scrap book."

"That's a very good idea," Olympe agreed.

"And I can't wait to start at Beauxbatons," she continued, working as hard as she could to babble. It was harder than it seemed. "It's going to be so much fun."

"I'm sure it will be," Olympe said with a small laugh. "And we're looking forward to having you."

"I got you your drink," Fleur said as she walked back into the room. "Oh, Gabrielle, I'm glad you're here. A bride shouldn't be left alone on her wedding day," she paused, and then grinned at Olympe, "she might have second thoughts."

"Of course Madame Maxime wasn't having second thoughts," Gabrielle said as innocently as she could. "She knows how much Hagrid loves her, and how much he'll spend the rest of his life making her happy. And they'll live happily ever after."

"Indeed," Olympe agreed.

Gabrielle handed the brush to Fleur. "You can take over now," she said, and bounced down and dashed out the room. As soon as she was outside, she skidded to a stop and crept back to eavesdrop.

“I hope she wasn’t too annoying?” Fleur asked.

“What? No, not at all, she actually helped me work through a problem.”

“Gabrielle did?”

“Oh, I’m sure it wasn’t on purpose, but sometimes you need a different perspective.”

Gabrielle smirked to herself. Now it was time to work on Hagrid, and make sure he didn’t do anything silly.

She skipped merrily across the grounds toward the groom’s quarters.

“Allo ‘Agrid, Profezeur Flitwick,” she said slowly, in a deliberately atrocious accent. She didn’t want anyone to know that she was now fluent in both languages. It was far easier to listen in when people didn’t think she could speak their language well enough to understand them.

“Good morning, Gabrielle,” Flitwick said, beaming at her. “You are looking lovely this morning.”

“T’ank you,” Gabrielle replied slowly. “You both lookin’ pretty.”

Hagrid beamed at her. He’d had a beard trim, and his hair had been cut as well. He didn’t look bad, and the suit had been especially tailored for his half-giant heritage.

“Are you looking forward to ze wedding?” she asked Hagrid.

He nodded, his beard moving up and down like a sentient bush. It fascinated Gabrielle in a slightly creepy way. She wished that Flitwick wasn’t around; he was a little too clever for her liking, and she always had to be careful around him.

“Filius,” Albus Dumbledore called from the corridor. “Can I have a few minutes of your time?”

“I will keep ‘Agrid company,” Gabrielle offered hesitantly.

“Thank you, Gabrielle,” Filius said as he scurried out.

“Good man, Dumbledore,” Hagrid said approvingly.

Gabrielle again fought the urge to roll her eyes at him. He was a nice enough guy, but his independent thought patterns were not fully developed.

“So, are you looking forward to babies?” she asked cheerfully, switching to French. It had taken several teachers over eight months to teach him to speak the language, but he was now semi-decent with it – and he spoke it without the dreadful accent he had when speaking English.

He smiled at her. “Babies, Gabrielle? Aye, they might come along at some stage. Olympe has her career to worry about first.”

“What are you going to be doing?” she asked innocently.

His beetle-like eyes blinked at her. “What do you mean?”

“If Madam Maxime is doing her career and can’t have babies, what are you going to be doing?”

“Working,” he said slowly.

“Oh, so you prefer working to babies,” Gabrielle said as if it made sense to her now.

“Well, no,” Hagrid admitted.

“So why don’t you offer to raise the babies, so that Madam Maxime can work,” she said, pleased that she didn’t have to be subtle around him – in fact, the only subtlety she could use would be a sledgehammer to pound an idea into his head.

“Have you seen the flowers?” she asked, decided it was time to change the subject.

“I have. Aren’t they beautiful?” he said.

Filius rejoined them, “It’s almost time,” he said to Hagrid.

“Oh, I should get in position,” Gabrielle gasped dramatically, and rushed out the room, leaving the Best Man and groom in her wake.

She walked into the Hall the wedding was going to be held in and paused by the door. She was planning on saving this memory for when her Prince woke up, and wanted to make sure she had every detail correct.

The chairs that were lined up in front of the arch that they would get married under were all larger than normal, and there was a charm that would make everyone who entered the room grow roughly a third in size.

To the left there was an open brazier with a fire in front of it. To the right was a table full of flowers, a carefully arranged collection of St Cecelia, Tower Bridge, Yves Piaget and Purple Tiger roses, all hand-tied with fresh lavender, rosemary, mint and jasmine trails.

She walked over to the table and inhaled deeply, committing the almost intoxicating smell to memory. She turned back and looked over all the chairs from the front. Each one had an individual bouquet of flowers on the back, and a small service book on the chair.

She smiled to herself and went to find her mother, so that she could be ordered to join Madame Maxime before the guests started to arrive.

The next hour seemed to pass in a flash as everyone had a last minute panic about getting things ready on time. Well, everyone but her. Everyone seemed far too wrapped up in the immediacy to sit back and realise that all this frantic rushing around was counter-productive.

Eventually, Olympe was ready, and Gabrielle stood next to her sister and followed the half-giantess down the corridor and into the Hall. She kept her face as solemn as befitted an event like this, running her eyes over the crowd for people her Prince might know. There weren't as many as she might have liked, but then, there was no reason for most of them to be there.

She eventually stopped with Fleur, and flashed her best smile at Professor Dumbledore, who was officiating. It hadn't taken her long to realise that he was going to be her main obstacle in getting her Prince. It wasn't that he was an evil wizard, intent on foiling her plans; it was more that he was the wizened advisor to the king, playing his own games.

She was going to have to be very careful around him; still, he had a weakness, and that was his own cleverness. All she had to do was pretend to be in awe of how clever he was – and he was very clever – and he would continue to underestimate her.

As Dumbledore invited everyone to sit, she took her place next to Fleur and scanned the crowd again. Ron was there, on the groom's side, and next to him was Hermione, the wicked-step-sister. Ron had hit puberty hard – and puberty had hit back, turning him into a lanky boy who almost didn't need the spell to sit in the oversized seats.

Hermione looked more like a teenage girl now, pretty, but not a Princess and Gabrielle grudgingly admitted that she wasn't an ugly step-sister either.

Remus was at the back, with the other Hogwarts Professors, looking dignified in his robes. He was an unknown in her plans, as she didn't really know him that well, and had no way of doing so. He didn't spend much time at the Weasleys', and was always busy at Hogwarts.

Bill was on the bride's side, sitting next to her parents. She was going to have to work on him later. He seemed reluctant to propose, and she guessed it was due to financial issues.

She stopped looking around and paid attention to the ceremony, so that her Prince would be able to enjoy it later.

The service was traditional for a Wizarding couple, and had aspects from every major religion in the world, as they asked the Supreme Being – the Source of all Magic – to bless the relationship, before two doves were released into the air.

There was a loud cheer from the crowd as Dumbledore pronounced them Man and Wife, or more likely, Woman and Husband, in *that* marriage.

The memories flew by as she posed for the official pictures and made a mental note to save a few for her Prince - she did look good.

The speeches at the reception weren't too bad, although most were delivered in English – which was a fine language, but it just wasn't anywhere near as romantic as French, and she bit her lip to stop herself saying something that would give her game away.

After the reception, she quickly collared Bill and made him dance with her. “Fleur looks pretty today,” she said, as she carefully guided him around the room, keeping her toes away from his feet.

“Beautiful,” Bill agreed.

“So why aren’t you asking her to marry you?” she asked, deciding that she didn’t need to be subtle about this.

Bill sighed. “Because being a Curse Breaker doesn’t make enough money.”

“Am I going to have to throw a fireball at you?”

“Huh?”

“You just called my sister a whore!”

“No, I didn’t.”

“Yes, you did. You said that she wouldn’t bed you unless you had enough money!”

“That wasn’t what I meant.”

“So you do admit that my sister doesn’t care for money?”

He mumbled a “Yes.”

“So what is keeping you from asking her?”

“Pride?” he offered with a heartfelt sigh.

“Is pride worth both of you being upset? I’ve read her diary. She wants to be ‘Mrs Bill Weasley.’”

“Gabrielle!”

She grinned innocently at him. “How else would I know? So, are you listening carefully?”

He nodded.

“You will go to my parents tonight and ask for their permission to marry Fleur. Mum will give you her engagement ring. You’ll take Fleur for a walk around the grounds, and propose under the apple tree. She’ll say ‘yes,’ and you’ll announce it after Hagrid and Madame Maxime have gone on holiday.”

“You are scary at times. But that is what Fleur wrote in her diary, right?”

“But of course.”

Bill took a deep breath. "I'll do it."

She gave him a wide smile, and carefully danced him around the room so that she could swap with her father. She didn't feel like smiling inside anymore. *What was wrong with these people?* Why did they have to be *forced* to be happy? Wasn't that the point to life?

She placed her head on her father's chest and closed her eyes. Dancing with him was always so natural; she just imagined that it was her Prince holding her as they moved around the dance floor.

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She watched the faces of the others as the memory ended.

She turned to face Harry, trying to decipher his expression.

"Fleur doesn't keep a diary, does she?" Harry asked.

She shook her head.

"I'm so glad you're on my side," he said softly.

"There is no other side for me," she whispered back.

He opened his arms slightly, and she smiled, moving into his arms and holding him tightly. Reality was much better than fantasy.

She turned in his arms and looked at Ron, Hermione and Dumbledore. They were all looking bemused.

Harry picked her up and carried her over to the chair – it was a simple movement, like a Prince carrying his bride across the threshold, and it thrilled her to her very core.

He sat down with her, and looked at the others. She snuggled into his chest, feeling a sensation of deep relief.

"I don't suppose I could persuade you to try and take a step back from your relationship with Miss Delacour?" Dumbledore asked with a sigh as he sat down.

She felt his arms curl around her a little tighter, protectively.

"No," he said simply. "I killed Voldemort, and all the Death Scum. I deserve something for doing it, and Gabbi has chosen to be that."

She smiled and rested her head against his chest, hearing his heart beat slowly and firmly.

"Don't," she said softly, aware that her voice would float across the table. "Don't try and say something like 'she's not a reward' or 'you shouldn't think of a girl like that', you don't and can't understand what we're talking about. None of you are Princes or Princesses. Different rules apply



for those of us who are.”

“You *are* dangerous,” Hermione said flatly.

“Not to me,” Harry replied calmly.

“How can you know that?” Hermione demanded. “You’ve known her for less than twenty-four hours!”

“Because she will never let me fall,” he said simply.

“What does that mean?”

Gabrielle smiled against him.

“We’ll talk about it later,” Harry said with a smile in his voice.

Ron leaned back and put his feet on the table.

“Ron,” Hermione complained.

Ron looked at Hermione, and then Dumbledore. “If you want my advice, give it up, dear. We’ve lost a game we didn’t even know we are playing. The plans aren’t going to work, so let’s just enjoy having our best mate back.”

“Plans?” Harry asked curiously. “Me as Minister?”

“See,” Ron said. “We’ve been outfoxed.”

“But,” Hermione started.

“I’m afraid that Ron is right,” Dumbledore admitted sourly.

“Of course I am,” Ron said. “Did you know that the speech Gabrielle gave to Bill was not the last time she said something like that?”

Hermione turned to face him, a look of horror on her face.

“Yep,” Ron agreed. “I was worried sick about asking you to marry me, when Gabrielle took me to one side, gave me a dressing-down for making you unhappy, and then told me what to say and how to do it.”

“But it was so romantic.”

Ron laughed under his breath. “And *that* didn’t give it away?”

Hermione paused and sighed. “I did wonder,” she admitted. “I just thought you asked one of your brothers.” She reached into a bag by her feet and pulled out a large stack of parchment. “*Incendio*

,” she muttered.

The parchment burst into flames.

“Well, can I at least tell you why we were thinking this?”

“Because you love me,” Harry said softly. “You wanted me to have a fulfilling career and be able to make the country a better place, and you felt this was the best job available. You also wanted my help to kick-start the economy, and stand as a figurehead to encourage people to not to leave the Wizarding world after finishing Hogwarts. Too many of our best and brightest go back to the Muggle world and are successful there, and you wanted to try and help stop that to keep the magical world alive.”

“Yeah, that,” Hermione agreed with a slight smile. “And to get Fudge out of office,” she added.

Ron stretched and smiled. “You know, I didn’t like it anyway, but I did like the ideas behind it. The world’s been dull without you, Harry.”

“I’m fixing that,” Harry responded. “Already started. It won’t be dull forever.”

“My poor school,” Albus mumbled.

“It could be time for retirement,” Harry offered. “You are quite old now.”

“Not old enough that I can’t still cope.”

Harry smiled. “I’ll take your word on it. So, what were you thinking?”

Albus sighed. “Lemon drop?”

“Prevarication via confectionary? Now, is that a tactic to garner some time for the creation of a plausible statement of incomplete veracity, or just the act of a harmless old man?”

Dumbledore paused and slowly leant back in his chair. “I honestly don’t think anyone has ever asked me that before.”

Gabrielle turned her head and looked at Ron and Hermione; they were sitting back, slight smiles on their faces.

“Is that why you avoided answering?” Harry asked.

“Indeed,” Dumbledore agreed. “I’m trying to decide what to do with you.”

“Would you like some advice?”

“Of course.”

“Stop trying to manipulate me. You won’t win. Don’t get me wrong, you’re better at it than I can detect, but now I have Gabrielle, and if you didn’t heed her warning, then you’re not as intelligent as you think.”

“Warning?”

She felt Harry laugh softly. “She just told you what she is capable of, and I know you picked up on that fact. People trust a beautiful innocent girl just as much as they trust a slightly barmy old man, and she has my reputation backing her up,” he said.

“You might even win for a while, but in the end, victory will be ours. We have everything on our side, including an intimate knowledge of your tactics.

“Or, you can leave me alone, and we can be friends. We’ll laugh and joke, you’ll be the favourite Headmaster who everyone likes to think is a little barmy, and I’ll probably come to you with questions and for advice, which I’ll take if I agree with it.”

Dumbledore smiled faintly. “A most unusual conversation, and yet I find it stimulating all the same. You will obviously break any rules I place on you, and I am aware that you do not need to actually stay at Hogwarts.”

“Indeed,” Harry agreed. “So, we’ll talk tomorrow. Hermione, Ron, let’s go get a butterbeer for old times’ sake.”

“Would it do me any good to point out that Gabrielle should be in class?” Dumbledore asked.

“At this stage, no.”

“I thought not.”

Harry grinned and stood, lowering her to the ground. She smiled at Dumbledore and walked with Harry out of the room. Something was playing on her mind, and she wanted to think it through.

She hardly noticed the walk down the path to Hogsmeade, as she mentally rewound a few things over the last day.

“You were plotting at the same time,” she said slowly, looking at Hermione.

Hermione smiled – a real smile for a change. “I am impressed,” she admitted. “I didn’t think you’d get it so quickly.”

“Thank you,” Gabrielle said slowly.

“My pleasure,” Hermione replied. “I didn’t factor in *your* schemes, but they seem to have blended with mine perfectly.”

Gabrielle nodded. “The future?”

“I’m all out of schemes.”

“Me too, I’m just following now.”

“Flip you for it,” Harry said to Ron.

Ron pulled out a Galleon. “Call.” He flipped it into the air.

“Dragons.”

“Dragons it is,” Ron announced after catching the coin. “You or me?”

“I’ll do it, I’ve got an excuse.”

“Cheers, mate.”

“What are you two talking about?” Hermione asked.

Ron and Harry laughed together. “Exactly,” they said in unison.

“Huh?” Gabrielle asked.

“What the hell are you two talking about?” Harry asked. “That is the question we were deciding to ask.”

“Oh,” Hermione said. “Gabrielle?”

“Basically, Harry, you didn’t react how anyone really expected when you woke up. You’ve been a little too autonomous, a little too distrusting of Professor Dumbledore, a little too conniving. Don’t get me wrong, I love it, but it didn’t quite fit. Hermione’s smile when you were talking to Dumbledore sparked something in my mind,” Gabrielle explained.

“Which was?” Harry asked.

“That someone else had some plans and had been helping you, not just me.”

“Hermione?”

Hermione nodded and pulled out her wand. She cast a silencing charm around them. “I’ll try and make this story as brief as possible. It was Albus’ idea to keep you in stasis. The idea was that we would be able to stop you degrading while we found a cure.

“I must have read every book in the library trying to find a cure. Almost from the start, Albus started to bring up the idea of you fixing things in the Ministry.

“It didn’t make sense to me. Why would anyone want you – who had just defeated Voldemort – to have to do a job you’d hate?”

“I thought you agreed with him, at first,” Ron interjected.

“I had to make it seem like that,” Hermione confessed. “I wasn’t sure of anything at the time, so I started to look back at our history with him, and what had happened. I read...”

“*Hogwarts: A History*,” Ron and Harry said together.

“Exactly,” Hermione agreed. “No one, ever, had been through what Harry had been through going to school. No one had even been through what Ron and I had. Then Percy contacted me, and showed me a piece of paperwork he’d found.

“Albus had the power to stop you from competing in the Triwizard Tournament. In fact, he broke the law the instant you began to play in the first task.”

“What!” Gabrielle demanded. “Harry could have been killed!”

“Exactly,” Hermione agreed.

Gabrielle jumped to her feet, “I’m going to ki...” Her sentence was interrupted by Harry’s hand shooting out, grabbing her by the arm, and pulling her against him. She felt his lips press against hers as he kissed her hard, his hands going around her and stopping her from escaping.

She tried to protest for a second, but he used her open lips to slide his tongue into her mouth. As the sensations raced through her like wildfire, she dropped the thoughts of revenge and concentrated on kissing him back, closing her eyes.

Her entire world collapsed to the feel of her Prince holding her, kissing her, claiming her.

He broke the kiss and smiled gently at her. “We need to hear the end of the story before we make decisions.”

She nodded slowly. Her Prince had pointed out the truth, and she felt embarrassed that she had lost her temper. “I’m sorry,” she said as she turned to face the others.

Ron smiled at her; Hermione had a thoughtful look on her face.

“Anyway,” Hermione continued. “I soon got to the bottom of the enigma that is Albus Dumbledore, who is truly the greatest wizard of our time. However, he has one fatal weakness, a profound confidence in his own cleverness – an arrogance, if you will – and with that, he has stopped looking at the people around him as individuals, but views them as chess pieces to be used in his game.

“He is *not* an evil man – manipulative to a fault, but not evil. He truly believes that he is doing the best thing for the many, but he has forgotten that the needs of the many do not outweigh the needs of the few. The many are nothing but a collective of individuals. I shudder to think just how things would have turned out with him in charge had you not managed to defeat Voldemort that night.

“So, with this discovery, I decided that I was not going to let him make you into a straw man for his ambitions, and I started to work against him. I spent some of the time with you talking about him, and what he is like, knowing that when you woke up, you’d remember enough, subconsciously at least, to stand on your own two feet and make your own decisions. I also made sure that everyone told you exactly what they thought was going on in the world at the moment.

“And to be honest, I couldn’t have been more pleased with the way things have turned out.”

“That’s awfully Slytherin of you,” Ron said slowly.

Hermione took a deep breath. “The Sorting Hat said that in the old days, he would have sorted me into Slytherin in an instant, but the current generation were a nightmare. I wanted to be in the same house that Harry Potter was obviously going to be Sorted into anyway, so I wasn’t concerned.” She blushed and looked down.

“Me too,” Ron said with a laugh. “It said that my ambition and desire to stand out from my brothers meant that I might find it better in Slytherin, and as I was a pure-blood, I’d fit in. I told it not to be so bloody stupid, that I was an idiotic Gryffindor to the core.

“You don’t mind, do you, Harry?” Ron asked. “When I was younger I hated that the Hat thought that I was like them.”

“Me too,” Harry added and shook his head. “Can you imagine what it would have been like with the three of us in Slytherin?”

“We’d have probably ended up exactly where we are today,” Hermione said thoughtfully. “No house can change our base personalities that much.”

“It does seem a little strange,” Harry said slowly. “That so many people have been talking to my subconscious and trying to guide me one way or another.”

“I swear that all I wanted was for you to stand on your own two feet,” Hermione said solemnly. “I would never force my best friend to do something he hated.”

Harry smiled and nodded. “I believe you, Hermione, and I’m very grateful. I like how I seem to have turned out. Anyway, to let you into my plans, I’ve got Fred and George quitting the Ministry today. They’ll be opening a joke shop soon. I’m going to have Dobby open a restaurant serving goblin, Wizard and Muggle food. Anyone non-goblin who eats a full portion of goblin food will win the meal for their party, free. Sirius will be handing over control of the Black fortune to me, because I’ve convinced him I can use it to prank all of his family’s traditions. I’ll be handing it to Percy later, and we’re going to use it to open orphanages, Muggle attractions – basically, anything we can think of. I’ve got the goblins looking at ways to hire Muggle-born graduates so that they can enter the world of Muggle banking.”

Hermione and Ron looked at each other and burst out laughing.

“We’ve created a monster,” Ron said cheerfully.

“You weren’t supposed to move this fast,” Hermione explained. “We figured you’d spend some time getting used to the idea that everything had changed, that we’d changed, and we all spent far too long preparing our explanations for you. Of course, we didn’t know that the Princess over there was going to wake you up like she did.”

“It was a potion,” Gabrielle confessed. “I researched the origins of Sleeping Beauty, and found the potion that the wanderer used.”

“An alley of research far too frivolous for me,” Hermione confessed, “but a brilliant one, at that.”

“Thanks,” Gabrielle replied slowly. “So, what happens between us now?”

Hermione stared at her and she felt like her soul was being read.

“You are conceited, arrogant, sneaky, and manipulative,” Hermione began. “Your intelligence is a little below mine, but you have an imagination that I do not possess, and that gives you flashes of pure genius. You are also stubborn, with an innocence that is mind-blowing. You truly believe that you are a Princess and that Harry is your Prince. Your psyche has adopted that as a fact, and your universe centres around him to a degree that most people are simply not capable of, nor would they want it. You are also fun, witty, and a genuinely nice person to people you like.”

Gabrielle nodded in agreement.

“Jeez, Hermione, don’t hold back, say what you think,” Harry said dryly.

Hermione flashed a smile at him, then turned back to look the younger girl directly in the eye. “I’d threaten you, but I don’t think you need it,” she said to Gabrielle.

“I don’t,” she replied evenly.

Hermione held out her hand. “Then I think it’s time we got to know each other as adults. I’m sorry for not letting you help. It was short-sighted and arrogant of me.”

Gabrielle took it, and stood to embrace the older girl.

“You were right,” Hermione admitted.

“So, you don’t mind this relationship?” Harry asked.

Hermione shook her head. “It’s been good for you. I’ve never seen you as happy as I have in the short time you’ve been awake. Gabrielle’s method of dealing with you is not how I would do it, but I have other priorities in my life – I’m Ron’s wife, after all – and I couldn’t do what she has done, and she has handled you waking up perfectly. Tell me, did you shout at her when she confessed what she’d done?”

Harry shook his head. “So, I’ve now got two spookily smart women in my life?”

Gabrielle grinned at him, aware that Hermione had an identical smile on her face. She frowned suddenly. “What are you now?” she asked Hermione.

Hermione considered for a long moment. “The Prince’s beloved sister?”

“There are not many fairy tales with those characters, though.”

“True,” Hermione agreed. “Actually, I think we’re both trusted court advisors.”

Gabrielle nodded happily. “Okay.”

“Why do we have to be fairytale characters?” Ron asked.

“Do you mind if I tell him?” Hermione asked.

Gabrielle shrugged. “You’re the one with a degree in psychology. I know who I am.”

Hermione nodded, “I think you do, at that. Ron, I don’t think you understand what I said a bit ago.

“Gabrielle has literally trained her subconscious to believe that she is in a fairy tale.”



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# Happily Ever After

## Chapter 4

“She believes that life is a fairytale? That’s ridiculous,” Ron said.

Harry was nodding slowly, as if the idea made sense.

“No, not really,” Hermione said. “All her life, Gabrielle has been treated like a Princess. Her father probably gave her that as a nickname when she was young. When Harry was knocked into unconsciousness, she couldn’t deal with it properly. She shouldn’t have seen a lot of what she did, but we hardly noticed that she was hanging around as we panicked. No one actually stopped to talk to her and explain what was going on.

“The only way for her subconscious to deal with the experience was to frame it in a way she could cope with – that Harry was a Prince, that she was a Princess, and that they would eventually be together.”

“Is that bad for her?” Harry asked, with a look of worry on his face.

“Absolutely not,” Gabrielle said firmly.

“In normal cases,” Hermione said at a much slower pace, “it would be. A single event could bring down her whole mental state. However, Gabrielle is not human, so I don’t know enough to judge the long term effects. I will want to talk to you both about it soon,” she added.

“What I do know, from talking to Gabrielle, is that it gave her a focus for her intelligence, and I can understand the benefits. My intelligence is a lot more normal; an organised mind, a retentive memory, and the ability to cross-reference facts at a huge speed. Gabrielle has that, to a slightly lesser extent, but she also has those flashes of intuition I was talking about. Without a focus, they could have led her into unsavoury areas. Imagine if Gabrielle had dedicated her life to being an assassin, a thief, or even the next Dark Lady.”

Ron paled slightly. “How powerful is she?”

“Powerful enough, but she has an advantage that Voldemort never had – Veela power. I can think of at least two rituals that would increase the effect so that it was similar to the Imperius, only with a deadly twist, as people would *want* to help her, rather than being forced. It would be a hundred times harder to fight.”

“There are four such rituals,” Gabrielle murmured, “and it works out to about one hundred and *fourteen* times harder to fight.”

“See,” Hermione said with a small laugh. “That’s exactly what I’m talking about.”

“Okay, enough about us,” Harry said decisively. “What’s happened to you two?”

“Well, I work for the Ministry, in a brand new department.”

“A department they created for her,” Ron added.

“Yes,” Hermione said with a slightly proud look. “I’m a psychologist attached to the Auror Corps, dealing with pure bloods and their bigotry. It’s fun, because not many of them are too terribly bright, and I can normally make productive members of society out of them with a little effort.”

“As for me,” Ron said. “Keeper for the Cannons.”

“All right!” Harry shouted, jumping to his feet and hugging Ron. “That’s brilliant, both of you. I’m so proud I could burst!”

They both blushed as they beamed at him.

He walked over and hugged Hermione tightly as well.

“This is still weird for me,” he confessed. “Forty eight hours ago, or so it seems to me, we were talking about the final task, and here you two are, all grown up, married... and hey, where’s the kids?”

“Just because the Wizarding world seems to like having kids early, doesn’t mean we do,” Hermione said firmly. “I’ve been very careful with my contraceptive charms, as my husband could probably get me pregnant at ten paces without them.”

“Yeah,” Ron agreed cheerfully. “We both want children eventually, but we also want to be able to afford to raise them properly. I know Mum and Dad did wonders with us, but I had such a hang-up over our wealth, or lack of it, that it gave me problems that have lasted most of my life. I don’t want our children to have any.”

“And is that the benefit of having a psychologist for a wife?” Harry asked dryly.

“Yep, bloody annoying, too, at times,” Ron grinned. “I’m all ready for an argument, and she pops my balloon neatly, and before I know it I’m cooking tea and wondering what I was upset about.”

Harry laughed and absently took Gabrielle’s hand, stroking her fingers.

It was this casual show of affection that she was starting to value most; these signs that he cared for her had her off-balance. Not that she had ever doubted that he would. No Prince in the fairytales ever turned down the beautiful Princess – especially when she finally grew boobs.

She moved her chair closer to his, and leaned against him. She was mentally tired in a way that she had never experienced before. Her mind was catching up with everything that had happened, how everything she had planned had worked, to one degree or another, and that after eight years of waiting, she was here, with Harry and his best friends, just talking and joking, while sipping a cold butterbeer.

All her life had been defined around grand gestures, outrageous public displays of affection, and scandalous behaviour – and it was a bit of a shock to find out that the small things mattered just as much.

She hadn't really contemplated the minutiae of their relationship, and she was flying a little blind. It wasn't something she was used to. She always thought things through at least four steps forward, and yet here she was, unsure what was going to happen next, and reliant on a Prince she couldn't read and predict like she could everyone else.

“Gabrielle,” Harry called.

She looked up at him, into his bright green eyes, eyes that were looking at her with such tenderness and caring.

“Yes, love?” she asked.

“Ready to go to Percy's?”

“I will go wherever you lead,” she whispered, before dragging her thoughts back to the here and now. She looked up to Ron and Hermione's amused faces.

“We'll see you at the weekend,” Harry promised as he stood. “I'm not going to be trapped at Hogwarts.”

“Excellent,” Hermione smiled. “How about you come over for a meal on Sunday evening?”

Harry nodded. “We need to go house-hunting first. Potter properties to find.”

“We know,” Ron said. “Saturday we like to spend the morning in bed, reading the papers.”

“You can read?” Harry asked in shock.

“Git,” Ron laughed. “Yes, I can read. Hermione taught me when I got my first contract. It was written in this strange language I'd never seen before: legalese.”

“I've heard of that,” Harry said, before striking a pose. “If any phrase, clause, sentence, section, subsection or provision of this speech is found to be unconditional garbage, unenforceable, or invalid with respect to any condition or circumstances, then every other phrase, clause, sentence, section, subsection or provision of this speech which can be made applicable to such condition or circumstances without the offending phrase, clause, sentence, section, subsection or provision shall be held applicable to such condition or circumstances as if the offending phrase, clause, sentence, section, subsection or provision of this statute were not present, and to such ends all of the phrases, clauses, sentences, sections, subsections or provisions of this speech are declared to be severable.”

Hermione groaned under her breath. “That was Bill, wasn't it? Only goblins have such an archaic way of saying so very little with so very much. I translated Gobbledegook out of curiosity once,

and one of their children's books was written like that."

Ron took the easier option and threw the cushion he was sitting on at Harry.

"What does the psychologist think of this violence?" Harry demanded.

"That it was a completely justified and natural reaction to such appalling provocation," Hermione retorted.

Harry pouted at her. "I can tell when we're not wanted," he said to Gabrielle. "Shall we depart, exit and vacate the premises?"

"If you're going to talk like that, I'm with them," she teased.

"*Et tu*, Gabrielle," he declaimed dramatically. "And yes, I had read Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, before I went to sleep, so that was definitely me!"

"It's all you," Hermione pointed out gently. "Think of what happened as sitting in Binns' class, learning while you slept. We gave you the information, but it's up to you how you access those memories and use them in everyday life."

"That makes me feel better," Harry said seriously. "So, two kisses?"

"Excuse me?" Gabrielle asked.

"For you to come with me. Three kisses?"

"Ten," she bargained.

"Done," he agreed.

"I don't think that's how bargaining's supposed to work," Ron pointed out. "Now get out of here, you crazy kids."

"Damn it, are you going to hold your old age against me?"

"If I need to," Ron said smugly.

"Is that why you're going grey at the temples?" Harry asked, as he grabbed Gabrielle's hand and moved with her out of the Three Broomsticks.

They paused by the door.

"I'm not going grey, am I?" Ron asked Hermione plaintively.

Gabrielle laughed. "So, ten kisses," she said.

"Indeed," Harry agreed. "We need to get back to Hogwarts so we can fly to Percy's."

“Why not take the Floo?”

“Because I hate the damn thing!”

“It has been improved,” Gabrielle promised. “And I’ll hold your hand.”

“You will?”

She nodded and smiled at him. “And if you fall, you’ll fall on top of me, and you *know* how much you like that.”

He laughed and wrapped her arms around her, lifting her up and swinging her around before kissing her firmly.

“Nine more,” she whispered.

“Do I have to stop when I get to zero?”

“Hell, no.”

He laughed and they re-entered the pub. Ron and Hermione had already left, presumably by the Floo, and she led him into the green fire, calling out their destination with a firm voice.

As they flew past the grates, she felt him tighten his arm around her and kiss her again. The rush of the air, combined with the high speed they were travelling, made her gasp; she instinctively wrapped her legs around him and held on for dear life.

When she opened her eyes they were standing in Percy’s kitchen, perfectly still. “That,” she said softly as she broke the kiss and reluctantly unwrapped her legs from his waist, “is how you do the Floo.”

“I have never tried that technique,” Percy said in an amused voice.

“Wow,” Gabrielle said again. “You should,” she said as she looked at the woman she presumed was Penelope. She had never seen her before.

“Gabrielle Delacour,” she introduced herself.

“Welcome to our house,” Penelope said with a welcoming smile.

“Thanks,” Harry said. “It’s good to see you again.”

“It’s better to see you awake and changing the world,” Penelope replied.

“Oh?” Harry asked.

“I had an interview today; Gringotts want me to transfer jobs.”

“Good,” Harry said cheerfully. “I’m glad that Grappleagus isn’t hanging around.”

“He, well, his underlings at least, speak very highly of you both. Gabrielle is rumoured to be frighteningly violent, while you have evidently managed to negotiate free banking for life.”

Gabrielle blushed demurely. “I’m not all *that* violent,” she said with an innocent smile.

“Right,” Percy said slowly. “And *I* go to work in tatty jeans and a dirty, crumpled t-shirt, smelling of doughnuts and stale beer. But, enough talk, would you care for a drink?”

“Please,” Gabrielle said, as they followed Percy into the dining room. There was a large oak table in the middle, with four chairs around it. Percy held out a chair for her, and she sat daintily, already in Princess mode.

Harry sat opposite her and smiled across the table.

“Wine?”

“Please,” she replied for both of them. “Harry has a new found interest in wine.”

“Really?” Percy asked eagerly. “I love wine; collecting it is my main hobby.”

“Don’t remind me,” Penelope’s voice echoed from the kitchen.

Percy grinned at the door as he pulled out a bottle from a large rack. “I think Lord Byron said it best when he said ‘ ‘Tis pity wine should be so deleterious, for tea and coffee leave us much more serious.’ ”

Gabrielle laughed softly, “I always preferred Homer, from the Odyssey. ‘Wine can of their wits the wise beguile, make the sage frolic, and the serious smile.’ ”

“A woman after my own heart,” Percy said with a grin. “Harry, you’ve managed to catch a champion here.”

“I think I was the one that was caught,” Harry said, smiling into her eyes. “Not that I’m complaining.”

“I should hope not,” Penelope said as she brought a wicker basket full of large slices of bread in, and placed it on the table in front of them.

“I was going to go for something fancy, but then I realised that you’d probably just want something you can eat a gallon of, so I’ve made some Spag-bol.”

“Brilliant,” Harry beamed.

“Spag-bol?” Gabrielle asked, not recognising the term.

“Spaghetti Bolognese,” Percy clarified. “Which is why I’m serving this rather splendid red. Mind you, the sauce has half a bottle of red in it already.”

“I’m hungry enough to eat a horse,” Harry admitted. “We’ve been flitting around since I woke up, and we’ve had about three hours sleep and one meal.”

“Then you’ve come to the right place,” Percy said conspiratorially. He looked around, as if afraid that he might be overheard. “My girlfriend is one of the few people on the planet who is a better cook than Mum.”

“Really?” Harry asked.

“No,” Penelope said as she carried a steaming pot into the room, placing it next to the bed. “But I can feed him.”

“And she does, I have had to start exercising to work off her wonderful meals.”

“Don’t stand to attention,” Penelope said as she brought the pasta and a large bowl of parmesan cheese into the room. “Dig in. Harry, you go first.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” he agreed eagerly, and piled a large amount of pasta and enough sauce to float a small ship onto his plate. Gabrielle was grateful that Penelope had cooked a lot, as she helped herself to a plate that was almost as big as Harry’s. She couldn’t remember the last proper meal she had eaten – apart from breakfast – and felt that was likely a cause of her unusual self-examination earlier.

“So,” Harry said, as they had all settled. “What do you know about orphanages?”

“Strange question,” Percy mused. “I know there aren’t enough, and that the ones we have are appalling. Apart from that, not much.”

Harry twirled some pasta onto his fork and looked thoughtful. “I mentioned a job for you, so I’ll lay it on the table, and you can tell me what you think.”

He paused to eat the pasta. “During my unfortunately elongated nap, Sirius did nothing with the Black family fortune, which is huge. He’s agreed that rather than not touch it, it would be much better if it was used for things that would make his family roll over in their graves. We’re going to make some of the Black properties into full-fledged orphanages, others into hotels for Muggles. So, what I want to hire you for is a supervisory position.

“It won’t be an easy job, as I’ll want you to try to break even – in that whatever money you can make from hotels and the like get poured back into the orphanages. You’ll have a lot of freedom, with only Gabrielle and me looking over your shoulder.

“You’ll have to learn a lot, both about how our laws work, and how Muggle laws work, so we’ll expect you to go on a hiring spree to start with. We want the brightest and the best working for us.



“At the same time, Sirius is going to enter High Society, using the social largesse generated by your work, and he’s going to help me turn it on its head – so that the only fashionable thing to do with money is to help those who haven’t got it.”

“You’re talking about total wealth redistribution?”

“That, and having the *hoi polloi* eating out of our hands. We want it so that any attempt by the Ministry to shut us down in some way gets smacked down without us having to do anything about it.”

Percy went silent and looked at Penelope for a long moment. “Salary?” he asked.

“Nine hundred a month,” Harry offered.

Percy’s eyebrows disappeared into his hairline. He carefully placed his wine glass back down on the table. “How much?” he croaked.

Harry grinned at him; it was such an inviting expression that Gabrielle couldn’t help smiling as well. She loved watching him.

“Don’t think you won’t earn it,” he said solemnly.

“He’ll accept, with one condition,” Penelope said clearly.

Harry turned to her.

“That you’ll accept that if he spends the night out, I go with him.”

“Of course,” Harry said, as if the idea that she wouldn’t would be preposterous. “I want him to be happy; a happy worker doesn’t mind putting in the work needed.”

“True,” Penelope agreed and smiled. “I take it we’ll be able to join the parties as well?”

“If you want,” Harry nodded. “We’ll let it be known that you control the purse strings.”

“I accept,” Percy said and smiled. He raised his glass. “To the future.”

Gabrielle raised her glass and smiled at Harry. “To the future,” she agreed.

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“I have to give a month’s notice,” Percy said.

“That should give me enough time to get everything organised. I’ll talk to you both long before that, anyway. I’ll probably see you at Gringotts, Penelope.”

“Probably,” she agreed with a smile.

“Thanks for a wonderful meal. I cannot remember the last time I ate like that... ever.”

“Me neither,” Gabrielle said. “I’m going to have to fly a few laps to work this one off. It was fantastic.”

“Thank you,” Penelope said. “You’re welcome anytime.”

“We’ll take you up on that,” he said. “I’m planning on having fun at school, but not really treating it as a boarding school anymore. When we find a place we like, we’ll live there and go to school every morning.”

“I think it’s a good idea,” Percy said approvingly. “You have no need to get any qualifications, but a formal education will stand you both in good stead for the rest of your lives.”

“I just hope that your mother feels the same way,” Harry said. “Somehow I don’t think she’ll accept my relationship with Gabbi quite as easily.”

“She might surprise you,” Percy corrected him. “Now, get off with you.”

Harry saluted and wrapped an arm around Gabrielle. “Bye,” they said in unison as they stepped into the fire and called out “the Burrow.”

He wrapped his arms around her girlfriend, but didn’t kiss her; he was feeling a little too full to do so. He felt her burrow into his chest and looked down at her. Under her bright eyes he could see a tinge of exhaustion, and felt a little guilty for not realising that she didn’t have eight years of sleep to keep her going.

They arrived together in the Burrow’s living room.

“I recognise that look,” Charlie said, in lieu of an official greeting. “They’ve just experienced one of Penelope’s feedings.”

Harry laughed. “Yep, we’ve had enough pasta to keep the giant squid happy and enough sauce to make him sleep for a month.”

“I do like Penelope,” Molly said happily.

“Neville,” Harry said, “it’s damn good to see you!”

“You too, Harry,” Neville said, climbing to his feet. He looked healthy, a little shorter than Harry, and still slightly plump. “It’s been a long time, but for you, I guess it’s only been a few days.”

“Exactly,” he grinned. “It’s really strange seeing all my friends grown up and congratulations on your engagement. You picked a real fox.”

Something flashed through Neville’s eyes, but was gone before Harry could identify it.

“Why don’t you two go for a walk,” Gabrielle suggested. “I need a quiet chat with Molly, Ginny and the others about the wedding.”

“Sure,” Harry agreed. “Walking off that meal sounds like a plan to me.” He led the Neville out of the house and through the garden, hopping casually onto the fence at the end.

“Did I mention that Hermione thinks that my girlfriend is a genius?”

“No,” Neville replied.

“I saw something in your eyes, but I didn’t know what it was. Gabrielle, on the other hand, knew exactly what it was, and what caused it, and has sent us out here to talk about it. We’re going to do that, because I don’t know what she looks like disappointed, and I have no wish to find out.”

Neville looked away. “Your girlfriend?” he asked.

“Ahh,” Harry said slowly. “So you’re worried about my reappearance doing something to Ginny?”

“She *did* have a crush on you,” Neville sighed.

“And she’s *marrying* you,” Harry pointed out bluntly. “Look, I don’t really know Ginny very well. Sure, I saved her life once, but to me she was just the sister of my best mate, nothing more, nothing less. As pretty as she is, she’s like a candle next to a *Lumos* spell if I compare her to my Gabrielle. And you, my friend, need to realise that you are insulting her by doubting her heart.”

“But she was so devastated when you were unconscious.”

“And then she grew out of it and got on with her life over the next eight years,” Harry said with an exasperated sigh. “Her crush faded away, you two started to date, and then you went on to ask her to marry you.”

“Yeah,” he smiled slightly. “I’m not normally this insecure, but well, you’re Harry Potter – *The* Harry Potter who wakes up from a coma and manages to snag Gabrielle Delacour – *The* Gabrielle Delacour – without blinking.”

“A few people have mentioned that Gabbi is special, and your ‘*The Gabrielle Delacour*’ backs it up. What’s up?” he asked curiously.

Neville smiled and seemed to relax. “Check out some of the back issues of *Witch Weekly*,” he suggested. “When you combine her looks with her Quidditch ability and her intelligence, she is exactly the sort of person they like. She did a bit of modelling for them, and I wouldn’t be surprised if half the boys in the country have some of her pictures.”

“Tasteful, I hope.”

“Of course, from what I hear happened when you woke up, it’s the first time she’s been seen not

wearing a shirt – she’s not even done a bikini shot for them.”

Harry grinned. “Sounds like someone has a crush.”

Neville shook his head violently. “I’m a photographer; I can appreciate the skill involved.”

“Right, that’s your story and you’re sticking to it,” Harry teased.

“Yep,” Neville grinned back. “I’ve been foolish, haven’t I?”

“Yes. I’d go in and grovel for a minute or two. Although, you might not have to, Gabrielle’s probably explained everything.”

“She has Hermione’s blessing then?”

Harry nodded.

“That’s quite remarkable. Hermione and Ron personally vetted everybody who visited you – they closed the list right down after the first few years. To be honest, mate, you were lucky.”

“I know,” Harry agreed. “I’m grateful, and I’m doing exactly what they wanted.”

“What is that?”

“Living life, Nev,” Harry grinned. “Come on, I’ve got a hankering for a hug, and you’re not the right person.”

“I could be,” Neville said and batted his eyelashes.

Harry laughed and pushed him away. “Not in a million years.”

“True,” Neville agreed. “Come on, I’ve got to make an apology. She might be shy and quiet, but when you get her wound up, well, the best thing to do is duck and cover.”

“Probably gets it from Mrs Weasley,” Harry suggested.

“Yeah,” Neville agreed. “Between her and Penelope, it’s no wonder I can’t lose weight. Mind you, Ginny’s not much better.”

“I’d suggest that perhaps she likes you this way,” Harry said. “Remember, the mind of a woman is a strange and mysterious place, and is not safe for navigation by mere males.”

Neville laughed. “Damn, I missed you,” he said.

Harry grinned and opened the kitchen door, ushering Neville in.

Neville walked in and straight up to Ginny. Whatever he said caused an instant smile to appear of Ginny’s face, and she hugged him.

“So, I distinctly remember hearing about hot chocolate,” Harry said to Mrs Weasley.

“I’ve got the milk simmering on the stove,” she said happily. “Sit and I’ll go get it.”

Harry dropped onto a couch and wasn’t surprised when Gabrielle sat on his lap. “There aren’t enough seats,” she told him.

“Only because you put one in the kitchen,” Charlie pointed out.

“Shush, you,” Gabrielle said to him.

Harry laughed. “Are you happy wrestling dragons for a living?” he asked.

“Very. Why?”

“Because if you ever want a different job, look me up. I’ve already got Fred and George working with me, and Percy’s going to start shortly. Penelope’s working on some suggestions I made to Grappleagus. Fred and George are going to start hiring shortly, and Percy will do the same. We’re going to raid the Ministry, the *Prophet*, and call up every Hogwarts graduate who has gone back to the Muggle world.”

“Why are you doing all this?” Ginny asked softly.

“To stop the Wizarding world from vanishing,” Gabrielle said from his lap. “Too many of the best people are leaving and not coming back. We want to keep them with us.”

“And we’ll make a fortune,” Harry grinned. “And we’re going to plough it back into socially responsible projects. The money isn’t important, but what we can do with it will be.”

“Can I quote you on that?” Ginny asked.

“Why?”

“I work for the *Quibbler* .”

“The what?”

“It’s the *other* Wizarding newspaper,” Gabrielle said. “They’re a little weird.”

“A little,” Ginny agreed. “My best friend’s dad owns it. I love working there.”

“Me too,” Neville added. “Lovegood, the editor, is battier than Dumbledore.”

“I’ll have to meet him,” Harry said with a smile. “Anyone who can out-crazy Dumbledore must be worthwhile. But no, you can’t quote me at the moment. You can have an interview, but my plans are strictly ‘family only’ at the moment.”

“Really?” she gasped. “An exclusive?”

“Sure,” he shrugged.

“This will kick the *Prophet* where it hurts,” Ginny said happily.

“Charlie,” Harry said, turning back to the other Weasley.

“I’ll remember,” he promised. “But really, I’m like Bill – I love what I’m doing.”

“That’s good to hear,” Arthur said cheerfully. “You have surprised us, Harry.”

“I tend to do that,” he agreed. “And I’d like to blame Gabrielle, but really, she’s just been hanging on while I’ve been dragging her around.”

“Hardly,” Gabrielle replied tartly.

Harry grinned over her head.

“Careful,” Molly said as she carried a large tray into the room. “It’s hot.”

Gabrielle shifted in his lap, before reaching out and taking two mugs.

“You’re remarkably flexible,” Molly noted.

“Years of dance lessons,” Gabrielle explained. “I practice three times a week, and I’m so happy Harry’s learnt to dance.”

“Really?” Neville asked in surprise. “You couldn’t at the Yule Ball.”

“Your first date,” Harry grinned.

“Yeah,” Neville said and smiled at Ginny – who smiled back.

“You do remember who my best friend is?”

“Hermione.”

“Exactly. I have no idea how she did it, but I can now dance, cook, and cast all sorts of spells. That’s why I’m going to be at Hogwarts next year, so I can learn what I know and what I don’t know properly.”

“And to have fun,” Gabrielle added, blowing on her chocolate.

“And to spend time with Gabbi,” Harry finished.

She turned and shot him a bright smile.

“So you don’t want to be Minister?” Molly asked. “Albus seemed to feel that you would love to do that.”

Harry shook his head. “Not even *slightly* interested, not now. Maybe later when I’ve got some more life experience, but it would be ridiculous for someone of my age with no qualifications to run. People would vote for me because of what I’ve done, not what I can do. It would be both dishonest and bad for everyone involved.”

Molly nodded slowly. “That does make a good deal of sense,” she admitted.

“It’s good to know your limitations,” Arthur agreed. “That sort of thing wouldn’t be good for me, either.”

“What happened outside of Hogwarts after I went into my nap?” he asked as he took a sip of the chocolate.

“It was a remarkable time,” Arthur said slowly.

“Yeah,” Charlie agreed. “We had a party in Romania that I still remember fondly. Your name was toasted to the sky and back. Even the dragons seemed to pick up on it.”

“Things were a little more restrained here, but for most people, it was a party. And then we turned up at work the next morning to find that a lot of pure-blood families had lost members, and that there were quite a few gaps in key places in the Ministry – so we had a lot of reorganisation, at Albus’ behest, and I ended up working for Madame Bones – the Director of Magical Law Enforcement. It was only a few years ago that I was able to escape back to my old job.”

“And about time too,” Molly agreed. “Arthur was coming home far too stressed for my liking. The extra money was nice, but I’d rather have a happy husband.”

Harry nodded and gently lifted the cup out of Gabrielle’s hand. She snuggled harder into him.

“With people like Lucius Malfoy dead, Fudge lost a lot of internal influence, and he hasn’t really gained it back yet. The public think he’s doing a good enough job, and haven’t voted him out – yet – especially as he still seems to have Dumbledore’s backing.”

“What about the economy?”

“It’s a mess,” Neville said. “And no one seems to want to hear it. Ginny and I were lucky to get jobs. Padma and Parvati are unemployed, and are thinking of heading into the Muggle world. There are no jobs available as students leave Hogwarts.”

“Really?” Harry said, “Can you get hold of them tomorrow? Tell them I want to talk to them urgently.”

“May I ask what for?” Ginny said.

“I’m opening a restaurant.”

“You are?” Molly asked.

“Aren’t there times when you’d like to go out somewhere special, and eat food prepared just for you, and know that it’s of high quality?”

“Well, yes, but we can’t normally afford those sorts of places.”

“Ahh,” Harry grinned. “The idea here isn’t to cater to the rich, but to the normal middle class. I’m going to be hiring a house-elf as the head chef, and I can guarantee that his cooking is almost as good as yours, Mrs Weasley. We’re going to serve goblin food as well as human food.”

Molly nodded slowly. “That would be nice,” she admitted. “Although it will be interesting to see a house-elf run a kitchen.”

“If anyone can, it will be Dobby,” Harry predicted.

“Is there anything you’re not doing?” Ginny asked with a small laugh.

“Running for Minister,” Harry replied. “Apart from that, nope. I’m just having fun and going for it with a splash. You know, before my nap, I always kinda knew that I was going to have to deal with Voldemort. Now that he’s gone, I need something else to focus on. Gabbi will take most of my attention, and as to the rest, well, it’s just for fun.”

“When was the last time you slept?”

“I had a few hours this morning,” Harry admitted with a yawn, as the effect of the warm milk hit him.

“Right, you two, home,” Molly said sternly, looking at Neville and Ginny. “Harry, you can take the guest room – it’s in Ron’s old room.”

“You do know that…” he trailed off uncertainly.

“Hermione warned me that you are an adult now, and that she approves. That’s good enough for me.”

“Thanks,” he said, standing with Gabrielle in his arms. “She’s been running on adrenaline most of the afternoon and evening.”

“You’ve got a good one there,” Molly said. “I’ve had my eye on her for years, but she’s always acted in the best interest of others.” She sighed, “I just wish she’d persuaded Percy to get married like she did Ron and Bill.”

“She did touch on that earlier,” Harry said with a small laugh. “She was quite persuasive, as she dealt with Penny’s reasons not to get married.”



Molly beamed. “I do so love weddings. Take your girlfriend to bed, and I’ll have a nice breakfast waiting for you when you wake up.”

“Night, Neville, Ginny. It was good to see you again. Charlie, Mr Weasley, I’ll see you in the morning.” He leaned over and kissed Molly on the cheek.

She smiled at him and made a scooting motion.

The trip up to Ron’s old room was full of memories; he opened the door and smiled. The orange had been replaced with a soft cream, the room expanded so that the king-sized bed in the centre of the room didn’t dominate it.

“Gabrielle,” he whispered. “You need to get ready for bed.”

She slowly opened her eyes. “Only if you’re going to be in there with me,” she said stubbornly.

“We have a bed,” he pointed out.

“Undress me?”

“Not until we’ve played the cards,” he said with a smile.

She looked sleepily amused and padded over to a chest of drawers and pulled out a t-shirt. She rolled her eyes at him and turned her back, stripping quickly and pulling the t-shirt on.

Harry kicked off his shoes and socks, pulled off his t-shirt and undid his jeans, letting everything fall into a mess.

Gabrielle climbed into bed the same time he did. He went to kiss her goodnight, only to find that she was already asleep. He laughed under his breath and then kissed her forehead; it didn’t take him long before he was asleep with her.

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It was the knocking on the door that woke him up. “What?” he called groggily.

“We were wondering if you were planning another eight-year nap,” Charlie’s voice echoed back. “Breakfast’s in half an hour. Mum got Dumbledore to bring a change of clothes over for you both this morning; they’re outside your door.”

“Cheers, Charlie.”

Harry looked down to see a pair of bright brown eyes looking up at him.

“This is the first, last and only time that we sleep in the same bed platonically,” she said quietly.

He blinked at her.

“Not one single fairy-tale Princess ever did this voluntarily. The night before we didn’t really sleep, last night I was too tired, but I won’t have that level of exhaustion again. So either we sleep in public – Gryffindor Common Room or something, or you get used to the idea that we’re going to have a hell of a lot of sex. The idea of a ‘chaste nap’ at night is ridiculously cliché and there are no clichés in *my* fairytale.”

“This is another of those things I should be upset about, but aren’t, right? ‘Oh no, a beautiful girl wants to have sex with me, oh, woe is me.’”

“Exactly,” she agreed.

“You don’t think that we’re moving too fast?”

She snorted eloquently. “I’m a Princess, you’re a Prince.”

He smiled slightly at her. “Sometimes I wish I had your belief.”

“You do, Harry,” she replied. “You just have to learn to trust it.”

He looked at her for a long moment. His brain told him firmly that this was illogical; that you just couldn’t make a lifetime’s worth of commitment in such a short time; you simply couldn’t make the decision to sleep with someone just like that.

His heart told his mind it was being incredibly stupid.

He tried very hard to ignore the third voice, the one that told the other two to shut up, and that he should just ‘go for it.’

The second voice won. He opened his mouth, but she shook her head.

“See,” she whispered as she kissed him quickly. “You just have to trust.”

“I do.”

Gabrielle pushed up from him and climbed out of bed. “I’d recommend that you spend today remembering some of the things the boys taught you,” she advised cheerfully. She opened the door and pulled the clothes in quickly, dumping them next to his feet.

She looked at him for a second before deliberately sliding the t-shirt up, shaking her head to free her hair, letting it fall down her back.

“I am the luckiest Prince in the world,” he whispered as he stared at her. Wearing only a pair of high-cut French lace knickers, she promptly redefined his ideal of what a woman should be.

“This one’s free,” she said, “tonight we’ll play cards.”

He looked at her and then tried to laugh as she shrugged dramatically, but the laugh caught in his

throat.

“Come here,” he ordered.

She looked at him thoughtfully.

“Gabbi, come here,” he said again. “We’ve got ten minutes before we have to be downstairs, and you don’t get to tease me like this.”

She didn’t move, and he suddenly understood. He rolled forward and grabbed her, pulling her on top of him, feeling the way her breasts crushed against his chest, the heat of her nearly-naked body pressed against his. He slid his knee up, between her legs, and revelled in the feeling of her velvet soft skin that made the lace of her underwear feel coarse and harsh.

“My Prince,” she whispered proudly.

“You are so dangerous,” he whispered back.

“Would you want me any other way?”

“No,” he admitted. “I wouldn’t want you to change.”

“I’m *your* Princess, Harry, and I’ll be your Princess for as long as you want me.”

“I’ll take the rest of your life for starters, and then we’ll review the options for eternity.”

Her laugh made her wiggle with delight against him; she kissed him firmly, but didn’t deepen the kiss. “Now that you know what’s waiting for you, can we get ready for the day?” she asked brightly.

He groaned in protest. She placed her hands on his chest and pushed off him easily. “Did you know that I can pole-dance?” she asked. “I got my dance teacher to show me how.”

He shook his head in awe. “I don’t know what I did to deserve you, but I hope it never changes.”

“It won’t. Sooner or later it will sink in that you *are* my Prince, and then everything will be clear.”

He climbed out of bed and ran through several disgusting thoughts to get his body back under control.

“I’d ask, but I don’t think I want to know,” she said as she looked at the clothes that had been supplied. “At least they choose some good clothes for me,” she said happily. “Want to do up my shirt again?”

“No. My self-control isn’t perfect. If I touch you again, we’ll never make it downstairs for breakfast.”

She smiled at him cheerfully.

“But I will undress you tonight.”

Her smile turned several watts higher.

“Okay,” she agreed and passed him a pair of jeans and a black t-shirt. “Hermione has surprisingly good taste. Every year you were asleep, she bought new clothes for you. She wanted to make sure you had something to wear when you woke up. I was able to help a few times, but not as much as I wanted.”

Harry nodded and changed his underwear – modesty seemed redundant at the moment – after using his wand to cast a cleaning charm on himself.

“Do me?” Gabrielle asked innocently.

He growled at her. “I’ll ignore the double entendre, and presume that you mean the cleaning charm.”

He dressed quickly, and settled on the edge of the bed to watch Gabrielle put her clothes on. She looked him in the eye as she started to move in a subtle motion, a barely detectable movement that seemed to combine a small amount of dance, a touch of desire, and an expression he didn’t recognise on a conscious level. She turned slowly, her hair shimmering in the early morning light as she continued to captivate him while barely moving.

She bent at the waist, picking her bra off of the bed, before flicking her head back, causing her hair to arch over her head, and for a brief moment her look changed – to one of total want and need – and that moment was locked in his mind for ever, a frozen slice he would never forget, never beat, his idea of perfection in a pose that was so subtle yet so dramatic at the same time.

The look on her face, as her hair seemed to defy gravity, the way her breasts stood high on her chest, was locked inside him, a memory that would power a chorus line of Patronuses for a decade. He knew, without doubt, that he could make a fortune selling the memory, but that he would never share it with anyone else.

It was his, and his alone, just as she was his and his alone.

And just like that the moment was over and another began, as she continued her subtle movements, using them to get dressed; it was dance that covered rather than uncovered, but still managed to be the sexiest thing he had ever imagined.

“Any doubts?” she asked.

“You’ve won.”

“I love winning,” she replied happily. “Let’s go eat.”

“After what we ate last night, I’m surprised I’m hungry.”

She walked out the door and he followed her down to the kitchen.

“Good morning,” Molly said brightly. “Sleep well?”

“I slept draped over Harry, with my head on his shoulder, and his arms around me. It was the best night’s sleep of my life. I didn’t have any bad dreams, and my mind didn’t go nuts on me, because my Prince was there holding me, protecting me, and every time I drifted into consciousness, I could hear his heart-beat, reassuring me,” Gabrielle said softly.

Harry gulped and pulled her into a tight hug, burying his face into her hair.

Molly surreptitiously wiped away a tear from her cheek and busied herself at the counter. Charlie and Arthur shared a long look and a stayed quiet.

“Nightmares?” Harry asked.

“Not exactly, more times when my mind wouldn’t stop and what I was thinking would end up in my dreams. It was the only time that I would worry that you wouldn’t be my Prince and I’d have no one who could ever understand me, no one who could ever love me as I need to be loved.”

He gently raised her head and kissed her softly.

“Food,” she mumbled, and moved over to the table.

“I hope you’re hungry,” Molly said. “It’s been far too long since you’ve had one of my breakfasts, Harry, and for you as well, Gabrielle.”

“I’m looking forward to it. We’ve got our appetites,” Gabrielle said cheerfully, her earlier vulnerability gone.

Harry was starting to understand her a lot better. She had felt that vulnerable and had told the truth, but had also said it there to help the others in the room understand her a bit more. If there was one thing he was sure of, it was that life with her was never going to be boring.

And it was a little surprising that the very idea of sharing a life with her was so appealing. It seemed to make sense, and while he knew that his pre-nap self wouldn’t have felt that way, it no longer mattered – he wasn’t that person. He was a new person, and so what if he was diving headfirst into uncertain waters? It was his life, it felt right, and it was definitely what he wanted.

“So what are you two planning today?” Charlie asked.

“Well, we’ve got a meeting with Professor McGonagall and Professor Flitwick to discuss classes first,” Harry said, as he started to dig into the huge plate of food Molly placed in front of him. “Then we’re going to talk to Dobby about the restaurant. We hope we’ll be done by about ten so we can drop in on Professor Dumbledore to discuss the party on Saturday. Then we’re meeting

Remus and Tonks for lunch, and finally we'll meet up with Bill and Fleur, and grab the Floo to France so I can meet Gabbi's parents."

Gabrielle turned her head and favoured him with one of her special smiles.

Charlie whistled under his breath. "I'd hate to see you with your Veela charm turned on," he mumbled.

"I can arrange it, if you wish," she said perkily.

"No, thank you," Arthur said jovially. "I'm quite happy to have my brain in one piece, and I have no wish to be on the blunt end of one of Molly's saucepans."

"Smart man," Charlie muttered. "I'll pass as well."

"It's good to see that I have at least taught you something," Molly said. "Eat up, everyone."

There was a companionable silence around the room as they all devoured the breakfast Molly had cooked.

Eventually, Harry groaned and leaned back in his chair. "If that doesn't last us until lunch, nothing will."

"I agree," Gabrielle said. "And we're going to have to enjoy your hospitality for a few more minutes before we're physically able to even move."

"Yeah," Charlie agreed. "Great breakfast, Mum."

"Sadly," Arthur said, "I do have to go to work, but then, I do have many wonderful years of breakfasts that have given me the ability to eat and still move." He stood and walked over and kissed Molly on the cheek, before he vanished into the living room with a smile and a wave.

"He's such a wonderful man," Gabrielle said.

"He is," Molly agreed happily. She sighed cheerfully. "It is really good that you are awake again."

"Agreed," Charlie said. "You know that you two are plastered over every newspaper and magazine?"

Harry shook his head, "Not really surprised. Still, I'll bet the text is about me, but all the photos concentrate on Gabbi."

"Not quite, a lot of them are of you as well. I believe that you're 'hot'."

"Why thank you," Harry purred. "But I'm taken."

“Git,” Charlie laughed. “That was not my description, it was *Witch Weekly* .”

“How are they treating Gabbi?”

“Pretty well, actually. The press seems to like the idea of Harry Potter and Gabrielle Delacour. There’s not really been a celebrity pairing before, but now you have the Boy-Who-Napped and the mysterious French model who woke him, so obviously they’re nuts about the two of you.

“There are a lot of rumours about how you got together, but your comment about moving fast means that the press are talking about how smooth you must be – everything fits into their preconceived notions of how you should act.”

Harry nodded. “Good, having positive press will help later. And if they start printing lies about Gabbi, I’ll sue them out of existence.”

Charlie and Molly laughed.

“So, when are Ginny and Neville getting married?”

“Next month,” Molly answered. “In the local church here. You two, are of course, invited.”

“Thanks, we’ll be there.”

“We will,” Gabrielle agreed.

“Right, it’s time for you two to get moving. Charlie, I believe you wanted to go see some friends today?”

“I swear you were a drill sergeant in a previous life,” Charlie muttered as he stood. “Catch you on the flip side,” he said as he popped out.

“I need to learn to Apparate,” Harry said. “I’ll talk to Professor McGonagall about that later. But for now, we’ll use the Floo again. Thanks for putting us up, Mrs Weasley.”

“It’s Molly, and you are both very welcome back any time.”

Harry stood and hugged her from one side so that Gabrielle could do the same from the other.

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“I didn’t think it was still so early,” Harry confessed. “I thought it was around ten.”

“Molly is always an early riser, and you haven’t got a watch,” Gabrielle replied. “Luckily I don’t normally need much sleep.”

“And I’ve had enough of sleeping.” He opened the doors to the Great Hall and bowed dramatically to her.

“Why thank you,” she replied with a graceful curtsey and entered the room.

“Good morning,” Professor Dumbledore called from the professors’ table.

“Morning,” Harry replied as they walked up the centre.

“You’re just in time for breakfast.”

Harry playfully recoiled. “After eating at Percy and Penelope’s last night, and having one of Molly’s breakfasts this morning, I don’t even want to *think* of food.”

Albus laughed merrily, his eyes twinkling happily. “I completely understand. Mrs Weasley is one of the few people who can give a house-elf a run for their money. Why don’t you have a seat at the Gryffindor table? Professor McGonagall will see you after we’ve finished.”

Harry nodded and guided Gabrielle over to the table. “Hi,” he said cheerfully to the awe-struck students. “I’m Harry Potter and I’m going to be reclaiming my place in Gryffindor for the final year of school.”

There was no response from the students.

“Is there a curse on them?” he asked Gabrielle.

She shook her head. “I don’t think I’m using Veela charm, either.”

“You think I should pull a prank?”

“No!” McGonagall said in a voice that was far too firm. He swivelled to look at her, as did practically everyone else – and they were treated to the unexpected site of Minerva McGonagall blushing.

“Sorry,” she apologised. “I just had a truly awful thought of what would have happened if Lily Potter had decided to join in with the Marauders.”

Every professor who had been teaching at the school during the time of the Marauders shuddered dramatically – including the Headmaster.

“What a wonderful idea,” Harry said, forcing his eyes wide. “I hadn’t thought of using Gabrielle’s help.” He dropped to his knees in front of her. “Fair and beautiful Princess, grant me but one boon, that of your intellect and cunning nature in this year.”

Gabrielle leant down and lightly kissed him. “Silly Prince,” she said just loud enough to be heard. “Of course I’m going to help.”

“We are so screwed,” McGonagall groaned, before clapping her hands over her mouth and looking appalled at what she had just said.



“Speaking of which,” Harry said as he got to his feet. “I’ve heard that a whole generation of Hogwarts students has had to do without the products of Zonko’s.”

“Yeah,” one of the boys at the Gryffindor table said, “I heard all these stories from my brothers, and when I get here, nothing!”

“Then you’ll be delighted to know that I’ve gone into partnership with the infamous Weasley Twins – we’re going to be opening a store in the next few months.”

“Brilliant,” the boy said. “Zach Masters, Gryffindor Quidditch captain. We already know that Gabrielle is a brilliant Chaser, and we’re in need of two – you wouldn’t be thinking of trying out, would you?”

“I’m certainly going to give it a shot,” Harry said, as some of the kids shifted so that they could sit down. “The only broom I’ve been on is Gabbi’s Lightning Bolt, and things have changed a lot since my day.”

“Most of us are still using Firebolts,” Zach replied. “They might not have the speed, but they are much easier to control.”

Harry turned to Gabrielle. “Can you teach me to play Chaser on a slower broom to start with, and we’ll move on after that?”

“Sure, I’ve got my old broom floating around somewhere. Yours is in your room.”

Harry nodded and turned back to Zach, when the doors to the Great Hall opened again, and a short portly man strode him, flanked by a team of Aurors. Following a step behind was a tall, thin man with a silver-headed cane and long blond hair – an older looking Draco Malfoy. Slightly behind them was Percy Weasley – who winked at Harry, before looking at Malfoy and then back at Harry. He pulled his hand from an imaginary pocket and made a winding gesture with an imaginary watch.

“Déjà vu,” Harry muttered as the group walked up the centre.

Gabrielle nodded. “You got a plan?”

“Nope – gonna wing it.”

“Perfect.”

He flashed her a grin, and turned to watch.

“Cornelius?” Albus asked, standing. “I didn’t expect you this morning.”

“I’ve come to congratulate Mr Potter,” the Minister said pompously.

“For proving that you are an idiot?” Harry asked cheerfully. “You’re welcome, although I didn’t

really need to do that much. I can't say how surprised I was that we're still being led by an incompetent buffoon. Still consorting with scum, I see."

"Potter," Malfoy hissed. "At least I don't consort with half-breeds."

"Racism is a very unattractive trait, Malfoy," Harry replied calmly. "And showing that you share your father's narrow-mindedness in public also shows that you are even more incompetent than he was – *he* at least knew how to apply power. Admittedly, it was done badly, and misdirected as he worshiped at the feet of that half-blood bastard, but at least Lucius had some ability and subtlety."

"Don't you talk about my father like that," Draco spat, his face an unattractive shade of red. "You killed him."

"*Au contraire*, my little ferret, his worship of Voldemort killed him."

Fudge was looking horrified as he was suddenly aware that Draco was not in complete control, and was saying things that Fudge did not want attached to him in public.

"Still, you are at least proof that not everyone grew up well over the last eight years. Of all my classmates I've seen, you are by far the most disappointing. Did you marry pug-face Parkinson?"

Draco drew his wand.

"Put it away," Harry said tiredly. "You're embarrassing yourself and the Minister. You have the entire staff of Hogwarts and most of the students pointing their wands at you. If today's your luckiest day, you'll be able to get off one curse, which will most likely miss, before you are knocked out, and then I'll destroy you legally, and then I'll destroy Fudge for bringing you into my presence."

"Put the wand down, Malfoy," one of the Aurors – a tall black man with a shaved head – growled.

"I hate you," Malfoy spat.

"And you're going to get me," Harry added with a bored tone. "Just like you tried to get me at school, but never managed it – only this time Daddy's dead, Voldemort's dead, hell, even Snape's dead, and you're going to have to do it all on your own."

"Hey, do you remember when Hermione punched you and you cried like a six-year-old? Good memory, that one – you know, it was only last year for me. Or that time you insulted a Hippogriff, then tried to have it put down by crying to your daddy, or when you got Daddy to buy your way onto the Quidditch team because you weren't good enough?"

Draco glared at him as hard as he could, shaking with rage. He suddenly started to move, raising his wand like a snake striking, pointing at Harry.

"*Avada Keda ...*" he started, only to end with a scream as his wand hand caught on fire.

Percy cast a silencing charm on Draco as he collapsed to the floor, still screaming and thrashing his flaming appendage about.

Harry turned to Gabrielle, a stern look on his face.

“What?” she asked innocently.

“Gabrielle,” he said firmly, “did you just launch a fireball at the ferret?”

“Me?” she asked, her eyes wide. “Would *I* do something like that?”

He nodded.

“No one harms my Prince,” she said, losing the innocent act and a grim expression taking control of her face.

Harry kissed her lightly.

“Miss Delacour,” Albus called down from the staff table. “Do you think you could extinguish the fire? I’m afraid that the smell of burnt flesh might put the children off their breakfast.”

“I’m sorry,” Gabrielle apologised. She waved her hand and the flame went out.

Harry walked over to Fudge, who was holding his bowler hat in his hands and turning it nervously. “Exactly why did your companion try to kill me?” Harry demanded.

“Er, I, er,” Fudge said, his mind obviously blank.

“Might I suggest we take this to my office?” Albus suggested.

“Excellent idea,” Harry agreed.

“Auror Shackbolt,” Percy said. “I believe that Mr Malfoy should be arrested for attempted murder, don’t you agree, Minister?”

Fudge looked down at the crying Malfoy and nodded hurriedly. “Absolutely.”

“Oh, Mr Shackbolt,” Percy continued. “I do believe that we require a thorough psychological examination of him. We’ll give the Auror department a month before we start trial proceedings, correct, Minister?”

“Oh yes, capital idea, capital.”

The four of them walked directly to Dumbledore’s office, accompanied by two Aurors, one of them who looked familiar to Harry.

As soon as the door shut, the two Aurors stood by the door, their faces implacable. Harry turned

to Percy and hugged him, then moved out the way, as Gabrielle kissed him on the cheek.

“That was brilliant,” Harry said. “Hermione will love getting to work on him!”

“Thank you,” Percy said modestly.

“Weatherby, what is the meaning of this?” Fudge demanded.

“It’s Weasley, you idiot, and yes, Arthur is my father, not that you ever bothered to check whether you even had my name right!” Percy said as he rounded on his boss. “And that was me eliminating yet another idiot from your social circle. When we walked in, I asked Harry to wind him up, knowing that Malfoy would react like the brainless idiot he is.”

“Mr Malfoy is a trusted advisor,” Fudge blustered.

“Only because he bribed you,” Percy sneered. “Now be a good little politician and sit down while the intelligent people are talking.”

“How dare you!”

“Sit!” Percy roared.

“Arrest him,” Fudge demanded.

“I seem to have gone temporarily deaf, how about you, Sturgis?”

“Deaf as a politician, Tonks,” Sturgis agreed.

Percy smirked at the Minister.

“Albus,” Fudge protested.

“I’m afraid,” Dumbledore said, his eyes twinkling, “that I have had a lot of time to think over the last day, as it was pointed out to me that I was becoming a puppet master, and that is not an epitaph I desire on my tombstone. I’m going to sit back and enjoy the show.”

Fudge growled and sat down. “I’m going to....”

“No, you’re not,” Percy interrupted. “You see, as you might have noticed, I’m no longer being a sycophant, you disgusting individual. In fact, I handed in my resignation earlier this morning. I’ve been placed in charge of the Black family fortune by Harry, and I’ll be helping Sirius Black wield the power and influence of that name.”

Fudge paled.

“Hey,” Harry said as a thought hit him. “You think you’re going to have time to write a book?”

“You are my employer,” Percy replied. “What I do is up to you.”

“True,” Harry agreed. “In that case, I’d love to read your insider’s view of what happened over the past ten years -- you know, what the movers and shakers within the Ministry really thought and did. I’m sure it would be a best seller.”

“I could talk about donations,” Percy mused. “And maybe point out some of the Manors that were taken from suspected Death Eaters and given to other people, and then point out just how many people were sent to Azkaban for no reason.”

Fudge went completely white and opened and shut his mouth like a fish.

“But I might not have time to do that, Harry,” Percy said reluctantly.

“I guess it depends on the Minister,” Gabrielle said. “I really don’t like people who associate with scum who try to kill my Prince, so I’m going to make this clear. You stay out of our way, and you might get to keep some of the pretty toys you’ve acquired – and your dignity.” She lowered her voice and glared at him. “Stand in our way and we will destroy you, and you will end up penniless, begging for scraps on a street corner, shunned by all. We know where your little secrets are buried, we know what bribes you took, what evidence you hid, we know it all – and when we use it, we’ll use my reputation, and Harry’s reputation, and the press will eat it out of our hands.

“So what’s it going to be, Fudge?”

The Minister of Magic looked like he was about to cry.

“Are you going to be a good puppy?”

Fudge nodded so hard his hat would have fallen off, if he’d been wearing it.

“Then leave, go back to your job, and do it well, because we’ll be watching – and if you are a bad puppy, we will take you down, hard, like we did Malfoy – we don’t fool around.”

Fudge nodded again, clearly terrified of the witch.

“Leave. Now, before my disgust overcomes my common sense.”

Fudge got to his feet and bolted out of the room.

“Do you think he wants us to follow?” Tonks asked.

“Nah,” Harry said. “I think he’s got other things on his mind.”

Tonks grinned at him.

Albus sighed. “I take it you don’t like Mr Malfoy?”

Percy settled down on a chair. “Take a seat, you two,” he ordered the Aurors, before turning to Harry.

“From what Ron and Hermione told me, Draco took his father’s death hard – and blamed you for it, vocally. Unfortunately for him, with Voldemort dead, he had no support left in the school – even Parkinson seemed relieved, although I do think her relief was partly due to inheriting her family money.

“Malfoy left school in the sixth year and transferred to Durmstrang, where his money and reputation meant that he was feted and allowed to do what ever he wanted. He re-appeared three years ago and started buying his way back into power and trading on the family name.

“Fudge welcomed him with open arms – and open pockets – and things were almost back to how they used to be at the Ministry. They started a small campaign against you, and made several attempts to take control of you from Albus.”

“They did?” Albus asked in surprise. “I certainly wasn’t aware of it.”

“They weren’t as subtle as they thought, and pretty much ignored me. Hermione and I talked, and we soon started to play games against them. Orders got lost in paperwork, and I was berated many times for my incompetence,” he grinned. “When I got into work this morning, Malfoy was already there, talking to Fudge about you being awake. I’d mentioned previously that when you did wake up, you’d be shocked, disoriented, and an emotional mess.”

“Which I probably should have been,” Harry agreed, “if I hadn’t had some amazing friends.”

“Exactly,” Percy nodded. “So I had a quick Floo call with Hermione, and she suggested that Fudge and Malfoy came to Hogwarts this morning to congratulate you – and that you should try and wind Malfoy up. She was pretty sure that his years of hating you, combined with the jealousy of you already landing Gabrielle, would make him react in a predictable fashion.

“I made the suggestion to Fudge, including pointing out how good it would make him look, and Malfoy was quick to volunteer to come along.”

“You set him up,” Tonks said admiringly.

“I’m not sure that I approve of such a dangerous strategy, though,” Albus said. “A Killing Curse could have hit anyone.”

Percy snorted. “Tonks, Sturgis, Kingsley and I were all expecting it, and he normally wouldn’t have got the A of *Avada* out, but we all saw Gabrielle was ready, so we let her deal with it.”

“Yeah,” Tonks agreed. “It seemed a lot more fitting, especially as his wand was destroyed.”

“That was the idea,” Gabrielle admitted. “His behaviour was easy to predict, I had the fireball ready, and at that range, missing his hand was out of the question.”

“Good call,” Harry agreed proudly. “Is this going to cause you any problems, Percy?”

“Oh, Fudge will pout, but Malfoy was really his last prominent supporter – apart from Albus, of course.”

“Said support which I believe it is time to rescind,” Albus said, an amused expression on his face. “You know, I’ve often wondered what it would be like to lose my control, and I have come to a rather startling conclusion.”

“Oh?” Tonks asked.

“That it is going to be a lot of fun; I can watch the fireworks from a safe distance.”

“Good to hear,” Percy said. “Anyway, I need to get back to the office and check that Fudge doesn’t do anything stupid.”

“Yeah, we should go as well,” Tonks agreed. “Still on for lunch, Harry?”

“Yep. Hogsmeade?”

“We’ll see you there. Remus gets out of class at midday, so it shouldn’t be a problem.”

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# Happily Ever After

## Chapter 5

Harry watched Percy and the two Aurors walk out of Dumbledore's office. "Fun morning," he said.

"Indeed," Albus agreed. "You do seem to have made a lot of waves, Harry."

"And I'm going to make more," Harry said. "No one ever doubted your motives, just your methods."

"As I am now seeing. You two should find Minerva in her room."

"Tell me something," Harry said, "have you ever tried Goblin food?"

"Most piquant," Dumbledore said with a nod. "With the right protective potions though, it can be excellent."

"Good. I'm going to try and poach one of your employees after the meeting."

"I believe that Remus is more than happy as my Defence Professor."

"Not him," Harry said, rolling his eyes. "Dobby. I need a chef for my restaurant."

Dumbledore stared at him for a long moment before he began to chuckle. "I do need to get out of that habit," he admitted. "I'll allow it on one condition."

"Which is?" Gabrielle asked.

"That you allow me to dine there on the opening night."

"I think we can arrange that," Harry said. "We'll pop back and see you before lunch, so we can talk about the party on Saturday."

Dumbledore nodded. "I've got the Head Boy and Girl working on it already."

Harry smiled. "Thanks. Do you want them here?"

Dumbledore shook his head. "You two are a special case; I don't want to drag any more students out of class. Now, hurry along, you don't want to be late."

Harry nodded and took Gabrielle's hand, guiding her out. "It's a little strange how quiet the school can be when everyone is in class."

She nodded and looked surprised as he opened a door and ushered her in.

“A cupboard?” she asked.

He smirked and charmed the door shut. “McGonagall can wait a few minutes. I have to thank you for saving my life.”

Gabrielle opened her mouth and shut it again as she changed her mind. “You do,” she agreed.

He reached out slowly; brushing his fingers against her cheek, then slid his hand around her neck and pulled her against him. He kissed her slowly, enjoying the incredibly smooth texture of her lips, the way she felt against him, the way her arms went around his neck – and how it caused her to stand on her tiptoes.

He broke the kiss and looked into her eyes as he slowly slid his hand down her back and approached her derriere.

The look in her eyes was a mixture of pride, desire and want; there wasn't a hint of doubt or desire to stop.

He kissed her again as he ran his hand over her bum and pulled her tightly against him. Gabrielle mumbled approvingly, and then kissed him hard, her tongue slipping between his lips and sliding over his. He slid his other hand down and pulled her harder against him, since she seemed to up the intensity in her kiss.

“Merlin,” he whispered against her lips. “I'm tempted to skip the rest of the meetings today and just go to bed.”

She smiled and lightly kissed him again. “Duty first, play later.”

“You have an amazing arse.”

Gabrielle laughed. “Thank you. I could feel how much you were enjoying it.”

Harry smiled bashfully at her.

“It's a good thing. Now come on. I've been thanked - it's time we get this show on the road. The sooner we can get through this, the sooner I can break out the cards.”

Harry looked at her. “You look fine,” he said.

“You were a good boy and left my hair alone,” she praised. “This is one of those things you wanted to do, isn't it?”

He nodded. “One of the many.”

“And it's not a one-time occurrence?”

“I hope not. There's a bit of a thrill about doing it here.”

Gabrielle nodded and followed him as he undid the charms on the door and led her up to McGonagall's classroom.

The professor was sitting comfortably at her desk, marking reams of parchment.

"Good morning," she said. "I'm afraid Professor Flitwick couldn't join us this morning."

"I can't believe you'd think that we'd target you," Harry said to her with a teasing grin, referring to her earlier protestations in the Great Hall.

"Don't remind me," McGonagall sighed. "I have had the other professors teasing me this morning."

Harry pulled up a couple of chairs and sat down. "So, do we have a decent Potions professor now?"

"We do indeed, Harry. With Severus dead, Albus tried to hire an old Professor, but he didn't want to give up his retirement, so we ended up with a recent Hogwarts graduate, and she is doing a wonderful job of inspiring the pupils."

"And is she as biased as Snape was?"

"Not at all," McGonagall said with a smile. "Slytherin hasn't really recovered from the deaths of the parents of a lot of its students. It seemed to drive home the point that following a Dark Lord is generally a very bad idea."

Harry nodded.

"That doesn't mean that we've had it our own way," McGonagall sighed. "We haven't won the Quidditch Cup since Fred, George, Angelina and Alicia all left."

"We're going to put a stop to that," Gabrielle said. "Give me a week with Harry and he'll knock the spots off the other Chasers."

McGonagall smiled. "I saw that you met my captain. He did offer to give up the captaincy for you, by the way. You are his Quidditch hero."

"I've not got time for that," Harry said. "My situation here is unique, and I'm going to have to act that way. I have too many friends to see outside of Hogwarts."

"And far too many pokers in the fire," Gabrielle added. "We've got Fudge under our control until we find someone we like to replace him."

"Hermione contacted me this morning to keep me apprised," McGonagall said. "Normally I'd disagree, but I have seen the sad state of the economy – my niece has been unemployed for several months – and I don't want to lose more people to the Muggle world."

“By the time our projects are up and running,” Gabrielle said, “we’re going to have to start recruiting Muggles, as there won’t be enough wizards.”

“I wish you nothing but good fortune.”

“Thank you,” Harry said. “So, what classes do you suggest I take?”

“Practical Magic to start with; that covers things like Portkey creation, Apparation, advanced Floo usage, and other spells of that ilk.”

“I’m already taking it,” Gabrielle added.

“Sounds good,” Harry said.

“The rest are pretty standard,” McGonagall said, as she passed him a piece of paper. “I’ve put you in the same classes as Miss Delacour where I could.”

Harry scanned down the paper. “That’s perfect,” he agreed. “It’s going to be fun learning things without Snape, without Malfoy, and without wondering if I’m actually going to survive the year.”

“And I hope to see an improvement in your grades.”

“I don’t think that Gabbi will let me get bad grades.”

“A Prince should as smart as he is brave,” Gabrielle said firmly. “You will need wisdom and intelligence to lead people properly.”

“Not quite how I would have put it,” McGonagall said dryly, “but the sentiment is correct.”

“Thanks for your help, Professor,” Harry said as he stood. “You’ll save me a dance on Saturday?”

“I’d be honoured,” she said. “When are you two planning on joining classes properly?”

“Probably Monday,” Harry admitted. “There’s a lot to set up, but once we put things in motion, it should calm down.”

“I’ll look forward to seeing you then.”

“Thanks, Professor.”

“Where to now?” Gabrielle asked, as they exited the classroom.

“Kitchen, to talk to Dobby.”

“Harry Potter, sir, called?” Dobby asked, appearing with a pop.

Harry laughed. “I didn’t, but we want to talk to you anyway. Is there anywhere we can go?”

“Dobby knows the perfect place, sir!” he said happily. “Dobby heard tell of it from the other house-elves when he came to Hogwarts, sir. It is known by us as the Come and Go Room, sir, or else as the Room of Requirement!”

“Oh?”

“Entered it is only by them with a real need,” said Dobby seriously, “sometimes there it be, and sometimes there it be not, but when there it be, it is always fulfilling needs.”

“That sounds perfect,” Harry said. “Lead on, Dobby.”

Dobby took them up to a corridor on the seventh floor, and stopped them outside an enormous tapestry depicting Barnabas the Barmy’s foolish attempt to train trolls for the ballet.

“Sir is needing to walking past this wall three times, thinking hard about what sir is needing inside.”

Harry nodded and started to pace, concentrating hard on the room he and Gabrielle had spent some time in with the Goblins.

“Dobby was always saying that Harry Potter is a great wizard,” Dobby said proudly as a highly polished door appeared in front of them.

Harry opened the door and smiled. The room was a perfect replica, down to the trolley with the food on it by the couch.

“This is brilliant, Dobby,” Harry said. “Thanks a lot for telling me.”

Dobby beamed.

“Are you happy at Hogwarts, Dobby?” Harry asked as he sat down, Gabrielle next to him. Dobby sat on the floor in front of them.

“Dobby is being very happy,” Dobby said, nodding his head. “But sometimes Dobby is wishing there was more for Dobby to be doing.”

“Are there any other free elves here?”

Dobby shook his head disgustedly. “They be thinking that Dobby is being a freak.”

“I have an idea I’d like to put to you, Dobby. It’s a big one.”

Dobby nodded solemnly, and then seemed to brace himself.

“I’ve been thinking about opening a restaurant, serving a mixture of Muggle, wizard and goblin food, priced to appeal to average wizards and witches. But what I need more than anything else is a head chef, someone I trust to run the kitchen and make sure the food is good. I need someone

who's a great cook, who can learn new skills, and who doesn't mind working with goblins and humans."

Dobby gulped and his eyes went as wide as Harry had ever seen them. The elf started to shake.

"We'd like you to be that person," Harry finished.

Dobby looked at them, not blinking. "Harry Potter is truly a great wizard," Dobby eventually said. "Sir is being as barmy as all great wizards!"

Gabrielle sniggered.

"Sir is wanting Dobby to be learning new things, to have a real job, and to be being in charge?" Dobby asked.

Harry nodded and was hit by a small missile that seemed intent on hugging the life out of him. "Dobby will not be letting Harry Potter down!" Dobby shouted, before he started to bounce around the room. "Dobby will be cooking the best food, and everyone will talk about how good sir's restaurant will be."

"So you don't think you'll have a problem supervising others, including humans?"

Dobby shook his head widely. "Dobby is in charge of making food perfect," he explained. "Others will do as told or Dobby will be being firing them!"

Harry laughed. "I've already persuaded Professor Dumbledore to release you," he said. "And I have the goblins looking for a restaurant. I need to hire a manager to work with you, and I have an idea of who I want."

Dobby bounced in excitement.

"It's going to take at least a month to get ready, so I'll arrange for you to learn to cook goblin-style."

"And Dobby will be putting together a menu," he said. He looked around, "Dobby always wanted to work in a restaurant, but restaurants don't want to hire elves. Dobby will show them!"

"Yes, you will," Harry agreed.

"Dobby has never been thanking Miss Delacour for waking Harry Potter."

"You're welcome," Gabrielle said, at her most charming.

The elf's eyes, which had been going back to normal, went back to their widest state.

Harry smiled faintly. "Are you helping out with the party on Saturday?"

Dobby tore his eyes away from Gabrielle and shook his head. “There is not being any food.”

“Nonsense,” Harry said. “We’re going to need all sorts of refreshments, something people can nibble on during the night.”

Dobby nodded eagerly. “Elves will be being happy,” he said. “They was not being happy about no food.”

“Well, you’re in charge, so make what you think is your best.”

Dobby puffed up his chest and nodded, before popping out.

“This room is brilliant,” Gabrielle said. “We’ll be able to plan whatever we want in here – and for pranks, it can be a Potions dungeon, or an experimentation area.”

Harry grinned, “Or a place for a bit of kissing.”

“That too,” Gabrielle agreed, “I can show you my pole dancing!”

“Now that’s something I approve of – you’ll just have to wait until we’ve learnt some locking spells that even Dumbledore can’t undo.”

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“We really ought to plan to at least try to eat meals with the other students tomorrow,” Harry said, as they walked hand in hand into Hogsmeade.

“So that we’re not alienated when we do join them?”

“Yeah,” Harry said. “We’re going to be pushing it as it is, but we can hope that they won’t realise just how much time we don’t spend at school.”

“We could just bypass the issue and make it known that we’re day-students.”

“What are they?”

“Literally that – we had them at Beauxbatons, they just went to school there, and spent the evenings and weekends at home.”

“That sounds good,” Harry said, nodding.

“Mr Potter, is it true that Draco Malfoy attempted to kill you this morning?”

Harry looked up and scowled as he saw and heard a horde of journalists Apparating in.

“Yes,” Gabrielle said, moving in front of him a little. “This morning, Draco Malfoy tried to cast the Killing Curse at Harry. Fortunately, the swift action of the Aurors meant that his attempt failed.”

“I heard that it was you,” another reporter demanded.

“It was the Aurors who arrested him. Now if you’ll excuse us, we have an appointment.”

The press didn’t move, and shouted more questions. Harry looked around and recognising a familiar face, he walked over to her. “Get us out of this, and we’ll give you an exclusive with both of us – Ginny already has one with me, we can give you one afterward.”

Lavender smiled, and turned to face the others. “All right,” she yelled, “back up, you scum. Potter’s just agreed an exclusive deal with *Witch Weekly* . You want access, talk to our lawyers!”

“We’ll pay double!” one of the journalists shouted.

“Triple,” another yelled.

“No dice,” Lavender said as she pulled out her wand and started hexing the journalists.

Harry blinked in surprise and started to laugh.

“We’re dogs, Harry,” she said. “Sometimes you need to take a stick to us.”

“Having you do the beating protects our reputation,” Gabrielle said.

“You took down Malfoy this morning; you could execute Fudge and we’d still love you.”

“Oooh,” Gabrielle said, “that’s an idea.”

Harry laughed as that last of the press vanished.

“They’ll hang about at a distance now,” Lavender said. “You’ve grown up, Harry, I didn’t expect you to be able to act like this.”

“No probing,” Harry warned her, shaking his finger gently. “You’ll get your interview after I do Ginny’s.”

“You’ve heard about her wedding to Neville?”

“Yep. Met Neville last night - it was good to see him. This is all off the record.”

Lavender pouted. “When can I get the interview?”

“Anytime after Ginny’s is published.”

She nodded. “And it will be both of you?”

“We’ll even allow a few photos.”

“Brilliant,” Lavender cheered. “This will really help my career,” she said. “And it proves that it’s



not what you know, it's who you know. I'm going to get back and talk to my editor." She turned, and then stopped, "I should offer some money for this – it's worth a fortune."

"You do know that I'm a Potter, and that Gabrielle is a Delacour?"

"The fact that you have money doesn't normally stop rich people from demanding more. However, it somehow doesn't surprise me that you don't." She reached into her pocket and pulled out a card. "Floo me, anytime."

"Will do," Harry promised, as Lavender flashed them both a smile and Apparated away.

"We really need to learn how to do that," Harry sighed. "Let's get to lunch."

"You did handle that well," Gabrielle said.

"As did you," Harry returned. "You could have said that you got Malfoy."

"Nah," she replied, "this way it makes me look humble, and it keeps the Aurors on our side."

He laughed softly and opened the door for her. Remus and Tonks were already waiting in a corner with four drinks in front of them.

Harry cast several privacy charms as they sat down.

"A little warning next time," Remus said. "My heart almost stopped as Malfoy started that curse!"

"Who are you working with?" Harry asked Remus, ignoring the teasing.

Remus pouted at him. "You're not supposed to be asking these questions for months," he complained.

"You didn't answer the question," he pointed out.

"Hermione, as are most of the Weasleys, Tonks, Sirius, assorted girlfriends and spouses, and a couple of Aurors."

Harry nodded. "I thought so. Want to tell me what happened?"

"No," he replied promptly. "But I will anyway."

"How about I guess?" Gabrielle offered. "Then all you have to do is say yes or no."

"Go for it," Tonks challenged.

"About seven and a half years ago, Hermione was discouraged with Harry's lack of progress - he was still in stasis, her faith in Dumbledore was wavering, and she had lost faith in herself for not

being able to cure her best friend.

“She developed the spell so that she knew everyone could talk to him and he would listen, and that was enough while she went back to trying to cure him.

“Four years later, she was getting very depressed, as she now had very strong suspicions about Dumbledore, and she was thankful she trusted her instincts not to tell anyone else the spell she was using on Harry.

“Fast forward another six months and we’ve got Harry out of stasis. Hermione now has enough proof about Dumbledore to be able to make some firm plans against him – not because she disagrees with his goals, just his methods.

“She called everyone she trusted together. She’d improved her spell dramatically, so now experience could be passed on, as well as knowledge. She was nervous, and relied on Ron for support, but she laid all her cards on the table, explained a lot about Harry’s early life at Hogwarts, and what Dumbledore had done.

“She finished by saying that the only thing she wanted was for Harry to wake up and be himself. She felt that Harry would probably fix things, because he has a thing for righting wrongs – but she wanted him to have the choice, so that if he decided he wanted nothing more to do with a world that had put him into cold storage for six years, he could do that, and no one would stand in his way.

“She asked for help, first with the new passing on of experience, and second with working around Dumbledore. Percy was asked to stay in the Ministry, while Hermione, who was now guarding the spell zealously, could limit Dumbledore’s access to Harry – but do it in such a way that no one realised that it was being done.

“She cracked down on the people who could access Harry, now that he was more open, banning everyone she didn’t completely trust – even I was only allowed in with Fleur – and prayed that it would work. She had no idea what *I* was doing, just as I had no idea what she was doing. Her long term plan meshed neatly with mine – so much so that I’m now wondering what would have happened if I’d talked to Hermione as an adult when I was younger, and not hidden myself.

“Looking back, I was influenced by her just as I influenced her. We both wanted the same thing – Harry alive and happy, we just had massively differing methods and expectations for what happened afterwards.

“Hermione wanted Harry free and happy; I wanted my Prince, knowing that I can make him happy. Since then, Hermione has been acting as the Matriarch of the family, having proved her love for Harry.” Gabrielle paused and looked at Remus and Tonks. “So, how’d I do?”

Remus and Tonks were looking at her in shock, before Remus shook himself. “Outstanding, Miss Delacour, simply outstanding.”

“When Hermione said that you were a frickin’ genius, I didn’t quite believe it,” Tonks said in awe. “How in the name of Merlin did you do that?”

“If I had been Hermione, it’s what I would have done,” Gabrielle said simply. “I just took what I know of her personality, and fed the data through that.”

Remus shook his head slowly. “Like I said, that was simply outstanding, Miss Delacour. I’d give a few points to Gryffindor, but we’re not really in school.”

Harry smiled and took Gabrielle’s hand so that he could play with her fingers. “She is good, isn’t she?” he said with a fond look at her. “Having a brilliant court advisor makes a Princess’s life easier.”

“So, who are you?” Harry said to Tonks.

“Huh?” she asked.

“Simple question,” Harry said with a grin. “I know you don’t like your first name and that you’re knockin’ boots with Moony here, and, of course, I know that you’re a Metamorphmagus and an Auror.”

Tonks nodded. “Well, I’m Sirius’s cousin. Mum is Narcissa Malfoy’s sister, and of course the sister of my dear departed Aunt Bellatrix. Mum was disowned from the Black family for marrying a Muggle-born.”

“But she’s back in now, right?”

“No,” Tonks said slowly. “Why would you think that?”

“Damn it. Moony, you really need to kick Sirius until you get his attention. I’m almost as disappointed in you as I am with him.”

“In my defence,” Remus said weakly, “I’ve never actually consciously realised that he can *do* that.”

Harry snorted.

“What *are* you talking about?” Tonks asked.

“Sirius is head of the Black family,” Harry pointed out. “As such, he can and should have reinstated your mother years ago.”

“He can do that?” Tonks asked.

“Of course! I’ll have a word with him tomorrow, and then I’ll get Percy on the case.”

“Thank you,” Remus said quietly.

“So, how did you two kids meet?”

“Charlie,” Tonks said. “Charlie was always like my brother, so I was at a Weasley party once. Somebody introduced me to Remus, we got to talking, we liked each other, and after I persuaded him that I don’t care about his furry little problem, we started dating.”

“No cure for that then?”

Remus shook his head sadly. “Potions have improved so it’s not as painful as it was.”

“Well, I’m pleased for small mercies.” Harry looked up. “Will you excuse me for a moment? I see some people I need to talk to.”

He cancelled the privacy charms and walked over to the two young women. “Padma, Parvati, you’re looking lovely.”

“Harry!” they cried in unison.

“Do you have a few minutes to join us?”

“Actually, we came looking for you,” Padma admitted. “Lavender said you were in here.”

“Come and sit down.” He ordered another round of drinks on the way back to the table, and pulled up two more chairs.

“You, of course, know Remus; next to him is Auror Tonks, his girlfriend. This is my girlfriend, Gabrielle Delacour.”

“No offence, Harry, but we know who she is,” Parvati said with a slight smile. “*Six Witch Weekly* covers, to start with.”

Gabrielle smiled at both of them.

“So,” Harry said, launching into his sales pitch. “I heard that you’ve both had trouble getting jobs?”

“No,” Padma replied, “We’ve had trouble getting *good* jobs. Menial jobs are readily available.”

“I stand corrected,” Harry said. “What did you get at school?”

“Second to Hermione,” Padma said proudly.

“Adequate, apart from a rather useless outstanding in Divination,” Parvati said with a sigh. “Stupid old bat.”

“Trelawney?”

“Yeah, you know that she prophesised that you would never wake up.”

“I’m glad she was wrong,” he said wryly.

“As I am,” Gabrielle added.

“Do you know anything about bookkeeping, current labour laws, and running a business?” he asked Padma.

“Some,” Padma said cautiously. “The rest I can learn, why?”

“I’m opening a restaurant. I’ve got the chef lined up, but I need someone actually to run it,” he said, looking to Padma, and then he looked to Parvati, “And I need a hostess. It struck me that having two of the most beautiful girls I know working the business would be a huge benefit.”

“You’re saying that I’d have to look pretty, meet and greet everyone who came in, make friends with everyone, and generally get paid to have fun?” Parvati asked excitedly

“It would be hard work,” Harry pointed out.

“I’m in,” she said with an uncaring shrug.

“Parv,” Padma groaned, holding her head in her hands. “Please, ask at least a *few* questions first, like salary.”

They paused as the drinks arrived.

“That would be up to you to figure out,” Harry eventually replied, after their waitress had moved away. “You’re going to be the manager.”

“Have you done a business plan?” she asked. “Scouted for good locations, thought about a permanent public Floo entrance? An analysis of competitors and who your prospective customers are, secured funding?”

“You’re hired,” Harry said dryly. “In reverse order, yes – I’m bankrolling it personally. I’ve arranged for the goblins to provide free business support. The target market I am looking at is woefully underserved at the moment – there are no restaurants for middle-class families – you either pay through the nose to eat at the Ragnarok or you don’t go out. There seems to be almost unlimited potential.

“I’ve hired a house-elf as a cook – for a lot of Wizarding families who don’t have one, it will be chance to go out and experience how the other half live at a reasonable price. We’re also going to be serving goblin food, with competitions for any wizard brave enough to eat it; it will be a gimmick that will attract the younger crowd to participate, and the older crowd to watch.

“I’ve got the goblins searching for a good location – they want me to succeed as well, as they are fed up with the economic problems we’re going through. And no, I’ve not done a business plan --

that will be your job, if you want to take it.”

Padma silently elbowed her sister to get her to close her mouth. She nodded thoughtfully. “That does make a lot of sense. Do you have any expansion plans?”

“If the restaurant works, we’re going to open a few more ourselves, while we devise ways to hide the fact we use magic, then we’re going to expand into the Muggle world – eventually, I’m thinking franchises.”

“So you’re offering us entry at the ground floor, and if we prove our worth, we’ll be able to follow you up?”

Harry nodded. “Yes. I’ve got no problem with that.”

“What do you think about me hiring people as waiters and waitresses who I think would be perfect for expansion? I know most people over the last four years who have got boring jobs who would love to get into this. I’ll tell them it might not work, of course, but that if it does, they’ll already be trained for the jobs, and if they’re good enough, they’ll get them?”

Harry smiled. “I like the idea. The more of the best people we can get early, the better it will be in the long run.”

“I accept,” Padma said. “I’ll get to work immediately on a business plan.”

“I’ll need a new wardrobe,” Parvati said excitedly.

Padma rolled her eyes at her sister.

“Go to Gringotts tomorrow. I’ll tell them you’re coming, they’ll help and show you what we’re planning – and get you on the payroll.”

“Thank you, Harry,” Padma said. “I won’t let you down.”

“I know.”

“Come on, Parv, we’ve got work to do.”

“Right. Good to see you awake, Harry.”

“Bye.”

Harry watched them go and shook his head in amusement.

“Two of the most beautiful girls you know?” Tonks teased.

“They are beautiful,” Gabrielle said. “Harry was telling the truth, and you are trying to imply something that wasn’t there. My Prince would never cheat on me.”

Tonks looked at her. “Sorry,” she apologised. “I guess he wouldn’t.”

“Nope,” Harry agreed.

“Do you know what you’re doing?” Remus asked.

“Haven’t a glimmer of a clue,” Harry grinned. “I’m winging it, but if I can read people correctly, I just offered Padma something she wanted badly.”

“You did,” Gabrielle confirmed, “you gave her a chance. And she’ll work herself into the ground for you. I’ve said all along that it’s so much easier to follow a Prince who cares. He can inspire people around him to work so much harder through caring and genuine openness, much more than he could with threats and punishment.”

“I think we did a good job,” Remus said.

“Careful you don’t dislocate your shoulder patting yourself on your back,” Harry teased. “But yes, the information everyone gave me is invaluable. All sorts of things that I didn’t think of before are now coming to me naturally.”

“It’s still you,” Gabrielle said. “You’re the one pulling it all together.”

They changed subject, and the rest of the lunch was spent with Harry asking questions about what had happened while he had been asleep.

Gabrielle looked at her watch. “We need to get moving,” she said. “It’s time to meet with Bill and Fleur, and then pop over to my parents.”

“Meeting the prospective in-laws?” Tonks teased. “Nervous?”

“A little,” Harry admitted. “But we are going to have to have a quiet word soon, Tonks. As Remus’ default family, Sirius and I need to check your intentions.”

Tonks paled slightly, “You’re joking, right?”

Harry shook his head solemnly. “Remus has a history of bad choices. We’re going to have to ensure he’s not being taken for a ride.”

“Hey,” Remus protested with a grin.

“Do you want to play some more, Tonks?” Gabrielle asked.

Tonks laughed and shook her head negatively, before she stopped abruptly. “Wait, yes, I do; it keeps me on my toes.”

“Just remember that Harry has me as back-up.”

“And I have Remus,” Tonks retorted.

“And I could probably get Sirius,” Remus added. “He’s already up for a prank war!”

“Close your eyes for a second,” Harry said in a low voice, his tone amused. “Picture Gabrielle and me working together, then picture the Weasley twins on our side, and then add in Hermione and Ron.”

Remus paled slightly. “That’s not fair,” he pouted.

Harry got to his feet. “It’s been a pleasure,” he said, as he looked down at the remains of the meal they had enjoyed. “Tonks, it was nice meeting you, and despite the teasing, you’re obviously good for the old wolf. Remus, we’re looking forward to our first Defence lesson next week.”

“As I am, Harry, Gabrielle.”

“Yeah, catch you two kids later,” Tonks added.

They walked over to the fireplace and hopped in, Gabrielle calling out their destination. As they spun through the network, Gabrielle took his hand and placed it firmly on her rear, while wrapping her legs around him and kissing him firmly.

Not one to ignore obvious instructions that were good for him, he moved his other hand into place and held her tightly against him.

They exploded out of the fireplace and ended up on a soft, carpeted floor, with him lying between her legs, and her hands in his hair, holding his head still while she ravished his mouth.

“Gabrielle!” Fleur shouted.

They stopped kissing, looked at each other, and started to laugh hard.

“You’ve just been set up, dear,” Bill pointed out.

Fleur blushed faintly. “Brat,” she muttered.

“You know you love me, ancient one.”

“I am NOT ancient!” Fleur protested.

“Did you get hold of Mama and Papa?” Gabrielle asked.

“Yes. We can go and see them in half an hour. Papa has taken the afternoon off work.”

“Good.”

“So, Harry, are you planning any more seismic changes?”



“Me?” Harry asked innocently as he dropped onto a couch, and Gabrielle dropped on his lap.

“Can’t you two sit normally?” Fleur asked.

“Old age hasn’t dried the passion out of our lives yet,” Gabrielle said, “so no.”

Fleur growled under her breath.

Gabrielle grinned unrepentantly.

“I’ve had fifteen years of this,” Fleur complained. “Can’t you do anything about it?”

“I can,” Harry said, “but that sort of authority should be reserved for important things, or when she crosses a line.”

“What do you mean?” Bill asked.

“If my Prince commands me to do something, I’ll do it,” Gabrielle said. “All Princesses follow their Prince when it’s important.”

Fleur shook her head. “You are warped.”

“From my perspective, I’m perfectly sane,” Gabrielle replied. “I understand myself completely; my actions are always predictable and understandable. It is everyone else who is crazy. You make decisions on irrelevant information, you deny yourself the things you want for reasons that make no sense, and you have to be persuaded to be happy. I live my life by simple rules - good will win over evil, I’ll marry my Prince and live happily ever after, we’ll rule with love and caring, and be adored by all.”

“You’re not human,” Fleur whispered.

Gabrielle rolled her eyes. “I never was – neither were you, by the way. I’ve just channelled my mild sociopathic tendencies into a useful channel.”

“So you weren’t discussing homework,” Fleur said flatly as her eyes went wide.

“Of course not,” Gabrielle confirmed.

“What are you talking about?” Bill asked as he sat down.

“One of the times I let Gabrielle talk to Harry,” Fleur said with a sigh, sitting down next to her husband, “she was talking about homework, or so I believed, so I let her chatter on about it – not really paying attention.”

“I was explaining myself to Harry,” Gabrielle explained. “A quick run down on what a sociopath is, how I was diagnosed when I was eight, how I’m at the low end of the scale, and not likely to commit murder without provocation, and what I’ve done about it.”

“From what I know,” Bill said, “that provocation wouldn’t be something we’d understand.”

“True,” Gabrielle agreed. “I can be most strange. My psychologist tried to get me to tie my belief structure to a religion, which was a ridiculous idea. I went the other way and tied my belief structure to my Prince. That way I just have to ask, ‘What would my Prince do?’ in the same circumstance. Princes are kind and just, and don’t go around killing. Mum and Dad thought the psychologist had helped.”

“Wait,” Fleur said, “Mum and Dad know?”

“Of course,” Gabrielle said. “You remember that funny little doctor I used to see?”

“He wasn’t for your leg injury then?”

“Nope. I didn’t want anyone to know about it. It would have put you all on guard, and you would have stopped me from getting to my Prince. No one knew about that, not even my psychologist; he just encouraged me to have a goal.

“But now that all of this has happened, I decided it was time to start opening up to people. I didn’t like not telling you, as I wouldn’t have liked people not telling me if you were seeing a shrink at eight.”

Fleur shook her head softly and grabbed Bill’s hand, squeezing it hard. “I didn’t know,” she whispered.

“You couldn’t have,” Gabrielle said, climbing out of Harry’s lap and kneeling next to her sister. “My psychiatrist thinks that it was caused by my Veela heritage not sitting correctly with my human heritage – which is why I have brown eyes, not blue. Personally, I think that’s just trying to find a reason when none exists. This is what and who I am, and I’m not apologising for it.”

Fleur nodded and bent over and hugged her sister, hard.

“How do you feel about this?” Bill asked. “I’m not finding it as surprising as I should, although it is a shock.”

Harry looked at his girlfriend thoughtfully. “Gabrielle,” he called.

She looked up at him, her eyes suddenly afraid.

“Did you ever use the time you talked to me to make me fall in love with you?”

Gabrielle shook her head; her eyes were still afraid, but he couldn’t see any deception in them. “Fleur was with me every time,” she said. “Most of the time I talked about how to dance. The only times I didn’t was the talk about sociopathy and a couple of times when I talked about charms I was learning at school.”

Fleur nodded in agreement.

“Were you tempted?” Bill asked.

“Of course not,” Gabrielle said, her eyes not leaving Harry. “Having to cheat like that would have devalued the relationship we were going to have.”

Bill whistled, “You never doubted, even once?”

“I am the Princess, Harry is the Prince,” Gabrielle said. “There was nothing to doubt.”

“Come here,” Harry whispered.

Gabrielle moved out of her sister’s arms, crossed the floor, and knelt over him, straddling him, so she could look straight into his eyes.

“I’m the only one, aren’t I?” he asked, “The only one you’re vulnerable to?”

She nodded.

“Thank you,” he whispered, gently kissed her, and pulled back.

A single tear drew a crystalline path down her cheek, before she smiled – a smile that removed his breath from his body as the full force of her personality beamed down on him.

She hugged him, hard, burying her face in his neck. He looked at Fleur and Bill as he stroked her back gently. “It makes a lot of sense,” he explained to them. “It explains a lot about her.”

“Does Hermione know?” Bill asked.

“She’s probably worked it out by now,” Harry replied.

“I need a drink,” Fleur said, “Papa should have some good wine.”

Harry stood with Gabrielle, “Shall we go?”

Fleur nodded and led the way back to the fireplace. “Chateau Delacour,” she called and vanished.

Harry stepped in after her, at Bill’s gesture, and called the same. He braced himself so that they wouldn’t go flying when they landed. He could feel Gabrielle crying against him, and didn’t want to stop her. She needed to get rid of the tension. The worst thing for Gabrielle was to be reliant on someone she couldn’t predict, as she was now with him. And despite her complete lack of admitted doubt, he suspected that was the cause of her nightmares that she’d mentioned that morning.

They arrived in a light, airy room painted in light cream, with black sofas. Gabrielle’s mother looked like an older version of Fleur, tall and regal, and still very beautiful. Her father was the same height, and looked to be slightly older, his hair greying.

“Mama, Papa, this is Harry,” Fleur said. “Harry, this is Marie and Eric, our parents.”

“Do I want to know why my daughter is crying?” Eric asked.

“Do I want to know why I wasn’t informed that my sister was seeing a psychiatrist?” Fleur countered with an angry expression on her face.

“Why don’t we all sit down,” Marie suggested. “Nothing is ever what it seems with Gabrielle,” she mused as she sat down herself. “She can’t even bring a boyfriend home without it turning into a life-changing drama.”

Gabrielle looked up and poked her tongue out at her mother.

“Gabrielle,” Harry said firmly, “the Queen is always worthy of respect.”

“Please forgive me, Mama,” Gabrielle said contritely.

Eric and Marie looked at each other, a surprised expression on their faces.

“What’s going on?” Eric asked.

“Harry was my goal,” Gabrielle said, turning so that she could see the others, but not breaking contact with Harry. “I’ve achieved my goal now.”

“What goal?” Eric asked, a frown on his face.

“You said I should have a goal to focus on when I went to my psychiatrist. When I saw Harry win the fight against Voldemmonkey was when I decided.”

“And you stopped seeing your psychiatrist not because you were going abroad?”

“But because I’d found the cure, and I didn’t need one anymore. I knew who I was and what I was doing.”

“And your lack of empathy?” Marie asked.

“It doesn’t extend to Harry, and I can certainly feel his.”

Eric closed his eyes, before standing and shaking his head. “I need a walk,” he muttered before storming out of the room.

Harry raised his eyebrows.

Gabrielle looked surprised as the door slammed shut behind her father.

“If you are finally telling people who love you about what has happened, that is a good thing,” Marie said slowly.

“I don’t need to hide it anymore,” Gabrielle explained. “Now I’m just following my Prince as he starts to take over the world.”

Marie smiled faintly.

“I wouldn’t go there,” Bill suggested. “They’ve already started. Doubting them will just mean that you will be more surprised when they succeed.”

“But,” Marie started.

“Mama, they have indeed already started,” Fleur agreed.

“But it’s only been two days since Gabrielle woke Harry up.”

“Time is irrelevant,” Gabrielle said. “All that matters is opportunity, creative thinking, and taking your chances. We’ve done that.”

“Let me get some coffee,” Marie said, as she got to her feet.

“I think I’ll go and talk to your dad,” Harry said, sliding Gabrielle next to him.

“Do you think it will help?” she asked curiously.

He nodded. “I hope so. You could try talking to your mum.”

Gabrielle nodded and kissed him on the cheek quickly. “He’ll be out of the front, to the left, 130 metres down, a third of the way around the fountain.”

Harry laughed softly and stood, nodding to Bill and Fleur he walked out. Eric was exactly where Gabrielle had said he would be.

“You know,” he said, as he sat on the edge of the fountain, “If I didn’t know better, I’d say Gabrielle was psychic at times like this.”

“She told you exactly where I would be?” Eric asked.

He nodded. “To the pace.”

“You know what frustrates me most?” Eric demanded.

“I’m not Gabrielle,” Harry replied evenly, “so no, I don’t.”

“That I can’t blame you for anything; you were unconscious, and before that, all you did was save my daughter and defeat a Dark Lord. I’ve heard the reports that Gabrielle woke you up and led you on a merry path.”

“Actually,” Harry interrupted, “as soon as I was awake, she pretty much just followed along and

supported – she passed the leading to me.”

“How could you lead?” he asked. “You’ve been unconscious for eight years – in fact, you should be a mess about now.”

“You’ve met Hermione?”

He nodded.

“Do you honestly think that she would let me awaken like that? Do you think that Gabrielle, knowing what you do about her, wouldn’t have had that aspect of things completely under control?”

“I don’t like it,” Eric said frustratingly. “She’s my daughter; she’s supposed to be at Hogwarts for education, she’s supposed to grow up, get a good job, and be a productive member of society – now I find out that everything she’s done over the past eight years has been aimed at you!”

Harry nodded. “And personally, I’m grateful.”

“I’ll bet,” he muttered. “You probably can’t wait to…”

“I’m not going to be a punching bag for your frustrations, at least not verbally. If you want to fight about this, then we’ll do it with wands.”

Eric shot him a long look, before he turned on his heel and looked out at the grounds. “You don’t know what it’s like having a daughter with a medical condition like this. A condition that we were lucky we found a psychiatrist for, because Muggles won’t even diagnose it until the patient is an adult. It was embarrassing.”

“Gabrielle said that she didn’t believe them when they were talking about her human and Veela heritage clashing.”

“No, she didn’t,” Eric agreed. “It is probably true though, but there is no precedent. Nothing like this has happened before – but then, neither has there been a part-Veela with brown eyes. The Veela gene is dominant, and that guarantees, or it used to, blonde hair and blue eyes.

“The psychiatrist thinks that she was born like this, and that nothing we could have done could have prevented it. That doesn’t mean that we have to like it, though. We first noticed the signs when she was five or six, little things didn’t work with her – she wasn’t emotionally attached to anyone, and when she was told off, she would look at us for a long time as if trying as hard as she could to understand why we were telling her off. We’d get reports from her nannies all the time about how she was behaving strangely, and her ridiculous attachment to fairy tales. But that soon changed and we thought it was just a phase. What we didn’t realise was that she was just simulating what we expected to see.

“When we asked her to see a psychiatrist – or a doctor who specialises in how our brain works as we put it, she just replied that she’d be happy to see him, as long as everything was kept a secret –

something we were more than willing to abide by.

“And now you’re seeing that changing?”

“Yes.”

Eric shrugged angrily and continued to pace.

Harry watched him for a few minutes and when he showed no intention of stopping, he shrugged and walked back inside. Gabrielle was waiting for him. She took one look at him, sighed, and took his hand, leading him to the Floo.

“The Three Broomsticks, Hogsmeade,” she said firmly. “Can we go somewhere?” she asked as they stepped out, “Just the two of us, where no one will find us?”

He looked at her for a long moment and thought about the places he knew, and realised that there wasn’t anywhere, really – apart from his room in Hogwarts. “Let’s just walk through the grounds,” he suggested, “see what we can find.”

She nodded and took his hand, holding it firmly.

Once they were in the grounds of Hogwarts, she seemed to sigh. “I didn’t expect that.”

“Expect what?” he asked softly.

“I thought they’d be happy for me. That I’ve achieved my goal – I have my Prince, and we’ll have a great life together. I thought that was what they wanted for me.”

“They do,” Harry said.

“Papa stomped off like a child and Mama thinks that I should move back home, away from you. They want to lock me in an ivory tower until I could grow my hair long enough for you to climb up it – and that sounds painful – and it would be so irritating to take care of that much hair!”

“Oh.”

“Why is everyone so bloody illogical?” she demanded. “They know that I don’t fit their narrow and confining definition of normal, and that I know what I am doing – so why, when I have exactly what I want, do they want me to throw it away and do things like a one of them would?”

“Because it’s what they expect?” Harry asked – he wasn’t sure himself.

“I know you’re my Prince,” she said, dropping to the floor and folding her legs Indian style. “And you understand me. Why don’t you understand them?” There was no accusation in her voice, just a genuine need to understand.

He dropped down in front of her and hugged his knees. “What do you know about my life before

Hogwarts?”

Gabrielle frowned. “Not much. I know what happened at Hogwarts, that’s common knowledge. I never thought about anything else.”

“Did I ever have any visitors from family?”

Gabrielle’s frown deepened. “Not that I know of.”

“I can guarantee that I didn’t. When my parents were killed, I was dropped off at my Muggle aunt and uncle’s house with a letter.”

“That’s strange,” Gabrielle said. “Why would they take you in if they’re Muggles?”

“You are probably the first person to ever ask that question. They are supposed to take me in because they are family. That’s what family do.”

Gabrielle nodded. “They knew about magic then?”

“Yes, and hated it with an almost religious fervour.”

“Then why were you left there?”

“Dumbledore wanted me to grow up without knowing about my fame and have a normal life.”

“But if you’re a Wizard, and your family hate magic, how can you live a normal life?”

“I didn’t. I was starved, locked in a cupboard, ignored, and had to watch as my cousin got all the attention and presents. I asked for a Christmas present just once – never made that mistake again.

“It wasn’t all bad, I mean, I learned to cook, and I have some fond memories of the cupboard – my imagination could soar then.”

“Where was this?”

“Little Whinging, a place called Privet Drive.”

Gabrielle got to her feet suddenly and turned.

“Gabrielle?”

She ignored him and stormed toward the castle. He suddenly understood what she was going to do and jumped to his feet and started to chase her.

She heard him coming and started to run as well.

He quickly caught up and dived on her, rolling with her until he was on top, pinning her to the ground.



“Let me go,” she snarled.

“You are not going to kill them!”

“They abused my Prince, they are going to die,” she said in a voice that was eerie in its lack of inflection.

“No,” he said firmly. “It is not up to us who lives and who dies. If they attack us, we can retaliate, but we cannot pre-emptively decide. Their crimes were of neglect and abuse. They do deserve to be punished, but not to die! How does a Prince act?”

“He is honourable and just,” she mumbled. “But it doesn’t say how *Princesses* are all the time.”

“What would the Prince do if he knew his Princess was doing that?”

“He wouldn’t love her anymore,” she said, withering on the spot.

“No.”

“No?”

“The Prince will *never* stop loving the Princess. If the Princess is cruel, it will make the Prince sad, but he will *never* stop loving her,” he whispered.

She closed her eyes for a second, and when she opened them, he could see into her soul. She had removed every single defence she had, baring herself to him without reservation.

He took a deep breath and did the same thing, opening himself like never before.

Her eyes went slightly wider, and then she wrapped her arms around him, and held on to him as tightly as she could.

“Tell me about them, let me know what they are like,” she eventually said, when she had regained her self-control.

“Are you going to run off?”

“Not if you keep holding me,” she said with a smile.

He laughed softly. “Vernon is a pig. He’s got a red face, is around eight or nine stone overweight, and isn’t exactly the brightest pig in the sty. Petunia is more like a giraffe, all harsh angles and long neck. They are both incredibly concerned about their reputation in the community, which was why they hated my ‘unnaturalness’. Dudley is a chimp off the old block. Just like his father – or was.”

“How did they explain you being at Hogwarts?”

“They said that I was at St Brutus's Secure Centre for Incurably Criminal Boys.”

Gabrielle went quiet for a few moments. “Okay, we’ll take care of them later. They will pay – no one touches my Prince – but it will be honourable and just.”

He smiled proudly at her.

“Are you going to tell me?”

She shook her head and smiled at him. “Let me refine it first... next summer would be best.” She tilted her head. “So you haven’t had a normal childhood, either, you never had the love you wanted, and missed your real parents. The only adults you’ve ever really known have either been authority figures or abusive.”

He nodded.

“And while you now have adult friends, you don’t think of them as such.”

He nodded again.

“So you have no real idea why my parents didn’t react like I wanted them to, and you’re guessing as much as I am?”

“Pretty much. I know how people are supposed to act, but when I think of the Dursleys, they never really acted like that.”

“Which is why you’re my Prince. You’ve had the terrible childhood not knowing your true identity, and then had it thrust on you when you were still young and unprepared, and yet you still defeated the evil wizard – and it even happened so that when you woke up, your Princess was waiting for you.”

“I think you’re right,” he agreed. What she said made sense, a lot of sense. “Why don’t we go and have some food with the others?”

“And then we can go and play cards,” she purred.

He nodded and climbed to his feet, offering her his hand. She used it to pull herself up easily.

“You’re very fit,” he remarked.

She nodded. “I used to compete in dance competitions, but I was banned.”

“Why?”

“My partner tripped and fell on me. I didn’t admit until later that he had broken one of my ribs.”

Harry winced.

“I wanted to win,” she said. “They thought it wasn’t healthy for me to do that.”

“Yeah, I know what you mean. I’ve done all sorts of stupid things on a Quidditch pitch. The desire to win just takes over, doesn’t it? I’m lucky in that people expect Quidditch injuries.”

They walked into the Great Hall without creating a scene for a change, and sat down at the end of the Gryffindor table.

“So,” Zach asked, “when are you two actually going to be in classes?”

“Monday,” Harry replied. “You wouldn’t believe the sort of things you have to sort out when you go for an afternoon snooze and wake up eight years later.”

Zach laughed. “I’ll bet. Did you know that there are going to be a lot of new kids starting in three years time? There was a baby boom shortly after Voldemort died. I’ve got two younger brothers starting.”

“Please tell me they’re not named Harry or James!”

“No, although my parents did think about it – there was a plea from Hogwarts for people not to name their kids after you. They said you’d hate it.”

“Damn right,” Harry agreed. He looked at Gabrielle. “We’re not naming our kids after me, my parents, or any relatives. We’ll not hang something they have to live up to on them.”

Gabrielle nodded in agreement. “I’ve not thought of baby names before. We’ll talk about that later.”

Zach gaped at them. “Isn’t it a bit early for you two to be talking about kids?”

“It’s what Princes and Princesses do – eventually,” Gabrielle said.

“But isn’t it a bit sudden?” Zach asked.

Harry tilted his head. “Put yourself in my shoes: you’re dating THE Gabrielle Delacour, and you’re as sure of her feelings as you are of your own.”

Zach gulped. “Okay, maybe I would,” he admitted.

“So, the important question is, when is everyone else going to start talking?”

“I think it will take a few days yet. You’re a legend, Harry. You defeated a Dark Lord, twice. You were the youngest Quidditch player in a century, and a genius on the broom, you defeated a Basilisk, frightened Dementors. And now you’re here, sitting with us, with the most beautiful and famous girl of our generation on your arm, with Professor Dumbledore talking to you as a friend, with Professor McGonagall of all people looking like you’re her nephew, and then this morning, you make a complete fool of the Minister for Magic. Is it any wonder we’re stunned?”

“You seem quite eloquent for someone who is stunned.”

Zach shrugged helplessly. “Gryffindor bravery combined with the overwhelming urge to gush at you, and as everyone here will tell you, I talk far too much. Besides, I really want to win the Quidditch Cup this year, and Professor McGonagall told me that I’d have to ask you personally, so I’ve spent most of the time since you woke up mentally preparing for it.”

“He’s got that right,” one of the girls muttered.

Harry turned and smiled at her – she blushed bright red and looked down. “I don’t bite,” he said dryly. “Honest, believe it or not, I am actually human, and nothing special.”

The girl raised her head and looked at him in disbelief.

“Come on, Rebecca,” Zach encouraged. “I’ve been pestering them for five minutes now and I’m still alive!”

“H-Hi,” she whispered.

Harry looked at Gabrielle, who shrugged back. “So,” Harry said slowly, “what’s your favourite subject?”

“Transfiguration,” she said.

“I’m looking forward to re-starting that one. Did Professor McGonagall do her cat routine in your third year?”

“Cat routine?” Rebecca asked, looking up properly for the first time.

“One day, she came to class in her Animagus form and jumped onto the table, transfiguring at the same time – we were all really impressed.”

“No, she didn’t,” Rebecca replied. “That would have been cool.”

“I’ll ask her why she didn’t later. That’s an idea,” he continued. “We should at least see if we can be Animagi, Gabbi.”

“I can’t,” Gabrielle said with a pout. “Damn Veela heritage.”

“But you’ve already broken one rule with those amazing eyes of yours, at least try it with me and see if we can work our way around it.”

“As you wish,” she said with a small smile.

“Let’s talk to the Potions Mistress after dinner. We’ll see if she’ll let us use her equipment to make the potion.”

“Potion?” Gabrielle asked and wrinkled her nose in distaste.

“Sure, the one that actually tells us if we can do it. It’s easy to brew, all we need is…” Harry paused and looked up as he realised he knew everything needed to become an Animagus. “Thank you, Sirius!” he almost shouted.

“How do you know it wasn’t me?” Remus called from Professor's' table.

“Pfft!” Harry replied. “You’re a traitorous member of the establishment now. You’re so respectable your shoes squeak!”

Remus pouted at him. “Just you wait until I get you in class,” he growled playfully.

“You’ll use your sartorial inelegance to intimidate me?” Harry teased back. “Did you know that one of the last messages I got from Mom and Dad included making sure that you get new clothes, Professor?”

“Eat your food, Harry, we’ll talk later.”

“Having a battle of wits with Remus always makes me feel guilty,” Harry said casually, as he turned back to the others. “It’s like fighting with an unarmed man,” he finished with a grin, just loud enough to be heard.

“Big words for someone who managed to sleep through his formative years. Things have changed in the last eight years, and I should show you how.”

Harry grinned at him. “Possibly,” he admitted.

“In fact, I’ll show you here and now, got the guts?”

“Absolutely,” Harry said jumping to his feet. He lightly kissed Gabrielle. “Professor,” he said to the Headmaster, “my ego’s been challenged. How about a duelling platform?”

Dumbledore’s eyes twinkled merrily as he raised his hands. “Ladies and gentlemen, we have some pre-dinner entertainment,” he announced. “A challenge between our Defence Professor and Harry Potter, a duel until one submits or drops his wand. There will, of course, be no use of the Unforgivable curses.”

“Want to take off your robes?” Harry asked Remus as the other professors raised a protective shield.

Remus grinned at him and walked over to speak with him, “Sorry to pull you out like this, kiddo,” he whispered, “but I’ve already taught you everything you need to know to pass the course. I want you to help me in class with duelling techniques, but I also want them to know I’m not just favouring you because of your reputation, but because of your ability.”

“Gentlemen,” Professor Flitwick called. “Are you ready?”

“Do your best,” Remus advised as he walked to the other end of the platform.

He looked around and met Gabbi’s eyes. She smiled softly at him, her face reflecting her faith in him and his ability.

He winked slowly at her, and turned to face Remus. This was the first real test of his magic, and he wasn’t going to fail, or let her down. He really didn’t want to see how she looked disappointed.

“Ready? Start,” Flitwick called.

Harry drew his wand smoothly; he hadn’t actually cast many spells recently and was looking forward to see what he could do.

“*Stupefy!*” Remus called, and the bright red light sped toward him.

He dropped to the floor, landing on his hands, and pushed off hard, forcing himself back to his feet. He grinned as he stood on guard. No matter what happened to his magic, he loved his new body. He’d never felt so strong or so fit in his short pre-nap life.

Remus launched a few more spells at him, and he danced away from them, just dodging for now as he examined his opponent’s technique and ability.

“Come on, Harry,” Gabrielle called, and the cry was soon taken up by the other students, as, almost in a group, they decided to support the student fighting the professor.

Remus winked at him and he felt a well of gratitude build up inside him. It showed that the Marauder was still as sneaky as ever, and that this act was going to help his integration into the school like nothing else.

Once again, he was blown away by how much his friends had done and continued to do for him. He felt privileged – especially when he looked at Gabrielle.

He finally shot a curse back, a simple one, just to see what Remus’ defensive skills were like. The Professor dodged to one side easily, so he started a steady bombardment of small spells, forcing Remus to raise a shield.

Without warning, he sent a high powered stunner down and smiled as it smacked against Remus’ shield, causing it to flare dramatically.

Remus retaliated with a cutting spell, his face losing its smile.

The spell missed Harry by an inch; he started to concentrate on the fight at hand.

Spell after spell erupted from his wand, without conscious thought or desire, pulled straight from the spells that his friends had taught him while he was unconscious. Remus’ spells he ignored, dodged, or blocked.

He started to move forward inexorably, a pace at a time. Each step was accompanied by a blocked spell from Remus and two of his own.

Remus was retreating, desperately trying to keep his own shield up and cast spells back at Harry.

When he was within eight feet of the werewolf, Harry dived forward, casting three stunning spells, flew straight over a curse from Remus, and rolled fast, coming to his feet, his left arm diverting Remus' wand as he touched his own to Remus' forehead.

There was a moment of silence before Remus grinned and dropped his wand, signifying the end of the duel.

There was an eruption of noise from the students and professors as they clapped and cheered.

Harry felt everything return to proper speed and did the only thing he could – he stepped forward and hugged Remus. “Thanks, old wolf.”

“Less of the old,” Remus muttered back. “And you're welcome. But you might want to turn around, you have an incoming blonde.”

Harry turned and took a few steps as Gabrielle walked forward serenely. She paused in front of him. “My Prince,” she whispered, in the proudest voice he had ever heard from her. She closed the distance between him and kissed him gently, a kiss of caring and affection rather than deep passion, as if she was very aware of the crowd and was acting with decorum, like a Princess should.

“If we're all finished,” Albus' voice rang out, “we should all sit again and enjoy the food our elves have produced.”

“That was awesome,” Rebecca said as Harry slipped back into his place.

“Remus is an old family friend,” Harry confessed. “He was very good friends with my parents.”

“He only took the job here because it would allow him to be closer to you when you were asleep,” Gabrielle added.

“I owe a lot of people more than I can say,” Harry said.

“I think,” Rebecca said softly, “that most people think that killing Voldemort was enough to get whatever you want.”

“I've got what I want,” Harry grinned. “And I'll spend the rest of my life making sure all my friends are happy. Isn't that the point of life? To make yourself and your friends as happy as possible, and if you can, make a legacy that will last forever.”

“That was what Voldemort never truly understood, that you don't need to live forever to be immortal, you can just work toward something that will last. He had so much power at one stage,

and if he'd just done something constructive rather than give into the fear caused by his own mortality, he could have been a legend that never died, like Merlin or one of the Founders.

“It’s sad that all that potential ended up in a graveyard, but fitting all the same. He had the chance and he didn’t take it. He tried to be evil and force people to do what he said. But he never repented, and even as I killed him, he looked at me with malevolence and hate.”

He took a long sip of the orange juice in front of him and absently saluted the professors at the table. “Voldemort could have been up there next to Dumbledore, the next generation ready to take over, to be respected, to have influence beyond the dreams of most people, but it wasn’t enough for him. He had to have it his way, and his fear meant that everything that was different had to be destroyed.

“Some say that Voldemort was a hero, that he had the courage to make the changes the Wizarding World needed. I say he was a coward and a juvenile one as well. He had to destroy everything around him if he didn’t get his own way, and his idea of recreating the world would have killed it faster than a Killing Curse.

“The Wizarding world is only strong as long as it continues to be diverse. You take out the fresh blood and new genes arriving and you end up with everyone like Draco – largely incompetent, full of prejudice, and remarkably powerless.

“So if you are going to change things, you have to start at the bottom and sort out the problems first. The economy, the lack of opportunities for everyone leaving Hogwarts, the restrictions put in place by people afraid of change, and once you’ve fixed that, then and only then can you have a civilisation that can be remembered through eternity. Only then can you have immortality as someone who lived during that time when the old order was destroyed and a new one created. Only then can you tell your grandchildren that you were there. That you were one of the people who started it, you stood up and were counted when the time was right.

“The history books might not remember you individually, but when you look down and see the paradise that this world could become, that will be your immortality, that will be your legacy, and in thousands of years time, there will be a generation of children in this school who will study us, and will marvel at what we have achieved, just as we marvel at the exploits of Merlin and Godric, and Rowena, and Helga and even Salazar.”

Harry looked around in surprise to find everyone concentrated on him. He blushed. “Sorry,” he mumbled. “I didn’t mean to interrupt dinner again.” He felt uncomfortable with the looks on the faces of some of the students; he wasn’t sure what they meant.

He looked up at the Professors. McGonagall raised her glass to him solemnly. Dumbledore’s eyes were twinkling and he too raised his glass. He met Remus’ eyes; he was looking at him with pride. He turned to Gabrielle, who leaned over and kissed him, just touching her lips to his. “And where you lead, my Prince,” she said softly, although her voice carried around the Hall, “we will follow you into the history books.”



“I didn’t mean it like that,” he protested.

She smiled at him and lightly brushed his hair back. “You wouldn’t be doing it if you did,” she said mysteriously. “Now, let’s eat.”

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# Happily Ever After

## Chapter 6

“Harry,” Hermione called. “Excuse me,” she said to the others who were sitting around them in the Gryffindor Common Room.

He looked up in surprise. “What are you doing here?”

She smiled at him and dropped into a chair opposite. “You know, I’ve not been back in here since I finished,” she said, looking around. “It hasn’t changed at all. Anyway, I got a Floo from Bill, asking me to come and talk to you two.”

“Why?” Gabrielle asked.

Hermione turned and looked at her. “Let’s go somewhere we can talk,” she suggested.

Harry climbed to his feet and silently offered his hand to Gabrielle, who took it. “I’ve got a place,” he confessed, as he led her toward the Room of Requirement.

“Somehow I’m not surprised,” Hermione said with an amused tone in her voice.

Harry opened the door into a room with three chairs and a small table. “Dobby,” he called. The elf appeared carrying a tea set and placed it on the table.

“Thanks,” he said.

“Dobby is being happy to help,” the elf said as he popped away.

“So, what happened to S.P.E.W.?” he asked.

“I grew up,” Hermione replied, “and found that I have to choose my battles, and *that* battle wasn’t one I could ever win and even winning would be losing.”

“So, what’s dragged you to school this evening?” Harry asked.

Hermione turned to Gabrielle and stared hard at her. “You could have told me.”

“I didn’t tell anyone,” Gabrielle replied, her chin set resolutely. “You would have stopped me doing what I wanted.”

“Even so,” Hermione, “we had the right to know.”

“No, you didn’t,” Gabrielle said bluntly. “My problems were my own, and I dealt with them accordingly.”

“That’s what I don’t like,” Hermione said. “What if you had been wrong? What would you have

done to Harry?”

Harry was about to protest, but stopped, was well aware that Gabrielle could look after herself.

“What do you mean?” Gabrielle asked, “I don’t understand.”

“What if Harry hadn’t responded like you thought he would.”

“But he did,” she pointed out.

“I know,” Hermione replied. “But hypothetically, what if Harry hadn’t responded like you thought?”

“He didn’t react like I thought, and it was wonderful. He was more of a Prince than I ever dreamed about.”

Hermione sighed. “Are you being *deliberately* obtuse?”

Gabrielle’s back stiffened. “Perhaps if *you* would get to the point rather than asking obscure questions, I could give you the answer that you’re digging for. I’ve dealt with bloody *psychiatrists* for seven years now. You’re all so convinced of your mental superiority that you forget exactly who you are dealing with. Please ask the question you mean and stop playing games with me. I’m not going to react how you expect because I’m not going to waste the effort and energy *filtering* things for you.

“You have questions, ask them, and I’ll answer, or drop the subject.”

Hermione blushed. “I’m sorry,” she apologised. “I’ve been spending too much time dealing with pure-blood idiots. Okay, you made Harry your focus, and he knows this. Don’t you think that puts him under a lot of pressure to be what you want, to his possible detriment?”

“I want to clarify, for Harry’s sake, what happens if he doesn’t love you like you want. What *would* you do? He needs to know this before he gets too deeply into this relationship.”

He could have told her that it was far too late for that, but kept quiet to hear Gabrielle’s response.

She looked at Hermione for a long time, a thoughtful expression on her face, before the expression cleared. “You think that I’m putting undue pressure on Harry to stay by me, and using some form of emotional blackmail on him?”

Hermione nodded. “You wake him up; tell him that you’ve spent all these years working for him. What do you expect me to think?”

“Her Prince,” Harry corrected quietly.

“What?” Hermione asked, turning to face him.

“She did it for *her Prince* , not me,” he said softly.

“But you *are* her Prince,” Hermione pointed out.

Harry smiled softly, “I’m her Prince as long as I want to be. Her focus wasn’t on me, but on her Prince. I *am* her Prince, but if I stop acting like it – for sake of discussion, if I say I’m not in love with her and we break up, then I won’t be her Prince, and she will move on and find her *real* Prince, having learnt from the mistakes that led her to believe that I was her Prince.”

Hermione tilted her head and looked at Gabrielle.

“He *is* my Prince,” she said proudly. “No one but my Prince would ever be able to understand me so well. Harry is correct; if things didn’t work out, then Harry obviously wasn’t my Prince, and I’d deal with the data and make sure I didn’t make the same mistakes with my next search.”

Hermione leaned back in her chair. “That wasn’t the answer I expected,” she confessed. “When Bill mentioned you were a sociopath, I was concerned about how much pressure you were putting on Harry. All of us have worked for his freedom, and we didn’t want Albus’ cage replaced with one of your making.”

Gabrielle nodded. “I can understand that. It’s pretty insulting toward me, as it assumes that I would want to cage my Prince, and it implies that I would willingly sacrifice his freedom for some twisted pleasure on my part.

“There is, at the moment, a thin mental separation between my Prince and Harry, until we are married. Then I will drop it, because I won’t marry him if I am not sure, and if I am not sure that he is sure.”

She took a deep breath. “I am already vulnerable to him like no one else. His opinion counts, his views count, and he can hurt me in a way no one else can. It is that feeling of vulnerability that has me more convinced than anything else.

“I did not expect to feel like this – I hoped I would, but I didn’t expect it, especially not this fast. Everything that has happened since Harry awoke has merely reinforced the opinion that my original plan of focusing on my Prince and that Harry was my Prince was correct.”

Hermione nodded. “I think you need to explain that to your parents. They were very upset.” She held out a Portkey – a metal ball. “They are expecting you.”

Gabrielle looked at Harry. “It *will* make them happy,” she said.

“Go,” he said with a smile. “I’ll wait up for you.”

She stood and moved over to kiss him. “I won’t be long,” she promised. She reached into her pocket and took out her small golden key and gave it to him. “This is the key to my Pensieve. You can look at whatever you like, but I’d recommend looking at Ron and Hermione’s wedding first, and maybe the montage I put together for you.”

“Thank you.”

Gabrielle took the Portkey and vanished.

“Happier?” he asked Hermione.

She nodded. “A little. How do you feel about all of this?”

“When I was talking to Neville, I compared Gabrielle and Ginny. It’s like comparing a glow-worm to a *Lumos* spell. On the girlfriend front I could probably get any single girl I wanted, if I tried hard enough. And I’d probably be happy for the rest of my life.

“Gabrielle is different. She’s going to be a lot more work, she’s going to push me and expect to be pushed back. She’s going to mould me into her ideal of a Prince, and she’s going to continue to mould herself into her ideal of a Princess.

“She is never going to accept anything that resembles normality; she’s never going to take the easy road if it doesn’t lead where she wants to go. And she has the desire, deep inside her.”

“What desire?”

“The desire *to make a difference*, to change things. To do what is right, not what is easy. I’ve defeated Voldemort, but now I have a bigger battle to fight, one for our society’s very survival.”

“I’m not sure I like this drive you have,” she whispered.

“What did you expect?” he asked. “I have all this knowledge about what is going on in the world, and you said yourself that I have a saving people thing.”

“But it’s so fast, and so broad. Your plans are on a scale unheard of.”

“And that’s what makes it fun,” he grinned. “So, what do you think of Gabrielle? From what I can tell, she’s about as much of a sociopath as I am.”

“I think that her psychiatrist is an idiot, taking an easy option of slapping a pejorative diagnosis on her rather than exploring her properly. That’s why I’m a little upset about not knowing about it; I could have helped more and protected her from the damage that useless idiot has done.

“There are seven key signs for a sociopath; Gabrielle barely matches three of them, and as for the other four, only an idiot would apply them to her.”

“Things like her dancing with a broken rib? Her inability to understand the way others act?” Harry asked.

“The broken rib *could* be one indication,” Hermione allowed, “and her lack of personal empathy maybe, but she hasn’t done anything criminal, she has long range plans, and while she is deceitful, it has not been for financial gain. It’s only for the personal happiness of others and done in such a

way as it does not affect others negatively. She is aggressive on a Quidditch field, but not more so than anyone else.

“This idiot psychiatrist, when faced with something he didn’t understand, broke the cardinal rule of being a psychiatrist and attached a label to a misdiagnosis, which, in Gabrielle’s youth and inexperience, she believed, and has used that as a crutch to explain the little things that bother her. And she’s probably used what she knows about being a sociopath to make herself act like one, in a self-defeating circle.

“She says that she has a lack of empathy, and that she has faked it. Well, that is an impossibility, and that in itself should have been the biggest clue that she is not a sociopath. And having watched her Pensieve memories of Hagrid and Olympe’s wedding, I can say that she is a lot more empathic than she gives herself credit for.

“I’m not willing to attach a diagnosis at this point, but I do want to speak to her, and you, professionally. Just from what Fleur has told me – that Gabrielle started talking at a young age and had a huge vocabulary – is a huge clue about what might be going on.

Harry nodded slowly. “Do you agree with their belief that her Veela nature and her human nature clashing was a cause of whatever she has?”

Hermione looked thoughtful. “That is a possibility,” she allowed, “but it’s far too pat for my liking. The mind is an extremely complex thing. I went into psychology because I wanted to study what might happen when you woke up. The whole field was fascinating, so as soon as I left Hogwarts I went to a Muggle university, while Ron started to work for the Cannons.

“Once I had a few years under my belt, I was able to start to really identify some of the root problems in the Wizarding World, and yes, I did talk to you about them.”

Harry smiled slightly. “As did everyone else. I’ll talk to Gabrielle about having an in-depth chat with you soon.”

“Do you want me there to help?”

“Not to start with,” Harry said decisively. “She will accept things from me that she won’t accept from anyone else. Like you said, the mind is a complicated thing, and she has convinced herself that the diagnosis is true, so she doesn’t want to change.”

Hermione sighed.

“Do you know why she has a Pensieve?” she asked, not waiting for an answer. “So she could study her own actions and try to understand why she did what she did. Rather than help cure her, I think that was a perfect way to reinforce her behaviour. That idiot she was seeing as a therapist could have created a new Dark Lady. Luckily, she was far too focused on her Prince to go down that route, and she’s succeeded *despite* him, not because of him. I’ve got his name, and I’m going to pay him a visit soon and then see if he can say anything to stop me having him arrested for

child abuse.

“Still, she has shown an incredible amount of trust in you, giving you full access to her memories. I wouldn’t do that for anyone.”

“I would, for her.”

Hermione nodded. “I think you would at that,” she agreed. “It is really good to have you talk back again,” she said with a smile.

“I’m not as good a listener as I once was,” he pointed out.

“But a far better conversationalist,” she countered. “How are you doing with all of this?”

He looked at her for a long time. “Far better than I should be. Because of Gabrielle, and because of everything that was said to me when I was asleep. I don’t feel disconnected with my current time period because I know what is going on. What did disturb me, of course, is my peer group being older than I am, and the dramatic changes in how you all look, but what has helped is talking to everyone and finding out that you’re the same people underneath. Plus, Gabrielle has been there, holding my hand. That’s one of the reasons I’m happy to talk to her about this mix-up – I get to hold her hand for a bit.”

Hermione smiled. “Harry, I wasn’t kidding when I said that Gabrielle is a genius – it takes one to know one, and I’ve known Gabrielle for eight years now – and I offer my personal and professional guarantee that she is *not* a sociopath.”

“I believe you,” Harry said. “I believed you anyway, you’re Hermione – ‘She-Who-Is-Always-Right.’”

She laughed, “Not always. If I was, I would have been chasing down Fairy Tales years ago. I’ve got to get back to Ron – he’s cooking tonight. Oh, he’s playing on Sunday, and he’s got tickets for the three of us.”

“Brilliant,” Harry replied. “We’ll be there in orange to show our support. Actually, no, *I’ll* be there in orange. Gabrielle has far too much dress sense to wear that colour.”

Hermione laughed and stood up; he stood up as well, and hugged her.

“We’re always going to be friends, and we won’t let a little thing like me napping for eight years get in the way of that,” he reassured her.

Hermione smiled at him. “You can walk me out before you enjoy Gabrielle’s perspective on my wedding.”

“I’ll bet you looked beautiful in your dress.”

They left the Room of Requirement and walked down to the Entrance Hall, where they bade each



other farewell, then Harry walked up to Dumbledore's office.

"Harry," Albus said cheerfully as he let him in. "I didn't expect you this evening."

"Gabrielle gave me the key to her Pensieve, and suggested I have a look at Ron and Hermione's wedding."

"Excellent," Dumbledore agreed, using his wand to bring her Pensieve out of its hiding place. "I did wonder if I might have a word first?"

"Of course," Harry said.

"Lemon drop?"

Harry reached over and took one. "These are actually pretty nice."

Dumbledore's eyes twinkled merrily. "You're the first person who's ever actually taken one," he said happily. "Now, I have a question for you. Can I be the first to sign up?"

Harry blinked. "Sign up for what?"

"My place in the revolution," Albus said eagerly. "After your recruitment speech earlier, you could have pointed in any direction and most of us would have started to march."

Harry groaned. "I didn't mean that as a recruitment speech."

"No," Albus agreed, his eyes still twinkling, "I didn't think you did, but your rather incisive deconstruction of Tom's motives, combined with your obvious passion for change, did give the impression that you were going to change our world for the better. Most of my students are very aware of the current state of the world. They have seen their parents and their elder siblings and friends bemoan the results of the arch-conservatism that has been in control for far too long.

"As you know, I wanted you to fix things, and I find myself regretting that I was willing to sacrifice your happiness for what I thought correct. I did not realise that there might be more than one way to achieve the goal, or that mine might not be the best way.

"Introspection is one of the gifts of time, Harry, but it is something I have long lacked the desire to indulge in. Your actions, and more, the actions of Hermione, have forced me to undergo a rigorous period of self-examination. If someone as brilliant as Hermione had to go to such lengths to manoeuvre around me, it spoke ill of my goals."

Harry laughed softly, "I did wonder if you'd pick up on that. Gabbi did."

"A remarkable girl, that one," Dumbledore agreed. "You do seem to have fallen on your feet."

"In more ways than one," he agreed.

“Well, I have some more thinking to do,” Albus said jovially. “Don’t let me stand between you and your memories.”

Harry nodded and walked over to the Pensieve, inserting the key into a lock. The Pensieve opened and a series of instructions appeared – instructions that hadn’t been there when he had looked with Gabrielle.

He pressed a button and felt himself fall in the Pensieve. He landed in a small room. On a console in front of him was a series of switches, over forty of them, each with a label. He read through the labels quickly, and pressed the correct lever.

A door opened to the left, and he slowly walked through. He appeared in what he presumed was Gabrielle’s bedroom. The room was huge and palatial, with a large four-poster bed and matching antique furnishings.

“Hello, my prince,” a younger, shorter Gabrielle said from the side. He turned to face her, and somehow wasn’t surprised that she was looking at him directly, even though there should have been no way that she would know where he would be standing.

“It seems like it’s going to be an eternity before you’ll see this memory,” she continued, “but as you’re seeing it, it means that I have woken you, and you are my Prince. As you’ve already seen the memory of Olympe and Hagrid’s wedding, you’ll understand that I got the idea from there. I’m now thirteen years old, I’m a Beauxbatons student, and I’m learning everything a princess should know,” she said, dropping a perfect curtsy. She smiled at him and shrugged off the dressing gown she was wearing, leaving her in a thin, clinging silk slip.

Harry blinked.

Gabrielle laughed softly. “I thought that it would be great for you to be able to see my development,” she explained. She looked down at herself and sighed. “My hair’s nice,” she commented, “but still no sign of puberty.” She picked up the dressing gown and put it back on. “Don’t go anywhere,” she said with a smile, and vanished.

She appeared again a few seconds later. This time she was wearing a pair of jeans and a t-shirt. “I’m fourteen now,” she said, still looking directly at him. “School is strange, really. So many people, all doing things for obscure reasons, and puberty seems to be making all my friends go insane!” She sighed deeply. “I can’t wait until I’m grown up and we can be together.”

She pulled off her t-shirt and posed proudly in a cropped camisole. “Look, puberty,” she said. “Not much, I know, but at least it’s something!”

She vanished again, and returned once more. Her hair was longer this time, and her face had started to change, showing the more adult look she had now. Once again, she was wearing her Beauxbatons uniform.

“Well, I’m fifteen now,” she said cheerfully. “Lady Puberty finally showed up, and we’ve become

good friends. I'm getting to talk to you quite regularly. Hermione's moved you out of stasis, and she's come up with a brilliant spell so that we can teach you everything a Prince should know. Now that I understand the magic, I've been checking Hermione's research, and it's good, but it's so predictable. I think the answer is not going to be found in a normal way. I'm positive that I'll find it though."

She undid her shirt and placed it onto her bed. For the first time in this montage, she was wearing a bra.

"Not exactly sexy, is it?" she asked, as she looked down at her chest. "I'll get some new ones before you see me in person." She raised her hands above her head and stretched. "I'm a B-cup at the moment, and still growing."

She smirked at him and vanished once more. The door to the right opened, and an older Gabrielle walked in. She was smiling at him. "I'm a little late," she explained. "I'm seventeen and getting ready to move to Hogwarts. I know how to wake you up now. I knew that I'd find it, and I have!"

Harry moved to the left, walking around the room.

Gabrielle smiled slightly and turned to face him again. "It's not going to be long, my Prince, until we finally meet again, with both of us conscious, but of course, I couldn't do that without finishing off the show, could I?" Her eyes were a lot more aware than they had been. Before it had been just something she had done without really understanding why he would be interested, but now she was aware of her own attractiveness, and understood a lot more about her own sexuality, and it showed.

"I can not wait until you undress me," she purred, as she reached behind her neck to undo the halter top to her dress. She wiggled slightly, leaving her dressed in only a pair of black heels and black silk knickers. "I *told* you I'd get some new underwear," she continued huskily as she slinked toward him. "Do you like my knickers, my Prince?"

Harry gulped and nodded.

She paused in front of him, swaying slightly to music only she could hear. Her hands slid over her body, slowly moving down, until her fingers were playing with the waist of her underwear.

"Do you want me to take them off?" she asked softly, smiling in to his eyes.

"Yes, please," Harry croaked, unable to take his eyes from her, and completely forgetting that he was in a memory.

She turned slightly, digging her thumbs into the waistband, before she paused. "I'm sorry, my Prince," she said, "but I've done all the pushing in our relationship so far. It's time for *you* to make the next step. You're seeing this memory, so I know things have gone better than I have hoped. I want you to have me, to possess me totally, but you've got to take me. I have to know that you believe in *us* like I do. Please, my Prince, don't keep me waiting!"

She faded away, and Harry found himself outside the Pensieve. He exhaled heavily and banged his head against the wall beside the Pensieve. Repeatedly.

“Would you like a drink?” Professor Dumbledore asked softly.

Harry looked up at him and nodded.

“You will, of course, never tell anyone about this,” the Headmaster continued as he opened his bottom drawer and pulled out a bottle of scotch and two glasses. He poured out two shots and passed one to Harry.

He took it and dropped down opposite Albus. He saluted him, before draining the glass. The liquid burned its way down his throat, but after the goblin food, its effect was negligible.

Albus smiled. “Sips are often better.”

“I’ll remember that for next time.”

“Would you accept some advice from an old man who has made a lot of mistakes?”

“Probably not,” Harry replied, “but I’ll accept anything from you.”

Albus laughed softly. “You have a remarkable young lady there, Harry. I was delighted when she asked to study here. As an educator, getting a hold of the finest students is always a goal, and as you, Hermione and Ron, in your own ways, were the best of your year, Gabrielle is the best of hers.

“But what you have to do is make sure that you keep her -- that you don’t neglect her and lose what you have. Love is the most powerful force in existence, and if you lose the love of your life, you are never quite the same again.” His voice was soft and sad.

“So who was she?” Harry asked softly, taking a guess.

Albus sighed and examined the bottom of his glass. “Her name was Doris. I met her ten years after I defeated Grindelwald. I’d pretty much got over everything by then, and she fascinated me. We married, and were happy for some years, but then I started to hear rumours of a new Dark Lord rising, and I started to believe my own publicity, that I was the only person who could save the world again. To my regret, I pulled away from Doris, dedicating my time and efforts to forming what we now call the Order of the Phoenix. One day, I came home and she was gone.

“I am forced to admit, now, that I left her long before that. She’s a school teacher in a small town called Llanidloes in Wales.”

“When did you last talk to her?” Harry asked.

“Thirty years ago.”

Harry nodded and glanced down at his glass, then suddenly looked up again, over Albus' shoulder. "What the HELL is that!?"

Albus turned fast.

"*Petrificus Totalus, Incarcerous, Silencio*," Harry shouted, pointing his wand at Dumbledore. The spells caught the Professor as he turned back to Harry. Fawkes looked up from his perch and trilled an amused song.

Harry walked over to the Fireplace and threw some powder into it. "Doris Dumbledore, Llanidloes, Wales."

A woman's face appeared shortly. "Hello?"

"Hi, I'm Harry Potter. Would you mind stepping in? I'd love to have a chat with you about Albus."

The woman's eyebrows rose, before she nodded sharply and stepped through the fireplace. She was a tall, thin woman, with soft grey eyes that danced with life and mischief. Her hair was grey and curly, and fell down to her shoulders. She looked at the spellbound Albus and turned back to Harry. "Doris Dumbledore, although I've used Jones for the past thirty years," she introduced herself, offering her hand.

Harry took it and was mildly surprised at her firm grip. "It's good to meet you," he said. "I was just having a chat with Uncle Albus, and, well, we were drinking, and Albus was telling me how badly he had mistreated you."

"He did?"

"Oh yes," Harry continued, "He was just saying that if he hadn't spent so much time trying to save the world, and had put some effort into saving what really mattered to him – his marriage – he would have had you next to him through his darkest days, and he wouldn't have made some of the basic errors he did."

"Albus said that he lost contact with his feelings, and it caused him to start to treat people like pieces on a chess board. It's only now, with the introspection and clarity of old age, that he realises just how much he lost when he pushed you away."

Doris blinked and stared at Albus. "He said that?"

"Absolutely. Obviously," Harry continued, "he's not expecting to resume his relationship with you, but he would like the opportunity to apologise in person."

"He looks it," Doris said wryly.

"I thought," Harry continued innocently, "that you might allow him to go home with you for the night, where he could apologise under optimal conditions. I'm sure he'll be frozen with delight"

for quite some time, and would be most attentive if you were to; perhaps, explain a little about what you've felt during this time." He paused. "This is a man who, while flawed like the rest of us, did have the best intentions at heart," he continued in a soft voice. "He managed to keep your existence a secret through two wars, and locked his love for you deep inside him."

"It was never his motives, it was his actions, Harry," Doris sighed. "But you may be right; getting some things off my chest would be cathartic."

Harry grinned and levitated Albus into the air. "He'll follow you."

"Harry, regardless of how this turns out, I thank you. You must come over to dinner some night."

Harry smiled. "If I can bring my Princess, I'd be delighted."

"Miss Delacour? I'd be delighted to meet her as well." Doris turned and moved toward the fireplace. "Come, Albus," she commanded.

Harry smirked as the two vanished into the Floo network. Fawkes sang another amused song, and Harry walked over to him. "Hey, Fawkes," Harry said, and rubbed his head gently. "Long time, no see, for me at least."

Fawkes nodded and crooned softly.

"I don't think I ever thanked you for my wand," Harry said. "Thanks. I couldn't have defeated Voldemort without it."

The phoenix puffed up his chest and looked proud.

"Do you know what happened to Voldemort's wand?"

Fawkes flew over to Albus' desk and scratched above a drawer.

Harry opened it, and at the back, wrapped in a black silk cloth, was the brother wand to his. "I'll bet you never expected so much evil to be done with one of your feathers."

Fawkes seemed to sigh, and a small silver tear appeared on the side of his face. It dripped down his face and vanished into his feathers.

"Yeah," Harry agreed. "Do you remember what happened the first time I met you?"

The phoenix looked embarrassed and nodded.

"Why don't we have our own burning ceremony?" Harry asked.

Fawkes hopped up onto his shoulder.

"I'm guessing you like that idea," Harry laughed. He moved over to Fawkes's perch and placed

the wand down in the pan that caught the ashes. He stepped backward and pointed his wand at Voldemort's. "*Incendio*," he said softly.

The wand seemed to resist being burnt for a second, but then it flared brightly. When the fire had died down, Fawkes flew over to it and examined the ashes for a second. With a disdainful expression, he kicked the ashes out of his perch and looked at Harry. He reached around with his beak and snatched a feather out of his tail. He turned and offered it to Harry.

"But I have a wand," Harry pointed out.

Fawkes rolled his eyes.

"For Gabrielle?"

Fawkes nodded.

"Thank you," Harry said simply. "I promise that she'll make up for everything that Voldemort did with your feather." Fawkes trilled in response and settled down, closing his eyes firmly.

Harry smiled and walked back over to the Pensieve. He entered the room with all the levers again and this time chose Ron and Hermione's wedding.

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Gabrielle looked in the mirror and tried out a smile. It was a little too bright, so she turned it down a little.

Her hair was hidden under a hat, her clothes didn't really fit her properly, and she'd even cast a spell to give her skin a slightly unhealthy look. Who would have thought that looking bad was so much effort?

Today was Ron and Hermione's wedding, and she had worked far too hard to get it to this stage to take away any attention from Hermione today.

She walked out into the hall, and down into the huge reception area. Fleur was talking with Bill, and looked at her curiously, before she slowly smiled and looked proud. Gabrielle smiled back, and walked into the large room where the wedding would take place.

As with Olympe and Hagrid's weddings, there were tables full of pretty flowers. She walked through, and slipped into the back.

"Is everything ready?"

"They are."

Gabrielle nodded. "Are the photographers ready?"

"They are not here yet, but they are due any minute."

She frowned. "If they are late, I want to know about it instantly."

"Yes, Miss Delacour."

Gabrielle nodded at the wedding planner, and walked down into the kitchens. "How's the food coming along?"

"We'll be on time, Miss Delacour," the head chef said, appearing in front of her. "We've had a few problems with the equipment, but it was nothing a few curses and kicks couldn't fix."

"Good," she said with a nod. She paused. "Is that a chocolate fountain?"

The head chef nodded. "They're popular at weddings these days."

"Get rid of it," she commanded. "It's too tacky."

The chef smiled. "With pleasure," he said fervently. "I hate them."

Gabrielle smiled. "Is there anything else I need to know?"

The chef shook his head. "I think you should tell them what you are doing."

"No," Gabrielle said firmly. "They don't need to know."

"You're the boss."

Gabrielle nodded and walked back outside to rejoin the crowd of people who were now congregating. Remus was talking to a pretty Auror with pink hair, and she made a mental note about that. Remus needed someone to stop him poking his nose too far into what she was doing with her Prince.

"Gabrielle."

"Sirius," she said, as the Auror walked up to her.

"You're looking awful."

"Thank you," she replied with a smile. "How did your first talk with Harry go?"

Sirius frowned. "Not as well as I would like. I didn't even know where to start. It was so strange to know that he would definitely hear everything I said."

Gabrielle gave a mental sigh. "Well, did Harry ever have the Talk?"

Sirius blinked, before he started to smile. "No one else would do that," he mused. "And I could actually tell him properly, and not worry about the sort of gumpf people usually give."

"And you could tell him how to become an Animagus," she suggested.



Sirius nodded eagerly. “I should have thought of that myself.”

“You would have,” Gabrielle said lightly.

Sirius smiled. “I should go and talk to Moony.”

“Okay,” Gabrielle said. “I’ll go and have a talk with that blonde woman who’s just entered. She looks a little lost.”

Sirius looked up and blinked. “Tell you what,” he said magnanimously, “I’ll go and rescue her for you.” He dashed off without waiting, and she smiled to herself. Of all of her Prince’s friends, Sirius was the easiest to deal with. All she had to do was point him at an attractive female and he was off like a dog chasing a car.

At least the only person she didn’t have to worry about today was Hermione. She was not the sort of person to get wedding jitters, and had insisted that Ron attend some pre-marriage counselling first.

It was a good idea. Of course, it wasn’t something that she would need with her Prince. But then, they were royalty, and different rules would always apply. She moved to a balcony and surveyed everything that was going on, checking for anything that needed her attention.

Why couldn’t these people just be happy? She still didn’t understand.

After she had told Ron how to propose to Hermione, and said proposal had been accepted, she had presumed that they would get married and live happily ever after. But no, they had to make a *drama* and a *crisis* out of everything.

She really wished her Prince had been awake, because he would have sorted their nonsense out right at the start, and she wouldn’t have had to work so hard to fix it.

The problems had started because Hermione’s parents, while dentists, were not used to how much things cost in the Wizarding World, and Ron’s parents weren’t wealthy either.

So they had planned to have a small wedding in a local church, with a cheap Muggle dress. They had refused a few offers of help – probably because they weren’t that sincere – and while a little disappointed, were going to go through with it as it was.

Well, she wouldn’t stand for that. This was her Prince’s best friends’ marriage. It needed to be memorable. It needed to be perfect. So, as no one else seemed willing to step in, she had.

The first part had been the most difficult. Luckily, the *Daily Prophet* was willing to do anything to get a photo shoot with her.

She didn’t understand why so many people wanted to look at her. Sure, she was pretty, but she was only fourteen years old. Photo shoots were boring, and she had to pose in the same spot for hours while the photographers argued about light.

She could have told them how to do it – it was pretty obvious – but they would get upset about it, so she resigned herself to a day of boredom.

In return for her patience, they had produced a competition in the paper for her – a Dream Wedding competition. She had given that particular issue of the *Prophet* to Ron, and persuaded him to enter it. Ron did, and she then ensured that Ron won.

That was the *Prophet*'s deed done, and it left her to pay for everything. It had taken a lot of her savings, ensuring that she would have to do a few more photo shoots, but it meant that today's wedding was going in to happen in a lovely mansion, that the flowers and the food would be perfect, and that Hermione's dress suited her.

There was the soft chime of a bell, and everyone was called to the main room for the ceremony.

She slipped in back, keeping her head down as much as she could, and settled down to make sure that she caught everything for her Prince to see later.

The room itself was perfect for a Gryffindor marriage, full of red and gold colours. Ron had wanted some orange, but Hermione had put her foot down – to Gabrielle's relief.

An organ started the traditional Wedding March, and she turned so that she could see Hermione. The girl was looking radiant, her hair sleeked to a silky shine and done up in an elaborate style that included a tiara. A few loose strands framed her face, which was covered in an ivory veil.

Her dress was a very traditional, pure white, off-the-shoulder gown. She walked slowly down the aisle, accompanied by her father. She was trailed by Ginny, who *still* didn't look like a princess, and Luna, the strange blonde girl with the unshakable belief in animals that didn't exist.

Ron stood alone at the front. His brothers were ushers, but the Best Man's place was Harry's, and she appreciated the gesture that Ron and Hermione had made. Even if Harry wasn't there in person, he would be there in spirit.

She watched the ceremony carefully, allowing herself to imagine that it was her Prince who was standing there, opposite her, and they were formally tying their lives together for the rest of time.

After the wedding, she slipped out quickly to check the food – everything was as she wanted – and then the photographers. As usual, the photographers were *still* talking about the stupid light. She ordered them to do what she wanted, using some of the vocabulary she had picked up from some of the boys at Beauxbatons.

She then retreated to the back of the crowd, blending in as much as she could so that she wouldn't be in any photos.

It was with a great sense of relief that she was able to take her seat at the reception. She knew that everything had gone as it should, and, more importantly, no one knew that she had arranged and paid for most of the details.

“May I have your attention please?” Fred asked, as he stood on a chair. Molly had bullied him and George into wearing proper outfits, and they looked pretty smart.

“Now, as well all know, the real Best Man is currently having an elongated nap, so we’ve been asked to step in and do the speech.”

“Well,” George continued, “maybe we volunteered, rather than were asked, but we think that we know what Harry would say in a time like this.”

“Oh, shite,” Ron moaned.

“Ron, language!” Hermione scolded.

“Whipped already,” George said with a grin. “Anyway, the speech.”

George held up a bottle of Firewhisky. “It’s always important when doing a speech to get the right amount of alcohol inside you. Enough so that you have the courage to go through with it.”

“And not too much that we can’t run away afterwards,” George continued. “When it came to writing this speech, we weren’t short of material.”

“Sadly,” Fred said with a sigh, “most of it we had to edit, throw away, burn, or hand over to the Aurors to help with their enquiries, so this is what’s left.”

“I think you’ll all agree that this has been a terrific wedding so far. A wonderful venue, an entertaining vicar, a beautiful bride.”

“And a somewhat adequate groom,” Fred finished. “We have now reached the pivotal moment in our speech, where, in good taste, we are meant to put down the groom.”

“So, without the good taste, we’ll proceed. As we are older than Ron, we can remember clearly how we first saw him. He was small, bald, and incontinent. Fortunately for us all, he has lost most of these characteristics over the years,” George said.

“Although, if you had been on his stag party last week, you would have seen at least one of those characteristics make a reappearance.” Fred grinned cheerfully. “If there is one quality that Ron has in abundance, it’s loyalty. And it’s been a loyalty that’s been tested over the past two decades of broken dreams and betrayed trust... as a Chudley Cannons fan. So Hermione, you can rest assured that no matter how badly you might behave, Ron will stand by you.”

“I’m sure that you would all agree that Hermione looks stunning this afternoon, and we would like to congratulate Ron for following Bill’s example in bringing another *absolute fox* into the family. It raises the bar for the rest of us, and Ron, even you have scrubbed up okay today,” Fred finished with a wink.

“And Ron,” George said, as he went slightly serious, “despite this abuse, you really are a special person, and we’re proud to know you. And we’re desperate to know how you managed to land a

beautiful woman like Hermione. Not only did you manage to find her, but you persuaded her to spend the rest of her life with you. Ron, we salute you!”

The two of them saluted formally.

“I think,” Fred said, “that we acted as well as we could in Harry’s stead today. Ron was up on time, and enjoyed his final meal as a free man. We got him here in one piece, on time, sober and fully dressed. Our only disappointment was that we were unable to fulfil his last request...”

“...but that was only due to the protestations of the Welsh Sheep Council.”

“To bring things to a conclusion, we’d like to thank you for your attention. And if you’ve enjoyed the speech as much as we’ve enjoyed making it—”

“—Then all we can do is tender our sincere apologies!”

“And finally, I hope you’ll join us in a toast. ‘Ladies and gentlemen, the Bride and Groom!’”

Everyone stood and toasted the blushing couple, and then started to clap for Fred and George’s speech. The two blushed and sat down, looking very relieved.

The rest of the evening passed smoothly, and then Ron and Hermione went on honeymoon. She would have liked to have helped with that, but she had run out of money.

She smiled happily and went to help clean up. Everything had gone perfectly. Her Prince would be pleased, and that was all she wanted.

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Harry pulled out of the Pensieve and sighed. He wished that Gabrielle was nearby, because he was so proud of her at the moment, and he wanted to tell her that.

Fawkes was asleep on his perch, and there was no sign of Albus. He walked out of the Headmaster’s office, and headed toward the Gryffindor dorm. He guessed that Gabrielle was still with her parents, repairing her relationship with them.

He didn’t want to sleep in his bed on his own, and he certainly didn’t want to sleep in a dorm, so he talked the Fat Lady into letting him in, then he collapsed onto one of the couches in front of the fire, put his feet up, and drifted off.

“Harry?”

He jerked out of sleep, and rolled off the couch. “Zach?” The Gryffindor Quidditch captain was looking a little concerned, and behind him, most of Gryffindor house was looking on.

“Erm, breakfast?”

Harry stretched. “Sorry,” he apologised. “And yeah, thanks. I think I’ll go and get changed

before I join you.”

“Where’s Gabrielle?” Zach asked.

“She’s got a small family matter she’s sorting,” Harry replied. “She should be back later – which was why I was sleeping on the couch. I didn’t fancy sleeping in the big bed alone.”

Zach blushed slightly, but nodded.

“Anyway, I’ll catch you in a few minutes.” He walked out of the Gryffindor common room and jogged to his rooms. He stripped and had a quick shower, before putting on some clean clothes and walking down to the Great Hall.

All the tables were full, and the meal was underway as he arrived.

“Harry,” Professor McGonagall called. “You wouldn’t happen to know what happened to Professor Dumbledore, would you?”

“He’s not back yet?” Harry asked, delighted.

Remus sighed. “What have you *done* to the Headmaster, Harry?”

Harry looked innocent. “Me?”

“Yes, you, the one who is insisting on fitting the eight years that you’ve missed into as few days as possible.”

“Oh, *that* me,” Harry said with a grin. “I got me some payback on Uncy Albus last night. I petrified him, bound him, silenced him, and then handed him over to the one person he is truly terrified of.”

Not a sound interrupted the Great Hall as everyone stared at Harry.

“Harry, who might that be?” Remus asked softly.

“Doris,” Harry replied.

Minerva dropped her glasses on to the table. “Harry,” she whispered, “did you get Albus back with his wife?”

“Well, no – I just gave Doris the chance last night to get a few things off her chest, and if Albus is as wise as he’s cracked up to be, he’ll have spent a *lot* of time grovelling in apology.”

Minerva raised her hand and brushed a tear off her cheek. “Bless you, Harry,” she said softly. “He’s missed her more than anything else in the world.”

Harry saluted casually, and wandered over to the Gryffindor table. As he sat down, there was a

burst of flame, and Fawkes landed on his shoulder.

Harry turned to the phoenix. “Don’t tell me, Albus isn’t back and no one’s fed you.”

Fawkes nodded and looked sad.

“You old hen,” Harry accused. “You’re just getting lazy!”

Fawkes swiped him with a wing and looked hurt.

“Don’t try that look on me, you overgrown turkey.”

Fawkes squawked and smacked him again. “Geez,” Harry complained. “The years haven’t mellowed you, have they. Dobby?”

“Sir is calling Dobby?”

“Do you know where Professor Dumbledore keeps his phoenix food?”

“Dobby is knowing that, but Firebirdie is preferring sausages.”

“Is Firebirdie allowed sausages?”

Dobby shook his head. “Sausages gives Firebirdie gas.”

Fawkes squawked again, and whacked Harry once more.

“Stop that,” Harry said irritably. “Dobby, will you go and fetch the food please?”

Dobby nodded and popped out. He returned shortly afterward with a bowl and a bag of food.

Harry emptied the bag into the bowl, and floated the bowl so that Fawkes could eat without having to move. “Thanks.”

Dobby smiled massively and vanished.

Harry looked up, to find that yet again, everyone was staring at him.

“It’s times like this,” Harry said with a sigh, “as I sit here with a phoenix on my shoulder, having played matchmaker for Albus last night, that I realise that I should stop pretending that I’m ever going to be normal, and just enjoy who I am.”

Zach laughed softly. “Yeah,” he agreed. “It would make it easier on the rest of us.”

Harry blinked. “In what way?”

“Well, if you’re Harry Potter, Gabrielle’s Prince, that makes you special, right?”

“Go on.”

“And if you’re special, we don’t have to try to keep up with you. We don’t have to worry about fighting a professor and making it look easy, or casually reuniting our Headmaster with a wife that none of us knew he even had, or even the absent mention of magically locking up Albus Dumbledore, the legend. Nor do we have to worry about the phoenix on your shoulder. And it’s because you’re Harry Potter – we don’t have to compare ourselves to you – and that means we can be happy.”

“I guess that makes sense,” Harry said. “But a lot of that was pure luck and acting on impulse. Still, if it means people start to talk to me, rather than stare at me, I’m willing to go for it.” He absently scratched Fawkes’s head. “But just remember that I am human.”

“Sure,” Zach agreed. “Just a special one. Like Gabrielle. She’s seventeen, and is already an international model and Quidditch star, and she managed to wake you up, when even Hermione Granger failed.”

Harry smiled and finished his breakfast. “I’ll see you later; I’m going to Gringotts to have a chat with Grapplepus.”

Zach smiled faintly and nodded.

Harry moved through the school and back up to Dumbledore’s office. He borrowed some of the Floo powder and Floo’d straight to the Leaky Cauldron. It was quiet; most of the shops weren’t open yet, so he was able to walk down Diagon Alley slowly. His first stop was Ollivander’s, and he waited patiently for it to open.

“Mr Potter,” Ollivander greeted him as he opened up. “I did not expect to see you.”

“I need a wand,” Harry explained.

“There is something wrong with yours?” Ollivander asked in surprise. “Eleven inches, holly wood with a phoenix core.”

“No, mine’s fine, but I need one for my girlfriend. It’s a surprise.”

“Does she not have one?”

Harry pulled out Fawkes’s feather. “Fawkes gave this for Gabrielle.”

“I see,” Ollivander whispered reverently, his protestations stopped abruptly. “Do you know what wood she would prefer?” he asked eagerly.

Harry thought for a second. “What have you got?”

“Pretty much everything,” Ollivander replied. “I have to have a stock, as each wizard and witch is unique, and you never know what you might need.” He turned and pulled out a case. He tapped it,

and the case unfolded several times, presenting samples of many different kinds of wood.

Harry looked down at it slowly, before he stopped. "This one," he said.

"Are you sure?" Ollivander asked. "I've not used Australian Blackwood in a wand before. I'm not sure how the wand will turn out, combined with a phoenix feather."

Harry nodded. "That's the one. How long will it take and how much?"

"Twenty-five galleons and you should be able to pick it up by lunch. Most of my time is spent with cleaning and polishing wands at the moment, so it will be a pleasure to make a new one."

"Thanks," Harry said gratefully. "I'll stop by later."

"A pleasure, Mr Potter."

Harry nodded and walked out and headed back up Diagon Alley toward Gringotts. Between the Magical Menagerie and the bank was a small building that proudly proclaimed itself as the *Quibbler*.

He walked inside. A witch was sitting at a desk, reading a magazine.

"Ginny Weasley," he said.

"Floor forty two, office negative three," she replied without looking up. "Have you seen the pictures of Harry Potter?"

"No," he replied in surprise.

The witch wolf whistled loudly. "If I was a few years younger, I'd show him what an older woman could teach him."

"Right," Harry agreed and shuddered deeply. He moved off quickly, praying that she wouldn't put down the magazine until he was long gone. He stepped into the lift and paused. The button labelling made absolutely no sense – there were two floor ones – until he squinted, and realised they were Catalan numbers. He was pretty sure that Hermione would have been the only person who thought that knowing various integer sequences would be useful.

He pressed the button for forty-two, and went up the six floors needed. As he walked out, to his left was office one, to his right, office minus one. It made sense, in its own way.

He walked forward to door negative three and threw it open, expecting to find Ginny's office. What he found instead was a large room full of people and desks and oddities. He looked to the side, and sighed as he realised that all the doors on this side led to the same place.

"Ginny Weasley?" he asked the first person he met. The person was busy interrogating a large squirrel.



“Through there,” he grunted, pointing with one hand.

Harry walked forward and kept his eyes straight; he really didn't want to know what else went on in this place.

“You!” a voice shouted. “Do you know what you've done?”

“Yes,” Harry replied instinctively.

“Good,” the man responded. “So many people come in here and don't know.”

Harry nodded at him and continued on his way. He knocked on a door and walked in. Ginny was bent over a filing cabinet. Harry took a seat and made a point of not staring at her bum. Which wasn't that difficult -- he could happily picture Gabrielle's chest for hours on end.

“Harry!” Ginny squeaked.

“Nice place you have here,” he said casually.

“Thank you,” she replied. “I wouldn't normally get a private office, but I can't work with the others. They all think I'm a bit strange.”

“By being the only normal person here?”

“Something like that,” she agreed.

“So who was the Muggle with a sense of humour who devised the floor naming scheme?”

“What?”

“You know, 1, 1, 2, 5, 14, 42, 132, 429, 1430.”

Ginny blinked at him, and then picked up the phone. “Someone's cracked the floor code,” she called.

The door opened two seconds later and the same man who had shouted at him entered. “Locutios Lovegood,” he introduced himself. “What's this about you cracking the floor code?”

Harry decided that the only way forward from this point was to treat everything as if it was completely normal. “You asked what I'd done, and this was it,” he replied.

“My dear fish, please do explain.”

“They're called Catalan numbers, named after a Belgian who discovered them.” Harry paused for a second. “If I was to say ‘binomial coefficients’ to you, how would you respond?”

“No matter how good looking you are, I don't swing that way,” Locutios responded immediately.

Harry nodded, having expected that sort of response. "Let's just say that the next floor would be 132 and be done with it," he suggested.

"Remarkable," Locutios said softly. "Do you know what this means?"

"Yes."

"This is what I like about you," Locutios announced. "Now, what do you know about Snorkacks?"

"That they can only be caught in Sweden by busty, bare-chested blondes wearing lederhosen."

"Lederhosen!" Locutios gasped. "Of course." He threw open the door, and shouted "Luna!" The blonde who had been one of Hermione's bridesmaids walked in. "Luna, this remarkable young man has decoded the floors! *And* he knows how to catch Snorkacks."

"Hello, Harry," Luna said.

"Hi."

"Quick, Luna, whip your top off, there's a good girl, so that Harry can see if your breasts are big enough." He turned his back on them and started to whistle the Indiana Jones theme.

Luna shrugged and did as she was told.

"They're big enough," Harry said before she could unhook her bra.

"Are you sure?" Luna asked, a disappointed look on her face.

Harry looked at her solemnly. "Do you have any lederhosen?"

"Of course, I would hardly be able to cook breakfast without them."

"Then you'll do fine."

"Excellent," Locutios stated. "Luna, book us a trip to Sweden, immediately."

Luna nodded. "It was nice seeing you again," she said to Harry, and turned to walk out the door.

"Luna," Locutios called, "put your top back on first, there's a dear."

Luna giggled. "You are so silly, Daddy," she replied. The two walked out the door, Luna doing her shirt up again.

Harry shut the door behind them and sighed. "I think that Hermione has just played a very delayed prank on me."

"Hermione?" Ginny asked.

“My answers have been just a little too pat,” Harry explained.

“I’m more impressed that you didn’t flinch,” Ginny said. “I was blushing like a lighthouse.”

Harry smiled. “Luna’s breasts are okay,” he agreed. “But Gabrielle has breasts that deserve to be sculpted and used as an example of how breasts should look.”

Ginny smiled faintly. “Luckily for the rest of us mere mortals, that won’t happen.”

“Damn right,” Harry agreed. “So, you wanted an interview, interview me.”

The door opened again, and Locutios peered around. “Luna mentioned that you’re Harry Potter.”

“Yes, but that happened quite some time ago,” Harry replied.

“Why are you here?”

“Interview with Ginny.”

Locutios looked at Ginny as if seeing her for the first time. “Be promoted, two grades,” he said. “You’re in charge while we’re in Sweden. And keep up the good work.” Before Ginny could respond, he was out the door.

“Oh,” Ginny muttered. She slowly smiled. “Thank you.”

“What for?” Harry asked.

“For coming in here – you didn’t have to do it.”

Harry shrugged his shoulders. “I didn’t plan it. I was just passing by and remembered that I owed you an interview.”

“Most people wouldn’t have,” Ginny said. “Locutios might be nuttier than a fruit cake, but he is a good manager. Neville is going to be so pleased with the pay raise.” She smiled brightly and pulled out some parchment and a quill. “It’s not a Quick Quotes,” she said, as it started to scribble. “It’s the same spell that lawyers use, so it just takes down what you say.”

“Okay,” Harry agreed and settled down. “Interview away.”

“How did Gabrielle Delacour waken you after all these years?”

“She kissed me,” Harry responded. “And any red-blooded male would react to a kiss from her. And no, I’m not into sharing, so they will have to take my word for that.”

Ginny giggled, before she cast the spell that paused the Quote Quill. “Is that what really happened?” she asked.

“Kinda,” Harry said. “She also used a potion on me, the same one that was the basis for Sleeping Beauty.”

Ginny nodded. “The public will like your story better.”

“That’s what I thought.”

“Okay, next question. I am a journalist, Harry, and I swear that this is stuff I’ve found out from other sources, and not what you’ve told me.”

“Okay.”

She cast the spell and the Quill started again. “Since you returned to active duty, we’ve been hearing all sorts of rumours around Diagon Alley. The goblins have purchased two shops on your behalf. Parvati Patil has been gushing about you hiring her as a hostess. Fred and George Weasley quit their jobs in such a fashion that they are *personae non grata* at the Ministry. All of these rumours place you firmly in the middle of them. Would you care to comment?”

Harry looked at her for a long moment, before he decided that she was doing her job and asking about rumours, and not betraying his confidence in her. “Mostly true,” he agreed. “Gabrielle and I have decided to try and shake up the Wizarding world a little. We’re in the early stages of planning a couple of new ventures. I’m not going to go into any more details at the moment, as some of the details are still in play. You can say that I had a crash course in the current economic climate, and as I’ve inherited a lot of money, I figured I’d do something with it.”

Ginny nodded. “Gabrielle Delacour. She’s the best Chaser of her age, she’s an international model, and she’s wealthy in her own right.”

Harry nodded.

“How on earth did you manage to nab her so quickly?”

Harry laughed. “I think it was more a case of her nabbing me. After all, she woke me up, not the other way around. I just reacted to the situation. Ask yourself this, if someone who looked like Gabrielle woke you up; wouldn’t you see what you could do to get her to stay with you?”

“No, I prefer men,” she replied drolly. “But I think our readers, both male and female, will be able to understand.”

Harry pulled out his wand and stopped the quill. “You do know that Neville has slight concerns about you and me?”

She sighed. “Yeah, I’ve tried to get him out of it. I did have a huge crush on you, years ago, as you know, but he can’t get it through his thick-headed skull that it’s *him* I love, and *him* I chose.”

“If you want,” Harry said, “I could get Gabbi to have a word with him.”

Ginny shook her head. "I've got Nev's ring on my finger, and that should be good enough for him."

Harry nodded in agreement. "I think it's going to be nice getting to know you, Ginny."

"As a person, rather than as an irritating crush?"

He grinned and started the quill again.

"These aren't in any order," Ginny said. "I'll write the article later. At your press conference, you gave some details about what happened with your fight with the Dark Lord."

Harry sighed. "Call him Voldemort; call him Tom, anything but a stupid honorific. He was not a lord, and was in no way deserving of that title."

Ginny smiled broadly. "Thank you," she said, "Printing that will have a bigger effect than anything else."

Harry swung his feet up and relaxed back. In a low voice, he started to recount what had happened that night so many years ago.

When he finished, Ginny cancelled the spell. "Thank you," she said softly. "This is going to go a long way toward establishing me as a credible journalist."

"That's what friends are for, Ginny," Harry said as he stood. "Actually, I have one question. What did Fred and George do?"

Ginny smiled broadly. "Somehow, they managed to get a full weeks worth of rubbish squeezed in to Fudge's office. When he arrived in the morning, and opened the door, the pressure pushed it out like a hose. It threw him all the way along the corridor, and practically filled all of level one.

"And, as soon as people started to use spells on it, it multiplied, so they tried to get House Elves to clean it up, only the rubbish wouldn't respond to their magic, and as they tried to use their hands, the rubbish actually ran away! So Fudge ordered the secretaries to clean it up, but that didn't work either. The only people who can move it are either members of the Wizengamot, or high ranking Minister officials! Fudge is having an absolute fit about the whole thing, only there's no proof that Fred and George did it."

Harry laughed. "Those guys are insane, but I love them."

"Me, too," Ginny agreed and gave him a quick hug.

"I'll see you later," Harry promised as he walked out the door. He was able to get to the lift without problem, and pressed the second first floor button. As he arrived, Luna was talking to the receptionist. "It was nice meeting you again," Harry said to Luna. "You have nice breasts."

"Why, thank you," Luna said happily. "Any time you want to see them, just let me know."

Harry nodded, knowing that would never happen. He nodded to the awe-struck receptionist and walked back into the sunlight. That was one of the strangest things he'd done yet.

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# Happily Ever After

## Chapter 7

Harry walked from the Quibbler building into the one next to it. Inside Gringotts, there was a large queue formed in front of the cashiers. Before he could join the queue, one of the guards came up to him.

“Straight through, Mr Potter,” he said, leading Harry past the queue.

“How come he’s getting through?” one of the wizards protested.

Two guards appeared. “Because he is friend of the goblins,” the one on the left sneered. “When you perform a service to Gringotts, and when you bother to make friends with goblins, maybe then you will be allowed through, too.” The goblin reached up and grabbed the wizard by the robes, pulling him down so that they were nose to nose. “Until then,” the guard growled, “I would suggest shutting your blunt-toothed mouth and keeping your loud opinions to yourself.” He looked around as he released the pale wizard. “Does anyone else have any comments?”

There was a complete silence.

The goblin accompanying Harry laughed softly and opened the gate that allowed him behind the counters.

“Thanks,” Harry said. He walked through to find Grappleagus waiting for him. “Morning.”

“Good morning, Harry,” Grappleagus said cheerfully. Before he could say any more, there was a flurry up ahead.

“Mr Potter, Mr Potter,” three goblins cried as they converged from three different directions.

“You are looking for an account manager,” the first said, almost breathless. “I’d like to tender my services for that position.”

The second goblin pushed the first hard. “As would I, Mr Potter.”

“Stop!” Harry commanded. “Grappleagus, knowing what you do about my plans, is there anyone you would suggest to act as my account manager?”

“Yes,” Grappleagus said promptly. “Me.”

The faces of the three goblins fell.

“However,” Grappleagus continued, “I have a business to turn around. In my stead, these three are reasonable.” He paused. “They wouldn’t have volunteered otherwise,” he finished in a low voice.

Harry looked at three goblins in front of him. “You do know that I am after high risk, high return



options?”

The third one blinked and then sighed. “I am sorry,” he said, “but I should withdraw. I’m a little too old and set in my ways. My younger colleagues would perhaps be better.”

“I like a man who knows his limitations,” Harry said. “Right, you two, I want both of you to go and write a proposal for how you would help me. I’ll pick the best one. You have seven days.” He paused. “And next time, when I have Gabrielle with me, I would suggest approaching with more decorum, or you will find that she will be most displeased with the lack of respect shown, and will act accordingly.”

The two goblins paled and nodded.

“Get to it then,” Harry said. They looked at each other, baring their teeth in matching snarls, before rushing away.

“The impudence of youth,” Grappleagus said in amusement.

Harry looked at the slightly-lost looking third goblin. “From you,” he said, “I want a much more restrained proposal for how to manage the Black fortune. We will be using it to finance a hotel business, and using the profits for some charitable work. Percy Weasley will be overseeing it, but he will need expert advice.”

The goblin stood up straighter and almost saluted. “It would be an honour,” he said. “Seven days?”

Harry nodded.

“I will be ready,” he agreed. He nodded at them both, and turned and marched away.

Harry turned back to Grappleagus and grinned. “Those two aren’t very good for business.”

“Oh?” Grappleagus asked. “They both want the job.”

“Of course,” Harry agreed. “And they’ll both do their best to outdo each other. If either of them had asked, I could have told them that your recommendation is good enough for me, and I would hire them both. This way, I get two different plans to follow for free.”

Grappleagus stared at him for a long moment, and then started to laugh, hard. “Harry,” he said seriously, “are you sure you’re not part goblin?”

Harry smiled. “Not as far as I know.” He looked up, as a voice he recognised requested to speak to the manager.

“Isn’t that Narcissa Malfoy?” he asked.

“Pure-bloods,” Grappleagus said with a sigh. “Not the finest examples of your species, even if they

do have money.” He paused and then smiled faintly. “Or used to.”

“She’s broke?”

Grappleus grinned. “I would never pass on confidential information.”

“Let her through,” Harry suggested. “Let’s go into your office.”

The goblin nodded and waved his hand. A guard escorted Narcissa behind the counter and over to them.

“Took your time,” Narcissa sneered.

“Did you just wake up on the wrong side of the bed this morning, or are you always this unpleasant?” Harry asked politely. “Because if it’s the latter, I can have you thrown out as easily as I requested you be allowed back here.”

Narcissa opened her mouth, but then closed it. “My apologies,” she said to Grappleus. “I have had an extremely bad morning and I took it out on you.”

Grappleus looked surprised, and then nodded. “This way, Lady Malfoy,” he said politely.

Narcissa blinked, and followed him. Harry trailed along after them, noticing the smiles on the faces of some of the goblins. He winked at them, and entered the office. He dropped on to one of the couches.

“Sit up straight,” Narcissa barked, and then blushed. “I’m sorry,” she said. “I’m used to dealing with my idiot of a son.”

Harry smiled faintly. “I’ve just spent an hour at the *Quibbler* . I’m entitled to slouch a little. So, what brings you to Gringotts this bright morning?”

Narcissa sighed and looked at Grappleus.

“I tend to take Harry’s advice on wizard related things,” he said.

“I need time,” Narcissa said abruptly. “To raise money for our loan repayment.”

“Why don’t you step back a bit,” Harry advised, “and tell us what happened to the Malfoy fortune.”

Narcissa nodded and started to pace. “My husband was a lot of things, but I loved him all the same, and he did provide for us. Unfortunately, he left everything to Draco, so that as soon as he turned of age, he had access to the family money.

“I tried to counsel him, but he assured me that everything was under control. It was only after his arrest that I discovered how much he had been lying to me. The influence with Fudge that he was

so proud of, he was paying massively over the odds for.” She sighed and swore under her breath. “I actually thought that Draco had grown to be like his father, and had started to use power properly. Instead, I find that he has managed to deplete a huge fortune in less than four years. And what is worse, he took out loans on our home.”

“Surely you have friends you could turn to.”

Narcissa sighed and sat down. For the first time, Harry managed to see just how worried she was, behind her elegant veneer. “Indeed. I had many offers of help; sadly, the price asked was too high.”

“Oh?”

Narcissa looked at him directly. “I had no interest in providing the services requested.”

Harry raised his eyebrows. “Some friends,” he noted. “I take it that does not appeal to you?”

Narcissa opened her mouth to snap at him, but paused. “Contrary to popular belief,” she said softly, “I am not that sort of person. As I said, I loved Lucius. I might not have agreed with a lot of what he did, but he was my husband. I would not dishonour his memory like that, nor would I degrade myself.”

“Have you considered working?”

Narcissa sighed. “I may be a pure-blood,” she said, “but I am not exactly full of marketable experience or skills. The jobs I have been offered were of the ‘secretarial’ variety, which would have had me bent over a desk rather than sitting behind one.”

“You really *do* choose your friends well, don’t you?”

Narcissa sighed and nodded.

“But you do know everyone who is anyone in the glorious high society circles?”

She blinked and looked surprised. “I do. It is a nest of vipers. They love you when you are rich, and despise you otherwise.”

“Right,” Harry said decisively. “You are going to go home, have a bath, then get some sleep. You are then going to start writing small biographies of everyone who is important – and include the gossip. Sometime soon, we’ll drop by and talk about what you are going to do in your new job, working for me.

“In the meantime, I’ll be taking on your debts, and will ensure that you have money for food and other essentials.”

Narcissa looked at him blankly. “Excuse me?”

Harry smirked to himself. "Sirius and I will be entering high society shortly and the better informed we are, the easier it will be for us. We will need a social secretary, someone who knows everyone and can advise us on the protocol of high society - you're it. You won't have to worry about non-secretarial duties. Sirius is your cousin and I've got Gabrielle Delacour, so neither of us has any interest in any services you might render while on your back."

"Oh," Narcissa said softly. She shook herself and a determined look appeared in her eyes, replacing the lost one that was there a few moments before. "Tell me," she said softly, "what is your goal? You don't strike me as the party type, and you must have said something to get Sirius to agree."

"We are going to be the life and soul of any party, and then we are going to ensure that the only fashionable thing to do with money is give it away. We're also going to ensure that high society stop any attacks on us from politicians."

Narcissa smiled, a cold expression settling on her face. "Revenge is a nice benefit to offer."

"You're a Black" he said. "I figured that would appeal to you. Of course, your continued employment depends on how hard you work for me; and your ability to lose your prejudices."

"My prejudices are not what they once were," Narcissa said quietly. "I have been paying attention, believe me. A half-blood killed Voldemort and all his supporters at the age of fourteen. The most famous girl in two countries is a part-Veela." She paused. "My son was extremely jealous of your relationship with her, and I found his hypocrisy nauseating. Miss Granger graduated from Hogwarts with the highest marks in modern history. And you yourself have offered me, the wife and mother and sister of three people who have tried to kill you, an honourable escape from debt. All the pure-bloods tried to use it to get me to act dishonourably. I thank you, Lord Potter, and will get to work immediately."

"After you've had a relaxing bath and slept," Harry said firmly.

Narcissa nodded.

"Grappleagus, can you ensure that she has some money available?"

The goblin reached into a drawer and pulled out a small bag. "A hundred Galleons," he said calmly.

"Right, food, relax, sleep, and then you can start to work. And I don't care if you take a few days to pull yourself together, okay?"

Narcissa stood and bowed to him gracefully. She paused, took a deep breath, and then bowed to Grappleagus as well. With her head held high, she walked out.

"That was interesting," Grappleagus noted. "You are taking a risk."

"How much is she in debt?"

“Ten thousand Galleons.”

“You’ll transfer the debt to me?”

He nodded.

Harry smirked. “I just bought Malfoy Manor for ten thousand Galleons. That is the bargain of the century. And if she works out, then her advice will be worth more than that. Never underestimate the power of revenge as a motivator. Narcissa is a proud woman, and the fact that people who she thought were friends tried to take advantage of her will ensure that she helps in anyway she can.”

“I mean this as a compliment - you are not like other humans,” Grappleagus said slowly.

Harry smiled. “Probably not.” He took a deep breath and hoped his next sentence wouldn’t sound too bad; he didn’t yet have the confidence to say it with the same self-belief that Gabrielle had. “I am a Prince, and I’m destined to rule.”

Grappleagus stared at him for a long moment. “You are going to have to come to my home soon,” he said slowly, “with Miss Delacour, because I really want to hear the full story.”

“We’d like that.”

“Where is Miss Delacour?”

“With her parents,” Harry said with a sigh. “I’m expecting her back shortly, so I’m flying solo for a bit, and trying to act as she’d expect.”

There was a knock on the door, and a goblin entered. “I’ve got a Miss Patil and two Weasleys asking to see you.”

“Bring them in,” Grappleagus said. “I’m willing to help until your advisors are ready,” he said, “if only because I find you both fascinating and entertaining.”

Harry nodded. “After that, we can schedule meetings properly. Now, can you get one of your cooks to whip up some of your food? Miss Patil will be managing the restaurant.”

“You don’t stand idle, do you?”

Harry smiled and moved to one side.

The door opened again and Fred and George bounded in, followed by a more sedate Padma. Grappleagus barked an order at the goblins.

Harry stood as Padma approached, and she kissed him on the cheek lightly, and then offered her hand to the goblin. Grappleagus shook it solemnly.

Fred moved into the space vacated by Padma and shook Grappleagus’ hand as well. “Fred

Weasley,” he introduced himself enthusiastically, “and this is my brother George.”

“Hi,” George said, moving to shake the hand.

“We’re Harry’s first employees,” Fred continued as he dropped into the couch to the side.

“Please, take a seat, Padma,” Harry invited.

She smiled and sat down formally. The twins were dressed in casual robes and were looked around excitedly. Padma was dressed in a very smart robe, and her hair was bound in a tight plait that hung down her back. She pulled out a small notebook and a pen.

Harry smiled at her. “Okay, to finish the introductions. This is Grappleagus, the manager of Gringotts for London. He’s volunteered his time until I have my account managers online. We’ll try to be as quick as we can, as I’ve already taken up enough of his time hiring a new social secretary.”

Grappleagus smiled faintly. “Yesterday we purchased two premises on Harry’s behalf. The first is on Diagon Alley, the building next to us. We’ve agreed to lease Harry one of our abandoned vaults, as we believe it would be the perfect place for experimentation. It has all of the standard charms you would expect.”

“Wow,” Fred exhaled. “That sounds brilliant.”

“The second,” Grappleagus continued, “was a pure-blood family summer house – the Smythe family. They needed the money, and while the location is a little out of the woods, we have arranged for a commercial Floo connection. We should be able to get eight lines in, as well as a Portkey and Apparation spot. The décor does need updating, but I think that the conservatory has a lot of potential.”

Padma noted down a few things and smiled at the goblin. “I’m sure we can sort out the décor. Harry, what’s our budget?”

“A thousand Galleons to start,” Harry replied. “That should be enough to buy all the furniture and material that you will need.”

Padma nodded. “We don’t want anything too over the top, do we? We’re aiming at the middle classes?”

“Correct. We want people to feel comfortable. You’re going to have to try and arrange it so that there is only a counter separating the kitchen from the dining room.”

“Why?” Padma asked, her pen flying over the pad.

“Because it will add a sense of theatre to watch a house-elf order a bunch of humans around and it will give the place a buzz.”

Padma nodded and smiled happily. The doors opened, and a goblin entered, pushing a cart. “Excellent,” Harry proclaimed. “Fred, George, it’s time for a test of courage. Take a bite of this.”

Padma, who was nearest, reached over and took the first bite, her eyes challenging. “Nice,” she said calmly. “I wouldn’t call that a test of courage though.”

Fred and George looked at each other, shrugged, and both took large bites.

For a second, nothing happened at all. Fred turned red, closely followed by George. They both dropped to their knees and threw their heads back, yelling in unison, flames bursting from their mouths a foot into the air.

Harry passed them each a bottle of potion, and they downed it eagerly.

“Blimey,” Fred croaked.

“What he said,” George agreed. “That stuff packs a kick,” he paused and looked at Padma.

“I took a protective potion before I came here,” Padma said smugly. “Harry mentioned he wanted to cook goblin food, so I planned ahead.”

Fred groaned. “And she looks so sweet and innocent too.”

Padma inclined her head. “I am,” she agreed. “But I also remember my hair being turned green when I was in school. I believe we are now even.”

Fred and George looked at each other before they started to laugh. “Bravo,” Fred said, as they both bowed in respect.

“Padma,” Harry said thoughtfully. “Can you write down some of the books you’d recommend on running a business? I want these two clowns to do a bit of homework before they start.”

Fred and George looked at each other and paled. “About that,” Fred said.

“We’ve been thinking,” George continued. “We’re good at inventing. We’re really good at marketing; selling ourselves and our products.”

“What we’re not good with is figures and handling money.” Fred sighed. “If we’d been able to save, we would never have ended up at the sanitation department.”

Harry nodded. “Padma, any suggestions?”

“Do you remember Su Li?”

“Tiny Ravenclaw girl?” Harry asked, holding his hand at knee height.

“She grew up,” Padma said dryly. “But yes. She’s currently helping in her mother’s apothecary.”

Which is a complete waste of her talents. She'd be good at the business side of things."

"What's her personality like?"

"Oriental," Padma said with a smirk. "Unfailingly polite, gentle, calm, until you push her a little too far, and then she unleashes the little dragon. When that happens, you better run, far and fast."

"Okay," Harry nodded. "Can you sound her out? If she's interested, I'd like to meet her first."

"If I can borrow the Floo?"

"Be my guest," Grappleagus invited.

Padma walked over to the fireplace, and Harry turned to the twins.

"Happy?"

They looked at each other and shrugged. "If it allows us do spend more time doing what we love, then yes, absolutely," Fred said.

George reached into his pockets and pulled out a small piece of parchment. He cast a spell on it and it expanded massively. "We worked on this last night," he explained. "It's a list of the base products we think we should sell."

Harry placed it on Grappleagus' desk and moved around so that he was next to the goblin. They read it together. Harry lifted a quill off the goblin's desk and added one last product to the list.

"Dragon's Breath Sweets?" George asked, reading upside down.

"Replicate the effect of the goblin food, without the pain," Harry said. "Well, maybe a little heat. It looked very cool when the fire came out of your mouths."

The twins looked at each other before they smiled. "We can do it," Fred said confidently. "Good idea."

"Su is coming over now," Padma announced as she sat back down.

Harry nodded and perched himself on the corner of the desk. "I'd like you to get Dobby involved in the kitchen planning," he said. "He's going to be the first famous house-elf, and he'll love the idea of helping plan the kitchen. The one thing you will have to do is manage him."

"How so?"

"He'll attempt to do everything himself. He'll need to delegate and make sure that everyone can do their jobs. And as confident as he sounds, it will be the first time he has ordered humans around, so he may need some pointers on how to do it."



Padma noted it down, before the door opened again, and a goblin peered in. “Another human, a Miss Li, to see you.”

“Send her in,” Grappleagus ordered.

The goblin nodded and vanished. Less than thirty seconds later, the petite form of Su Li appeared. She was wearing a white apron over utilitarian robes. She looked at Grappleagus and blinked, before she started to blush.

“My apologies,” she said. “My friend failed to pass on important information. If I had known, I would have taken the time to dress appropriately.”

Grappleagus sighed deeply and looked at Harry. “Are you trying to ram home a point?”

“Me?” Harry asked innocently. “I certainly would never point out that pure-bloods are a miserable example of the human race, all insular and inbred, and that the rest of the Wizarding population is full of open minded people who believe in courtesy and politeness. And I’d never accuse the goblins of pandering to the pure-bloods, since they have the gold, and not looking at what sort of partnerships could be achieved by going beyond them.”

Grappleagus calmly banged his head against his desk several times. “I hate you,” he grumbled. “You’re throwing out centuries of tradition.”

“Tradition...”

“I know,” Grappleagus interrupted. “I remember.” He looked up at Su Li. “You’ll have to excuse us. Harry’s right, the only humans I’ve met in the past have been pure-bloods – normally I wouldn’t have met him, but business has been challenging recently, and he has a large amount of money. He was supposed to be a good boy and let us invest in the traditional ways, and life would have continued to be good. Instead he has insisted on shaking our world to the foundations.”

“He did that at school, too,” Su Li said calmly. She’d removed her apron and her robes, and was wearing a simple green dress that suited her complexion. “Padma mentioned something about a chance of employment?”

“How well did you do at Hogwarts?”

“Fifth in our year,” she replied. “I got outstanding on everything; I just did fewer subjects than others.”

“Do you know what binomial coefficients are?”

Without hesitation, Su responded, “Yes. If you have a number of potion ingredients, and the number of ingredients per potion, you’d use them to work out how many different potions you could make.”

Fred and George looked at each other blankly.

Harry smiled and nodded. “You’ve studied out of the Wizarding world?”

“I’ve got an MBA from Kent University.” She sighed. “I wanted to come back to the Wizarding world. I missed using magic, but recently I’ve been thinking of going back to the Muggle world. They’ve at least heard of equality there.”

“Rather than vanish, how about you take a job managing these two? They’ve got the production, sales and marketing sewn up, but they wouldn’t recognise an integer if it bit them on their bums.”

Su smiled. “A prank shop?” she asked.

Harry nodded. “Fully funded. They’ll need someone to balance the books, make sure that they sell their products for a profit, keep an eye on costs, and allow them to do what they do best.”

Su bounced in her seat. “You have premises?”

“Right next door.”

“There was one more question I had,” Padma said quietly. “Share options?”

Su was nodding eagerly as well.

Harry thought for a few seconds. He picked up the quill again and made a few notes and a small diagram. So far he owed thirty-four percent of the business with Fred and George, and the total of the restaurant, but that was only the start of some of the things that they had planned. He looked up slowly, facing the two girls. “You can have five percent of the respective businesses,” he said softly, “or half a percent of the parent company.”

“The parent company?” Su asked intently.

“Princess Holdings,” Harry said, making a name up on the spot. “The company that will finance the restaurant and prank shop, and the other ventures we explore.”

“Done,” Padma and Su said instantly in unison.

“Wait,” Fred interrupted. “You took the smaller share?”

“Simple maths,” Su explained. “A small part of a big number will be bigger than a big part of a small number. We’re gambling, of course, in Harry and Gabrielle, but we think it’s a safe bet.”

Padma nodded in agreement. “Exactly. But we’re also betting on ourselves. We believe that we can make a lot of money in these jobs, and we want to use them to prove that we’re the best, so when Harry and Gabrielle move on, they’ll take us with them. This sort of chance doesn’t happen, normally.”

Fred and George looked at each other, before they looked at Harry. “Can we do the same?” George asked seriously.

“Exchange your share of the business for shares in the parent company?” Harry asked to clarify. As they had a third of the pranking business, he was going to give them more of the parent business.

They nodded. “You’re hiring Su to take care of our finances,” George pointed out. “So we’ll take her advice now.”

“We might not understand finance,” Fred continued, “but we’re not stupid. And besides, betting on ourselves? Not a problem.”

Harry smiled faintly. “Done.”

“Woohoo,” Fred cheered

“Su, do you need to give any notice?”

She shook her head.

“Then why don’t you four go and have a look at the properties?” Harry suggested. “Pool your ideas.”

Su smiled brightly at him and nodded.

“Go on, get moving,” Harry ordered. “We’ve taken enough of Grappleagus’ time as it is.”

Fred and George stood and took the girls’ hands, dragging them out eagerly. As the door open, Grappleagus barked a few orders. “They’ll be looked after,” he said to Harry.

Harry moved around the table and dropped down on to the couch.

“Good business.”

“I hope so,” Harry agreed.

“I like that you don’t let sentiment get in the way.”

Harry nodded. “I was trying to be fair, but I don’t want to lose control either. I’ve given away five percent of the shares so far, two percent each to Fred and George, and half a percent each to Padma and Su, which leaves me another thirteen to play with.”

“You are keeping eighty for yourselves?”

Harry nodded. “Forty each for Gabrielle and me. I can’t see us ever disagreeing, but if we do, the others will be able to decide.”

“A wise move,” the goblin agreed. “Have you considered allowing institutions to buy in to the shares?”

Harry shook his head. “Not at the moment. I’m going to keep things very close to my chest for now; the others will be able to sell their shares after a one year period. That will be the chance for anyone to buy them.”

“I’ll swap you a free lease on our old vault for first refusal at the shares.”

Harry thought for a second and then nodded. “I’ll write it into the contract. Obviously, they don’t have to sell to you, just offer. It’s up to you to come up with the right price.”

Grappleagus nodded.

Harry smiled. “In that case, I’ll leave you to your job.”

“I meant what I said about you and your Princess,” Grappleagus said.

“We’ll arrange it as soon as I talk to Gabrielle,” Harry promised as he stood and shook the manager’s hand. After a brief goodbye, he walked out of the bank and into the bright sunlight. Through the windows of the building next to the bank, he could see his friends with a couple of goblins.

He looked at his watch and frowned. He still hadn’t heard from Gabbi, and he was starting to get worried. He didn’t want to appear over-protective – he was more than convinced that she could look after herself – but he wanted to make sure. He smiled. He could always send her a letter, but to do that he needed Hedwig.

With a cheerful stride, he walked through Diagon Alley and exited into the Muggle world. It was an extremely pleasant day, so he walked to the phone box and dialled the number that would connect him to the Ministry of Magic.

“Harry Potter visiting Hermione Weasley,” he said in answer to the question. The box dropped into the earth as a badge popped out for him. He shoved it in his pocket and whistled to himself.

After a minute of descending, the door opened into the large atrium of the Ministry of Magic. He walked up to the guard to get his wand checked. The guard didn’t even look up as Harry handed over his wand, and he was quickly able to get to level two.

He walked confidently through the maze of desks that made up the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, and entered an office without knocking. He silently dropped down on to a chair. “Secure place you have here.”

Hermione literally jumped out of her chair, and then clutched at her heart. “Don’t do that!” she demanded.

Harry smirked at her. “Why not?”

“It’s bad for me!”

“As bad as visiting the *Quibbler* and having Luna flash me?”

Hermione blushed.

“Lederhosen?”

“Look, I didn’t know Gabrielle was going to wake you up,” she confessed. “And I figured you’d need a girlfriend sooner or later, and Luna’s a lot of fun, and she’s one of the few people I could guarantee wouldn’t give a Knut about your fame, or your money.”

Harry shook his head. “Are there any more surprises buried in my memory like that?”

Hermione shook her head. “No, that was it on the surprise front. I figured you’d be a teenage boy and have a bit of fun.”

“Okay,” Harry said and dropped the subject. “Nice digs.”

“Thank you. Want to sit on my couch?”

“Is that how you got Ron to marry you?”

Hermione blushed again. “I am a psychologist,” she pointed out. “I meant that I might be able to help you.”

“Right,” Harry drawled. “Actually, you can help me. Where’s Hedwig?”

The smile slowly dropped from Hermione’s face. “I’m sorry, Harry, but she’s no longer with us. She died of old age -- last year.”

Harry felt like he had been punched in the stomach.

Hermione stood and walked around the desk, taking his hand. “We buried her. I’ll take you to her grave.”

He nodded, and they moved to her private Floo, and soon emerged in Hogsmeade. The trip to Hogwarts was conducted in silence. He didn’t know what to say. The idea that his first real friend had died was not one he had ever contemplated, and it showed starkly that the world really had changed while he was unconscious.

Next to Hagrid’s hut was a small cemetery; headstones large and small were scattered around. The newest one bore the simple inscription of his owl’s name.

Harry dropped to his knees in front of it.

“She never left you,” Hermione whispered. “Every day she would go fly for an hour or two, eat, and then sit on her perch and watch you. She loved you, and would have waited until the end of time for you to wake up, if she could.”

Harry felt tears dripping down his face.

“We offered her new homes, anywhere she wanted, but she always ignored us. She was yours, Harry, and she never forgot it.”

“Hey,” Harry whispered softly. “I’m sorry I wasn’t there for you. I just wanted to say thanks. You were always there for me when I needed someone. I’ll never forget you.”

He patted the tombstone softly, and then turned. Hermione was still there and he hugged her tightly, crying on her shoulder. She didn’t say anything, she just let him cry.

“Thanks.”

She smiled at him softly. “I’d say anytime, but I think we both know you’d rather be with Gabrielle.”

He smiled at her. “You’re always going to be my best friend,” he said simply. “Nothing will change that.”

Hermione smiled and reached up to wipe away a tear. “I can’t tell you how much I missed you,” she whispered back.

She took a deep breath. “At least you’ve calmed down a little now.”

Harry smiled faintly. “I need to go and borrow another owl.”

Hermione nodded. “Feel free to drop by anytime you want to talk.” She looked at her watch. “I’ve got to get back anyway. I’ve got a three o’clock appointment with a ferret.”

“Have fun.”

“You know I will,” she smirked.

“You might want to know that I’ve hired Narcissa, and that the Malfoy family is broke. I technically own Malfoy Manor, although I’m letting Narcissa live there for now.”

Hermione’s smirk turned positively evil.

“He used far too much money buying his influence.” He paused. “And he fancies Gabbi.”

“Hypocrite,” Hermione said. She took a deep breath. “I need to absorb this. I have to act like a professional.” She kissed Harry on the cheek and walked off.

Harry went in a different direction, heading toward the school Owlery. “Anyone fancy taking a letter for me?” he asked the assembled owls.

There was a series of squawks, before a flock of owls headed toward him at top speed. A grey and

black one arrived first, and turned on a six-pence to block the others.

“I’ll guess you’ll do,” Harry said with a laugh, and walked over to the table. He scribbled a quick note. “Take this to Gabrielle Delacour.”

The owl nodded and extended a leg for Harry to attach the message. With a hoot, the owl took off and flew out the window.

Harry walked back down into Hogwarts. Hermione had raised a good point; he had calmed down today, and he didn’t like it. Being so serious and sorting out the business plans didn’t really feel like fun. It was more like a duty he had to perform. He smiled faintly. He knew exactly how Gabrielle would have put it, ‘a Prince must do his duty before he can have fun.’

With a charm he didn’t know he knew, he cast a spell to make others ignore him, and walked toward the Great Hall. It was close to lunchtime, and students were scurrying around, mostly heading toward the Great Hall as well.

It was time to pull off a prank, and he needed an accomplice. He just didn’t know who or what.

To the left, a young girl tripped and her bag went flying, spilling the contents. Rather than help, some of the other students laughed at her and walked off.

The look on the face of the girl ripped straight through Harry. The long brown hair that framed an oval face and blue eyes with an expression of sadness and longing was very familiar. She wore a pair of glasses, and had an air of forced detachment around her. The resemblance to Hermione – in expression, if not looks – was unmistakable.

“Here,” he said, cancelling the spell and helping her. All the other students had already left her.

“Thank you,” she said, before she looked up and gasped. “You’re Harry Potter!”

“Yeah, but I’m taking something for that.”

The girl blushed brightly and looked down. “I’m sorry,” she said. “I state the obvious a lot.”

Harry finished gathering her books and opened the door to a classroom.

She looked at him and then walked in.

“You’re a first-year?” he asked as he sat on a table.

She nodded nervously. “I’m Natalie Jones,” she started, “I’m an only child and my Mum worked with Professor Dumbledore to help fight Voldemort. I came to Hogwarts hoping to make friends but I can’t seem to do it. They call me a brainbox. Just because I want to beat Hermione Granger’s Hogwarts scores in my exams and study all the time. That’s why I’m in Ravenclaw.”

Harry blinked. He hadn’t heard that sort of stream of consciousness in years – well days, at least,

depending on how you looked at it. He grinned at her. “What do you think about pranks?”

She looked horrified. “I would never be involved in a prank,” she gasped. “I’m a good girl.” Suddenly the expression faded, to be replaced by an impish one. “How was that?”

Harry applauded.

She grinned. “It always gets me out of trouble with Dad,” she chatted. “It’s much better to be sweet and innocent, and then no one suspects you. Are we going to be friends?”

Harry couldn’t help laughing. “You know something, Natalie, I think we are.”

Natalie cheered and bounced on feet. “Will I get to meet Miss Delacour?” she asked shyly.

“I certainly hope so,” Harry replied. “She likes pranks just as much as I do.”

Natalie bounced again. “I knew things would turn up for me when you woke up. Without you, Mum might not even be here. I’ve done all sorts of studying about you, and it says in *Hogwarts: A History*, that your father was one of the Marauders.”

“It does?” Harry asked, surprised.

“Well, not precisely,” she admitted. “But you can work it out. So many pranks that stopped just after they all graduated? That pointed to the year, and only the Head Boy would have had the access needed. From there, it was simple!”

“Right,” Harry agreed. “So, the prank. I think that you no longer sing the school song?”

She shook her head. “That stopped the year after you fell asleep.”

“Brilliant. All I want you to do is ask Professor Dumbledore – if he’s back – why you stopped.”

“But…”

“I know you know,” Harry interrupted. “Leave the rest to me.”

Natalie took a deep breath and hung her head. “I’m sorry.”

“Nat,” Harry said gently. “We’re friends now, you don’t have to apologise.”

“But…”

“You’re only eleven years old; you’ll grow out of it.”

“Promise?”

“On my honour.”



“As a Prince?” she asked.

He looked at her in surprise.

“Gabrielle’s the Princess, right?”

“Yes.”

Natalie nodded, “Even though she’s not *really* a Princess.”

Harry didn’t answer immediately, as he tried to work out how to answer the implied question. “What is a Princess?” he eventually asked.

Natalie frowned and thought about it for a few seconds. She absently started to fold her fingers as she mentally ticked off points. Then her eyes widened as she came to a realisation. “Apart from the blood line, she *is* a Princess!”

Harry nodded. “We’re not going to rule by blood,” he explained, “but through what we can do.”

Natalie thought again. “That’s even better,” she decided. She smiled brightly at Harry, and he could already see the air of melancholy fade from around her. “Time for the prank. I’ll wait here for a few moments.”

Harry lightly ruffled her hair.

She grinned at him, before adopting a serious expression.

Harry walked out quickly and took his seat near Zach at the Gryffindor table. Professor Dumbledore was in his place at the head of the table, and he shot Harry a glare that Harry fended off playfully. The food hadn’t arrived yet, and everyone was talking cheerfully. He held his wand under the table, and cast a few spells as silently as he could.

Natalie walked in and placed her bag at the Ravenclaw table, before she nervously approached the Professors’ Table.

“Natalie?” Filius asked.

Natalie looked down shyly. “I wanted to ask Professor Dumbledore a question.”

“Ask away,” Albus said cheerfully.

“I was reading *Hogwarts: A History*,” she said, her voice was still soft, but everyone had quietened down to try and listen to her. “And I wanted to know why we don’t sing the school song anymore? It looked fun.”

“What!” Harry demanded loudly. “You’ve stopped singing the song, why?”

Dumbledore looked embarrassed. “Well,” he started, but then stopped. He sighed. “Under-Secretary Umbridge felt it was an over-the-top display of school spirit and demanded that we stop.”

“And you let her?”

Albus looked guilty. “I thought,” he started, and then trailed off.

Harry rolled his eyes. “Right. Well, I’ll deal with it.”

“Thank you.” Albus turned back to Natalie. “Take twenty points for your bravery,” he said gently. “And you raise a very good point. The school song has not been heard in these halls for over eight years. Would you like to lead us off?” He waved his hands, and above his head, a large scroll dropped from the ceiling. “Just sing the words, any tune you like.”

“Professor?” Natalie asked, and Harry realised that she was going to be brilliant at pranks.

“Just sing what you see,” Albus said gently. “Any tune you like.”

Natalie took a deep breath, and then in a pure, clear alto, started to sing.

A wizard's staff has a knob on the end  
It never will buckle, it never will bend  
He cherishes it, and he calls it his friend,  
and he frequently takes it in hand.

As one, every professor froze and then turned slowly to look up at the banner. The rest of the students immediately joined in. All of them were aware that these were not the official words of the Hogwarts school song.

A wizard's staff is the source of his power.  
He checks up on it every hour on the hour  
And he's never surprised when it turns to a flower --  
The fairest throughout all the land.

Every professor’s head slowly turned back to stare directly at Harry, who shot them as innocent a look as possible.

Remus started to laugh, before he took a breath and joined in.

The staff of a wizard with honour is crowned.  
Without it a wizard will rarely be found.  
'Tis big and it's round and weighs three to the pound  
And without it he's truly unmanned.

Albus and Minerva both bent over and banged their heads against the table, as the students roared the final parts with gusto.

The staff of a wizard can do mighty deeds.  
It protects him from harm and attends to his needs,  
Provides him with banquets upon which he feeds  
And potions on which he gets canned.

Whenever a wizard is lonely or sad,  
Or feeling dejected, or puzzled, or mad,  
He turns to his staff, and things don't seem so bad --  
By it he is never trepanned.

There was a loud cheer as they finished, followed by a lot of clapping and yelling.

Natalie stood alone, and waited for the noise to die down. "I didn't know that the school song had changed," she said innocently.

"I'm afraid it hasn't," Albus responded. "Someone's played a prank."

"A prank!" Natalie gasped. "But there hasn't been one of them in Hogwarts for years!"

"Eight years," Dumbledore said sourly, looking at Harry.

"I don't know why he's looking at me," Harry said. "I didn't do it."

"Why don't we discuss that in my office," Albus said. "Now, I think."

"You better be providing some sandwiches," Harry said. "I've not eaten since breakfast."

Dumbledore groaned. "Get," he ordered.

Harry smirked and walked out. "Dobby," he called on the way. The elf appeared next to him. "Can you arrange for lunch for two in Unca Albus' office?"

"Dobby is being delighted," he agreed, and popped out. They walked toward the office in silence, the Gargoyle moving out the way as Albus approached. In the office, Harry sat on the couch, as Albus moved behind his desk. With a wave of his hand, the door to the office shut and Albus started to laugh.

"Did you *have* to pick *that* song?"

Harry nodded.

Dumbledore sniggered, "I'll keep that memory for a very long time. Now, for the official part of this. You can't use an innocent first year like that, it's not fair."

Harry grinned. "Innocent?"

Albus looked at him in horror. "Sweet Merlin -- she was in on it?"

“Yup. And you know, I just had a crazy idea.”

“Should I hide?”

“Comedian,” Harry grumbled. “I’ve already got one person whom no one will ever suspect. How would you feel about being the other?”

Dumbledore blinked in surprise. “You’re asking me to help prank my own school?”

“No one will ever suspect you and what better way to get the feeling of fun back in Hogwarts? I’m not planning on terrorising anyone, or picking on anyone, just a series of harmless pranks like today’s.” He paused and dangled the biggest carrot he could, “And after we’ve got into the swing of things, we’ll stop pranking Hogwarts and start on the Ministry.”

Albus groaned. “You are telling me that you seriously want to start a prank war with the Ministry? You are a cruel and evil man.”

“You’re in then?”

“I wouldn’t miss it for the world,” Albus said with deep sigh. “I just hope that Hestia never finds out. You do know that you’re corrupting me?”

“I try,” Harry smirked. “So, why did you allow this Umbridge character to stop the school song?”

“Well, she did play the Ministerial card quite well, and I had to be careful to make sure she couldn’t take control of you.”

“And?”

“And,” he continued, “I thought it would be something else that would inspire you to take control of the Ministry,” Albus finished guiltily.

“There we go,” Harry said cheerfully. “Confession is good for the soul. How was last night?”

“Enlightening,” Albus grunted. “Unca Albus?” he asked, obviously changing the subject.

“Yeah,” Harry said. “I was talking to Zach, and he said it was easier on the rest of the students if I wasn’t a normal student. Gabrielle and I are going to be day students anyway – too much going on.”

“Celebrities don’t use the bathroom.”

Harry blinked. “They don’t?”

Albus chuckled under his breath. “It’s the same thing in the Muggle world, I understand.” He paused and looked at the door. “This is a surprise, an old friend of yours, I believe.”

The door opened and the tall form of Cedric Diggory walked in. “Harry!” he said delightedly. “Professor McGonagall said I’d find you here.”

“It’s good to see you too, Cedric,” Harry said.

“Before anything else, I have to say thanks. You saved my life that day. I knew I was going to die before you pushed me out of the way.”

“Oh, that was nothing,” Harry said airily, dismissing the praise. “Anyone would have done the same.”

“No, they wouldn’t.” Cedric disagreed. “And they certainly wouldn’t have been able to defeat Voldemort afterward. I did try to say thanks earlier, but Hermione was very protective.”

“I owe her a lot,” Harry agreed.

“Anyway,” Cedric said. “I wondered if you had thought about Quidditch.”

“Of course,” Harry agreed. “I’m looking forward to seeing if I can play Chaser.”

Dumbledore looked up and waved his wand subtly, his movements almost imperceptible.

Cedric snorted. “That wasn’t what I meant.” Before he could say any more, the door opened again and Cho Chang burst in.

“Stop right there, Diggory,” she said firmly.

Harry looked at Albus, who was smiling. The headmaster silently cast the same charm Harry had used earlier. Harry smiled and did the same, quite willing to watch the show unfold between Diggory and Chang, who promptly forgot anyone else was there.

“What are you doing here, Chang?”

“If you think the Harpies are going to let you cut in ahead of us, you’ve got another thing coming. One of our fans saw you high-tailing it up here and contacted us.”

“I don’t see why you’d be interested. Potter’s got the wrong plumbing to play with the Harpies.”

“After dating you, is it any surprise I changed teams?” Cho demanded. “Besides, we had a quick chat, and we agreed that we wouldn’t even ask for a separate changing room if he joined. It might be nice to have a real man around again. And we can offer him some fringe benefits he won’t get anywhere else!”

“Riiiiight,” Cedric drawled. “He’s dating Delacour, there’s nothing you tarts can offer him.”

“We’re prepared to offer her a contract as well. We have the fan base to make them both a very attractive offer.”

“You tarts just need the skill. The only way you manage to get sell out crowds is because of the short skirts you wear! It’s pathetic, you just flash a bit of thigh and wizards drown in their own drool!”

“At least we get a full house every game, Mr Half-Full-Stadium.”

The door opened, and a scowling Marcus Flint entered. “Great,” he said after looking around. “A pretty-boy and a dyke, all in one place.”

“Hey!” Cedric protested.

“Great comeback,” Cho snorted. “Drop dead, Flint.”

“That was the problem with you two,” Flint sneered. “She always had more balls than you did.”

“Now see here,” Cedric protested.

“Will you please *shut up!*” Cho said to Cedric. “What the hell do you want, Flint?”

“Same as you two. Potter and the bird.”

“Potter doesn’t like you,” Cedric pointed out. “And neither do I.”

“Oh, the pretty-boy hates me,” Flint smirked. “What am I to do? That was years ago. I’ll flatter him into accepting, get him on the team, and then after I break him and the Veela-whore up, maybe see if I can show her what a real man can do.”

Harry was out of his seat before he could stop himself, cancelling the notice-me-not spell half a second before his fist exploded onto Flint’s jaw. The tall Quidditch player toppled backward, unconscious before he hit the floor.

“That’s a ‘no’ to the job offer,” Harry spat at him. He looked at Fawkes. “Would you do me a favour and wake him?”

Fawkes looked quizzically at Harry.

“The lake,” Harry suggested.

The phoenix trilled in laughter and flew down, grabbing Flint by his hair, and pulled him out the window. A few seconds later, the faint sound of a loud splash accompanied a smirking phoenix’s return to his perch.

“Right,” Harry continued. “Thank you both for your interest, but I’m not interested in signing anything until I’ve at least seen if I’m going to be any good.”

“That’s hardly in doubt,” Cho said softly.

“It is to the person who counts, namely me!”

“Harry,” Cedric started. Cho elbowed him in the stomach firmly and rolled her eyes.

“I meant what I said,” she continued. “The Harpies wouldn’t normally go for a male player, but we need two Chasers, and we know we wouldn’t get Delacour without you. We have a lot of fun, and we’re all really close. Would you keep us in mind when you’ve proven to yourself that you’re good enough?”

Harry nodded.

“And us,” Cedric continued. “The Wanderers are a very good team, and we could be great. We know that money isn’t important for you both, although obviously we’ll match any offer you get from another team.”

Harry nodded again.

Cho smiled at him, and then leaned forward and kissed him on the cheek. “It is good to see you awake,” she said. She leaned in and whispered, “I wish I had said yes that night.”

Harry smiled, as she continued, “But it’s a good thing I didn’t, I’d hate losing you to Gabrielle.”

“It’s good to see you both. I’d say the same about Flint, but I’d be lying. He was the worst person they could have sent.”

“Believe it or not,” Cho sighed, “he’s the most eloquent of the lot of them. Hooligans. Come on, Cedric, we’ve said what we needed to.”

Cedric shook Harry’s hand, “Can we go out for a drink?”

“Probably,” Harry agreed. The two walked out the door, before Cho poked her head back around. “If it helps, I’ve beaten Cedric to the Snitch the last eight times we’ve played!”

“Chang!” Cedric shouted.

Cho winked and vanished.

Harry sunk back down onto the couch. “That was fun.”

“I thought so,” Dumbledore agreed. “Capital entertainment.”

Harry shot him a dour look. “Do you think they forgot that Ron plays for the Cannons?”

Dumbledore smiled. “Probably not. As much as I like the Cannons, their chances, even with you two, wouldn’t be high. Well, not unless you fancy helping rebuild a team from scratch.”

Harry groaned. “That good?”

Dumbledore nodded. “Ron is a good Keeper, and should really be on another team – but his loyalty is without question.”

“I’ll let Gabbi decide,” he eventually said. He looked up as the same owl he had sent to Gabrielle flew in through the window. The owl had an embarrassed look on its face as it held out its leg. “You couldn’t find her?”

The owl hooted and took off immediately, not even waiting for a treat.

“Fawkes, can you find her?” Harry asked, starting to get a little worried.

Fawkes rolled his eyes.

“Here,” Harry said, scribbling a new note.

Fawkes took it and vanished in a puff of smoke.

“You’ve not heard from Miss Delacour?”

“No,” Harry replied.

Dobby appeared with a pop. “Dobby was being waiting for them to be going,” he explained. “Harry Potter sir is to be eating now.”

“Yes, Dobby,” Harry said. “You should be contacted shortly by the Manager of the restaurant – Padma Patil – she will want your input into the kitchen set up that you are going to be running.”

Dobby bounced eagerly. “Dobby has ideas! Dobby will be writing ideas down so he isn’t forgetting them.” The elf vanished with a pop.

“Was it me or was that pop somehow exuberant?” Albus asked in surprise.

“It wasn’t you,” Harry confirmed as he took one of the two plates.

“Your plans are going ahead then?”

“Absolutely, Grappleagus has been a big help. I should be getting two new account managers next week, and a third for the Black fortune.”

“What exactly are you planning?”

The next few hours passed swiftly, as Harry outlined some of the things he had planned, and listened carefully as Albus offered advice freely.

Fawkes appeared back in a puff of smoke. He landed on Albus’ desk.

Dumbledore frowned. “Fawkes says that Gabrielle’s been kidnapped!”



“What?!” Harry looked at Fawkes. “Where is she?”

The phoenix looked embarrassed as he shook his head.

“But you can get to her?” Harry demanded.

Fawkes nodded.

“Phoenixes can locate people and transfer straight there,” Albus explained, “but they can’t actually fly directly. Fawkes says that he spent some time where Gabrielle is being held, before returning. She is currently unharmed. I would suspect that the best place to start would be the family home. It’s in Sainte-Maxime on the South coast of France.”

“Couldn’t he just transfer me there?”

Albus looked at Fawkes, who looked embarrassed and shook his head.

“I believe that there are wards in the way,” Albus explained. “Fawkes can slip past them, but you would be stopped.”

Harry nodded. “Thanks for what you’ve found out,” he said to the Phoenix. “I’ll find her.”

“Miss Delacour’s broom is in her room.”

“Thanks.”

“Harry,” Albus called as Harry stood to leave. “If it gets serious, call for help. We’ll all be ready.”

“I will,” Harry promised and hurried out of the office.

“Harry,” Natalie called. She’d been waiting around the corridor.

“Gabbi’s been kidnapped,” Harry told her as he walked at a fast pace toward the Gryffindor Common Room.

Natalie gasped. “By whom?” she asked as she trotted to keep up with him.

“I don’t know,” he said. “If she’s been hurt, I’m going make sure that everyone knows what happens when they touch my Princess.”

“Good,” Natalie said fiercely.

“Golden Goose,” Harry said to the portrait. “Coming?”

“It’s the Gryffindor Common Room,” Natalie pointed out. “I’m a Ravenclaw.”

“You’re my friend; that takes precedence.”

“Yes, Harry,” Natalie said happily.

“Err, Harry?” Zach asked.

“Natalie, do me a favour and fetch Gabbi’s broom, it should be on or near her bed,” he said, pointing to the seventh year girls’ dorm room.

Natalie nodded and flew up the stairs.

“Gabbi’s been kidnapped,” Harry explained. “I’m going to rescue her.”

“Can we come?”

Harry blinked. “Sorry?”

“You’re Harry Potter, going on an adventure,” Zach said excitedly. “Most of us have waited all our lives for this sort of chance! We can help.”

Harry smiled faintly as Natalie ran back, the Lightning Bolt in her hands. She gave it to Harry. “Can I help?” she asked.

“Not this time, Nat, and this goes for the rest of you as well.” He took a deep breath, “I have a hunch – a feeling that I’ve got to do this one alone.

“I know that with Remus as a Professor, you’ve all had a better Defence classes than I did, but still, I’ll have to say no this time.” He paused. “But, as I *am* Harry Potter, this sort of thing seems to happen all the time, and if you’re serious about helping, then next time, when I know you better, I promise those that want to can come along.

“But for now, my Princess is being held in France, and I’m going to get her back, even if I have to tear the country apart piece by piece.” He pulled out his wand and cast a spell at the window, hopped onto the ledge and jumped out. As he left, he could hear the Gryffindors start to cheer.

He plummeted toward the ground, and had a split second to admire his own stupidity as he had just jumped out of a tower with a broom he didn’t know how to control!

He wrestled it under control and managed to pull it out of the steep drive at the last second, his feet brushing the grass, before he pulled up and headed toward Hogsmeade.

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The remains of the cheer echoed through the hall, and Minerva McGonagall groaned. That sort of noise always meant some sort of trouble.

She nodded to the Fat Lady and entered the Common Room. All her students were crowded around a window in the corner, and were talking excitedly, most looked slightly out of breath – which considering the volume of the cheer that had attracted her attention, was hardly surprising.

“What is going on here?” She demanded.

“Professor,” Zach gasped. “Harry’s invading France!”

Minerva groaned again. In front of her the students separated, so that she could see her Quidditch Captain. What she didn’t expect was the small Ravenclaw beside him. “Miss Jones?” she asked.

“Professor,” Natalie said softly.

“What are you doing here?”

“She came in with Harry,” Zach said. “And that’s good enough for us.”

Natalie blushed as the students cheered again.

“Natalie?” Minerva tried again.

Natalie looked up, her eyes huge and innocent. “Harry said that he owed me an apology for using me for the prank earlier,” she said. “We’re friends now.”

Minerva nodded. “Of course. Now, why is Harry invading France?”

“Because they’ve kidnapped his Princess,” Natalie explained. “And he’s going to get her back!”

“Oh dear,” Minerva gasped.

“Don’t be worried,” Natalie said. “Harry’s our Prince, he’ll rescue her, and they’ll live happily ever after.”

“Not you, too,” Minerva mumbled.

“Sorry, Professor?”

“Nothing, Natalie,” she replied. “You can stay in the Common Room for a bit, but in future, you should only come in here with Harry.”

“Or with Gabrielle?”

Minerva nodded. “I’m going to see the Headmaster. Do try to keep the noise down.”

She turned and hid a smile as she heard Zach say, “Come on, Natalie, I’ll show you around.” Zach might talk too much, and not study enough, but he was a Gryffindor to the bone, and if he had been born a few years earlier, he would have definitely been with Harry, Ron and Hermione through their adventures.

She knocked on the door to Albus’ office more out of politeness than because she had to – she knew she was welcome, but some things were deeply ingrained.

“Come in, Minerva,” Albus called cheerily.

“Gabrielle’s been kidnapped,” she said as she entered.

“I know,” Albus agreed. “Fawkes doesn’t think it’s anything Harry can’t handle.”

Minerva blinked. “Then exactly why is he taking a broom, and not a Portkey or even the Floo or having Fawkes take him there?”

Albus looked guilty.

“Albus,” Minerva said sternly, placing her hands on her hips. “If this is one of your schemes…”

“It is NOT a scheme. It’s payback!”

Minerva blinked.

“Last night he petrified me and handed me over to Doris. By the time the spell wore off, the only thing I could do was beg forgiveness – several decades’ worth. I’ve never had so many shortcomings pointed out to me in so little time.” Albus smiled suddenly, his eyes twinkling.

“Besides, he is concerned about his performance on a broom, and an international trip will be the best way for him to get used to it.”

Minerva’s lips twitched.

“I also told him that if he does need help, that we’d all be there for him.”

“Good,” Minerva said with a slight smile. “In which case, do you want to come to the meeting tonight?”

“Meeting?”

“Very informal, but those of us who were looking after Harry get together for a drink or two.”

“*Et tu*, Minerva?”

“Yep.”

“I’d be delighted,” Albus said. “May I invite Doris?”

Minerva smiled broadly. “Yes. Oh, for your information, I’ve allowed Natalie Jones to enter the Gryffindor Common Room. Harry apologised to her for using her in today’s prank, and they’re now friends.”

It would take Minerva a long time to work out just why Albus started to roar with laughter at that point.

*Jeconais*  
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# Happily Ever After

## Chapter 8

Harry grinned as he headed toward London. He had one stop before he could go to France.

Being in control of this broom was like nothing he had ever flown before. It seemed to respond to his every wish almost before he made it, and the speed was incredible.

The trip seemed to pass in a moment as he got used to how the broom handled and became comfortable with everything it could do.

He dived down toward Diagon Alley, knocking it out of super-sonic speed before he got close, and landed outside Ollivander's.

"Mr Potter," Ollivander welcomed him as he entered. "The wand is ready."

"Brilliant," Harry cheered.

"This wand," Ollivander continued, "is a contradiction. It shouldn't exist. Good for both charms and curses. The straight grain of the heartwood allows for power, and when mixed with a phoenix feather core, well, it is the most unusual wand I have made since the last two I made from a phoenix feather from this particular phoenix."

"Of which only one survives," Harry said softly. "This wand is to help make up for the evil done by the last one."

Ollivander looked surprised. "I see." He pulled out a long box and opened it. The wood itself was almost golden, and it seemed to glow with its own magical light. "A unique wand," the old wand-maker said, "fit for royalty."

Harry smiled and pulled some money out of his moneybag, and placed the required amount on the counter. "Thank you."

"It was a pleasure, Mr Potter. A pleasure indeed."

Harry slipped the wand into his right boot and turned to leave.

"Mr Potter," Ollivander called.

Harry turned his head.

"Did you know that Muggles use that wood as stocks for their firearms?"

Harry shook his head. "Fitting, isn't it?" he whispered, before he left and jumped back on Gabrielle's broom and headed toward Dover as fast as he could.

As the gleaming white cliffs approached, he plunged down in a power-dive, hugging the contours of the land before spiralling down to the Channel. With a yell of pure pleasure, he kicked the broom into high speed and took off. A huge plume of water trailed after him as he raced across British waters and into France.

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The living room in the Burrow had been expanded, and was full of people chatting and sitting on comfy-looking couches.

Molly was floating around the room, making sure that everyone had drinks. Sirius, Remus and Tonks were to the left, next to Percy and Penelope. Bill and Fleur were next to them, as was Charlie. Ginny and Neville were next, with Minerva, the twins and their guests next to Arthur and Molly. Ron and Hermione were near the front.

As Albus arrived, there was a hush of surprise.

Albus smiled merrily. “Please,” he said, “let me introduce my former wife, Doris.”

“Hi,” Doris said cheerfully. “Actually, Albus, as we never got divorced, I’m the *current* wife – we’ve just had a brief hiatus.”

“I invited him,” Hermione announced, from where she was sitting with Ron, “as we are no longer at cross-purposes.”

“Indeed,” Albus agreed. “I’ve had my errors pointed out to me in a variety of ways, and while bad for my ego, I suspect it will be good for me in the long term.”

“But who’s going to play the bogey-man now?” Fred asked.

“Flip you for it?” George suggested.

“Nah, we ought to introduce our guests as well.”

“True.”

“Guys,” Fred said. “This is Su Li, the latest person enrolled in the cult of Potter, who has agreed to manage our new shop. And next to her is Padma Patil, who is going to be running Harry’s restaurant.”

“And you all know Penelope,” Percy added, “who is working on the new Muggle initiative that the goblins have started – thanks mainly to our catalyst.”

“Welcome, all of you,” Hermione said, as she stood and moved to the front, her cup of coffee in her hand.

“There is very little formality here; it was just a group who got together to talk about Harry, and how we’d make sure that Harry was able to make his own choices when he woke up.” Albus

blushed at this. “This is the first meeting since he did exactly that, and started to cram everything he had missed out on into as short a time as possible.”

Hermione took a sip of her coffee. “I think I screwed up,” she said with a sigh.

“What?” Fred was the first person to respond, narrowly beating everyone else.

Hermione held out her hand, and waited for silence.

“We gave Harry everything we knew. We taught him things that took us our whole lives to learn. We chatted to him, told him our fears, our hopes and desires, our troubles.”

“We did that so he wouldn’t be alone, though, right?” Ron asked.

Hermione nodded. “But what I didn’t take into account, is the effect this would have on Harry. Imagine you are Harry Potter.”

“Hmm,” George said. “My courage is rising, my fear is under control, I feel responsible for everything bad that happens around me, but my attractiveness to hot international models is going through the roof, my bank account is increasing by the second and my charisma is out of this world. Damn, it’s good to be me.”

Everyone laughed.

“But,” George continued, “I can see the world is in a state. I can see inequality everywhere I look. I know what is going on through many different perspectives. What do I do about it?”

Everyone was now silent.

“George,” Hermione’s voice was soft, but very insistent. “You are not just Harry Potter; the most beautiful girl in the world has just told you that you’re a Prince, and that she is a Princess. You are destined to rule.”

George slowly smiled. “Then the answer is obvious. I fix everything I can find, and make all my friends’ fears and worries go away. And I’ll have a good time doing it.”

George blinked. “Wow,” he said. “Mum, could you close your ears for a second?”

Molly shook her head. “I’ll give you a pass to swear this one time.”

“Thanks. Hermione,” George continued, “you are talking absolute bollocks!”

Hermione blinked.

“So you’ve given Harry enough information to know what he is doing, so what? The choice is still mine – his, sorry – he doesn’t *have* to do anything about this, except for what he chooses to. He’s better prepared for life than the rest of us put together, and he’s already found the sort of person



that a lot of us are still looking for.

“You fought to give Harry that choice, and we all helped. Well, he’s been Harry Potter and taken that choice as easily as most of us chose which underwear to wear.”

“Well said,” Fred agreed.

“Did you know that Harry played a prank today?” Minerva asked Hermione.

“Really?” Hermione asked, a smile appearing on her face.

“He changed the words of the school song to a song about a wizard’s staff.”

“With a knob on the end?” Hermione asked and as Dumbledore nodded, she started to laugh. “Oh, my. At least it wasn’t ‘*The Hedgehog Can Never Be Buggered At All !*’”

“Hermione?” Ron asked.

“Does anyone else know what I am talking about?” she asked with another giggle.

“No,” came the chorus of replies.

“That’s brilliant then,” she said happily. “It means that Harry is definitely still himself. I’m the only person here who knows who Terry Pratchett is, and I didn’t teach Harry anything about that at all. That means that it is knowledge he picked up himself, probably at school, as there is no chance those damn Dursleys would have had a book in their house.” She took a deep breath. “I still think that he’s going too fast, and I’m not sure if Gabrielle is the right....”

“Hermione,” Ginny interrupted softly. “I do.”

“Really?”

Ginny blushed slightly as everyone looked at her. “And you owe her,” she continued.

“I owe her?” Hermione asked.

“For getting me to propose to Hermione?” Ron asked.

Ginny shook her head. “Harry popped into the *Quibbler* this morning and gave me the interview he promised. Do you know that he was the first person to beat Locutious at his own game? Anyway, after he left, Frank Copard dropped into my office. We were talking, and he said that he wasn’t surprised that Harry was dating Delacour – because they were both obviously nuts.”

There were a few snickers from the gathered people. “So,” Ginny continued, her hand reaching out to take Neville’s. “I asked what he meant. And he explained that when he used to work for the *Prophet*, Gabrielle agreed to do a photo shoot for them as long as they did a bizarre favour for her.”

“Which was?” Molly prompted eagerly.

“To run a fake competition for them – it was a few years ago.”

“No,” Hermione gasped.

Ginny nodded. “A *wedding* competition.”

“What does that mean?” Molly asked.

“That Gabrielle personally paid for Ron and Hermione’s wedding,” Ginny said softly.

“But why?” Ron asked.

“Ooo, it’s my turn,” Fred said. “I’ll put myself in her shoes.” He paused. “Damn,” he whispered, “I am hot! All the boys want me. *I* want me!”

Padma calmly swiped him on the arm.

“Sorry,” he apologised with a grin. “I’m not female, and I’m definitely not Gabrielle, so I’ll just use logic instead. We all know that Gabrielle’s believed in Harry for eight years. We know that she believes that *she* is a Princess, and that *Harry* is her Prince. We know that Harry’s two best friends were getting married, and that it was going to be,” he paused and shrugged, “on the cheap. George, as Harry, would you let Ron and Hermione get married like that?”

“Hell no,” George replied instantly. “And I don’t care who I have to hurt to ensure that it’s *not* like that.”

“And finally,” Fred continued, “we know that Gabrielle doesn’t see the world like the rest of us. So there you go, that’s why.”

“I think I missed something,” Sirius muttered.

Fred sighed. “Gabrielle was acting in her Prince’s stead. As far as she was concerned, Harry would never have allowed them to get married like that, and as no one would listen to her, she simply bypassed all of us and did what needed to be done anyway.”

Molly beamed. “I did wonder. The chances of our family winning two competitions did seem low, but I wasn’t going to complain. I’ve had my eye on that little one for years, and she has never acted selfishly, and this just proves it. Can you imagine anyone keeping it that quiet – and if Ginny hadn’t found out, we would never have known.”

“Harry knows,” Albus stated. “He watched the wedding last night from her perspective.”

“He didn’t even hint when we talked today,” Hermione said with a sigh.

“This puts us in a position,” Remus said softly, “where we have to be careful what we say, so that

Harry doesn't take it as an invitation."

"Erm, I know I don't know you all that well," Doris interrupted, "but if I might make a quick statement here."

"Go ahead," Hermione said. "We're all planning on pumping you for information as soon as we finish with Harry," she added with a grin.

"Okay, Remus, was it?"

Remus nodded.

"Excellent. Now, that was possibly the most pretentious statement I've ever heard," she continued cheerily. "I'll presume that you meant it in a good way. Now, from what I know of Harry, mainly through Albus here, he's impulsive, with a heart of gold, and pretty much convinced that he's destined to fix things – and unlike most people, he's probably capable of doing so as well – especially when you add in Miss Delacour.

"The point of this meeting seems to be that you aren't sure what you've done. As far as I'm concerned, you did the right thing. But, you now have a bigger responsibility between the lot of you, that will take the rest of your lives."

There were a lot of blank looks. Fred leaned over to George. "You know," he said in a stage whisper, "she's actually scarier than Mum is."

"I know," George stage whispered back. "I think that if Albus hadn't screwed up by driving her away, we would never have had a Voldemort problem, because she would have just taken him over her knee and given him the spanking he so richly deserved."

Doris started to laugh, although she did look embarrassed as well. "Anyway," she said, before anyone else could get a word in. "You all need to make sure that the two of them stay on the right track."

"What do you mean?" Hermione asked.

"They believe that they are destined to rule. They are planning on doing so, and changing the world as they see fit. Well, the last person who wanted to do that was named Voldemort.

"I'm not suggesting that they are like him – they're polar opposites, but the point remains. They are going to change our world as *they* see fit! You will all need to make sure that they stay on the right path, that they don't start to take shortcuts, that everything is nice and legal.

"That is your punishment for what you have done. And that is your reward as well. And if Harry and Gabrielle decide to do something, you smile and accept it as it is meant – like the adults you all are."

"And you dumped her?" Bill demanded to Albus.

Albus coughed and looked down. “Well, she left me physically after I left her mentally.”

“I was younger then,” Doris agreed. “I made more than a few mistakes myself in my pride.”

“Great men have always made a mark on history,” Minerva said. “And the greatest are those who had people around them they could trust. Voldemort never truly trusted anyone. I would like to believe that Harry and Gabrielle trust us all.”

“Harry has always been special,” Su said. “More so now, because he has the confidence to go with the ability.”

“Indeed,” Minerva agreed. “And he is growing up as well. He could have taken any Gryffindor with him to invade France today, but he turned them down gently.”

“Excuse me,” Neville interrupted. “Exactly why is Harry invading France?”

“What he said,” Bill agreed.

“Oh, well, it seems that Gabrielle’s been kidnapped.”

“What!” Fleur demanded.

Minerva winced. “I could have put that better,” she agreed. “Albus?”

Everyone turned to look at the Headmaster, who raised his hands. “After an amusing visit from some ex-students – that I’ll tell you about later, it was capital entertainment – an owl appeared, very embarrassed because he couldn’t find Gabrielle.

“Harry co-opted my phoenix – not for the first time – who took a note to Gabrielle. Fawkes returned and told me that Gabrielle had been kidnapped. I was prepared to call in the cavalry, but Fawkes shook his head. In the esteemed opinion of my phoenix, Harry should be handling this on his own. And while normally I might have disagreed, I do tend to take advice of immortal creatures of Light.”

“Oh,” Hermione said.

“He’s probably at your parents’ right now, Fleur, working out what is going on.” Albus looked thoughtful. “Besides,” he continued slowly, “it is always the handsome prince who rescues the beautiful princess in peril.”

“Okay,” Fred interrupted, “there have been far too many references to fairy tales since Harry woke up. It’s time for someone to explain.”

“Fleur?” Hermione asked.

Fleur looked thoughtful. “You are convinced you are right?” she asked.

Hermione nodded.

“Then yes, perhaps you should explain Gabrielle to everyone.”

Hermione smiled slightly and spent ten minutes explaining her views on Gabrielle and the way she had dealt with the shock of watching Harry fight Voldemort, and everything that had happened over the last eight years.

“Woo-hoo!” Doris cheered when Hermione had finished, “I hope you were paying attention, you old meddler,” she said, poking Albus firmly. “I take some of it back,” she continued. “If I’d known that, I wouldn’t have been worried at all. Personally, I think we should find this psychiatrist of hers and thank him for what he’s done for us.”

“What?” Fleur demanded.

“That’s before we throw him off a cliff, obviously,” Doris finished. “I’m sure it wasn’t what this quack wanted, but he’s given us the gift of someone who firmly believes in fairy tales and that’s a brilliant thing.”

“It is?” Minerva asked.

“Absolutely. Don’t you get it? I’m a primary school teacher. I deal with children ages four through ten every day. And if you ask them what the rules of a fairy tale are, they will be able to answer easily. Evil is dark and twisted, it hides from the light and sneaks around. Good is bright and beautiful, everyone is honest and loving and caring, and the Prince and the Princess rule for the benefit for everyone else. Good always triumphs over evil, and everyone on the good side lives happily ever after!

“Human fragilities aren’t in fairy tales. As far as kids are concerned, everything is black and white. And if that’s how they’re going to rule, I’ll be there, serving in the castle, doing everything I can to help keep the fairy tale alive.”

Hermione nodded thoughtfully. “I think on some level they do know that life isn’t a fairy tale, but Gabrielle is convinced, and I think Harry wants to be convinced. He’s always had a thing for saving people, and now he has a framework to handle it.” She smiled. “This is completely nuts, but can anyone see a downside to us supporting them?”

Everyone looked at Dumbledore.

“Hey,” he protested. “I’ve changed, honest. I’ve had more genuine fun since Harry woke up than I’ve had in the last thirty years. Did you know that he’s taken to calling me ‘Unca Albus’? It fills me with pride every time he says it. All my students are already convinced that he is a Prince, and they didn’t need much convincing either. I’m going to enjoy myself from now on in the role he has asked me to take. As court advisor, I know that my advice might be occasionally ignored, and that’s fine. Sure, I’ll have the occasional ego prick, where I’ll feel like I should be leading, but every time that happens…”

“I’ll borrow one of Molly’s frying pans and belt you with it,” Doris finished.

Albus chuckled.

“Molly,” Doris said, “did you know that your apple pie really is world famous?”

Molly blushed.

“Albus got me to come by over-reaching himself again, and promising that you’d have some.”

“Well,” Molly said, “I *do* happen to keep one spare at all times, just in case. I’ll go and get it.”

“All right!” Bill cheered – the sentiments were echoed around the room eagerly.

Molly grinned. “Why don’t you come and help me,” she invited Doris.

Doris was instantly on her feet.

“Sorry Hermione,” Molly said happily, “but I get first crack at her.”

“So I can see,” Hermione said. “At least my husband wouldn’t abandon me for pie.”

There was a pause as everyone looked at Ron.

“Oh, yeah, right,” he agreed, his tone one of reluctance.

Hermione laughed and dropped on his lap. “Thanks, honey,” she said, her tone equally as dry.

“I do love you,” Ron said. “But Mum’s pie...”

“Did I ever mention that I kept my old school uniform?” Hermione asked him in a sultry voice.

“...is secondary to how much I love you,” Ron finished.

Hermione smiled triumphantly.

“George,” Fred said quickly. “Can you think of any jokes that won’t get us thrown out, yelled at or hit?”

“Not a single one,” George said, “so we’ll just have to think them.”

The two looked at each other and started to giggle like school children.

“In which case,” Arthur said, “and as this meeting seems to be over, I’ll break out the wine and we can finish off in the traditional way.”

“Oh?” Albus asked curiously.

“By us all having a wonderful evening talking to each other and having a good time. These meetings have always been a good excuse for everyone to get together.”

“That,” Albus said, “sounds like the perfect end to the evening.”

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Harry slowed his broom as he reached the air above Sainte-Maxime. The Mediterranean Sea was in front of him, and he could detect Saint Tropez across the bay. He made a mental note to come here and explore with Gabbi, before he turned right and flew down the coast.

He was using simple ‘point me’ spells to get to where he wanted to go. It wasn’t the most sophisticated way, but when flying at super-sonic speeds, it was the easiest.

He was flying at a mere 90 miles an hour when he finally spotted the fountain where he had spoken to Gabrielle’s father. He swooped down and jumped off the broom. The door to the house was open, and he walked in carefully, his wand at the ready.

He whispered under his breath and cast a spell that would tell him how many people were around. Two, was the immediate response, and they didn’t seem to be moving. Carefully, he peered around the corner. In the kitchen, both of Gabrielle’s parents were on the floor.

He walked over and released that gag around Marie’s mouth. “They took Gabrielle!” she said, before anything else.

“I know,” he agreed. He used his wand to undo the ropes binding her, before he released Eric. “What happened?”

“Well, we arranged for Gabrielle’s psychiatrist to meet her here this morning.” Harry frowned but didn’t comment. “They went into my office, and a few minutes later, there was a knock at the door. I opened it, and two men grabbed me and Eric, and tied us up. They went into the office, and there was some noise, and one of the men and Dr Van Neuman emerged, the other man and Gabrielle floating behind them. They then stunned us, and we woke up about half an hour ago.”

Harry smiled slightly. “Did Gabrielle have her wand?”

“No,” Eric replied. “She was never allowed it when she was with Dr Van Neuman. I think he took it with him. Now, I have to call the Aurors!”

Harry shrugged and walked into the office. “You can’t go in there,” Eric protested. “The Aurors will need to check it for evidence!”

Harry didn’t pause as he walked in. The office was a mess, proof positive that Gabrielle, despite being unarmed, had put up a fight. He looked around; he could see that she would have been sat across the desk from him – her back to the door. There was a pad in front of her, and a few pencils.

There was a message here for him somewhere. A Princess being kidnapped would always leave her Prince a message somehow. He thought for a second, and then got on his hands and knees. All he found was a notebook that had been thrown. He flicked through the book, it seemed to be Gabrielle's notes on the sessions she had with Van Neuman. He smiled at some of her descriptions, and he could almost see her rolling her eyes as Van Neuman tried to persuade her to do something - anything, that she didn't want to do.

His princess could be remarkably stubborn.

He flicked to the last page and read it. At the bottom, was a message for him.

*Something is going wrong here. He's on edge, and he keeps looking past me (which makes a change from him staring at me). I've got a few suspicious, so while I'm supposedly writing notes for him, I'll mention that Van Neuman lives near Staufen Im Breisgan in Germany (there's an atlas on the book case to your right) and*

The message ended abruptly.

Harry moved to the bookcase and pulled out the atlas. He quickly found Staufen Im Breisgan, at the edge of the Black Forest. He flicked over a few pages, so he could see the general direction he needed to head.

With the information he needed, he turned to walk out the door. Eric was on the Floo.

"Thank you for releasing us," Marie said to him.

Harry shrugged. "I didn't do it for you," he said honestly. "This was just the first place to look when Gabrielle didn't come back to me." He paused, and then said, "I got a message to Gabrielle. She's okay."

Marie gasped. "Thank you," she repeated again.

"The Aurors will be here shortly," Eric said.

Harry turned and started to walk out.

"Wait," Eric called.

Harry paused.

"You need to wait for the Aurors, they will handle this."

Harry laughed. "The Prince *always* rescues the Princess."

"Not another one," Eric sighed.

"Another one?" Harry snarled, turning to face him. "Someone else who should be sent to a bloody



shrink, who will try to turn me Dark, before kidnapping me? Or perhaps a shrink who doesn't know the first thing about children?" He turned and stalked forward. "You remember Hermione, don't you? Cleverest witch in her generation? Degree in psychology? Without even getting close to Gabrielle, she's agreed that Gabrielle is about as much a bloody sociopath as I am!

"Didn't you do any research yourselves? 'Sociopath' is a label that can only be applied to adults for a reason! She barely matches three of the seven key signs for a sociopath, and only an idiot would apply them to her. She was a frickin' genius, who needed help, not being told that she was likely to commit murder. She was bloody six years old! How many six years olds even know what murder is?"

"What was it? Hide her in a corner and forget about it as long as she was seeing her shrink? Pay the nannies to look after her?" Harry looked disgustedly at the two of them. "Did you even try and understand her?"

The two adults blushed. "The psychiatrist said that..." Marie started.

"Bloody Hell," Harry swore again. "Have you heard of independent thought? I can accept listening to an expert, but I can accept not following it up with finding things out for your selves. I suggest that while I'm rescuing her you start reading up, because I will not have my Princess constantly disappointed by you." He turned and stormed out, far too irritated to let anything stop him.

He was on his broom and away in seconds, heading directly north.

Down below he could see a small Wizarding town, and descended into it. In the local bar, he found a small public Floo.

"Hermione Granger," he called.

"Harry!" Hermione said.

"Just to let you know that I'm heading into Germany now. I'll be near Staufen Im Breisgau."

"Albus told me what was going on. Good luck, and call if you need help."

"Hermione," Harry said slowly. "Could you try and have a chat with Eric and Marie? I just shouted at them for what they've done to Gabbi in the past, and I might have been a bit harsh. They need someone they can talk to – someone who isn't completely in love with Gabbi."

"I'll get Fleur and go immediately."

"Thanks, I appreciate it."

Hermione smiled softly. "Go rescue your Princess. And if you need help, call me immediately."

"I will. Thanks."

Hermione turned from the fireplace. “Okay people, Harry’s now invading Germany. He knows where Gabrielle is.”

There was a cheer from the others.

“He’s heading into the Black Forest, so he should be there in an hour or two.”

“Hmm,” Minerva said. “Well, it’s been a fun evening, but I have something to do.”

“That look is evil,” Albus pointed out.

“*Moi ?*” Minerva asked. “Nonsense. On a completely unrelated note, you do know that the Black Forest was a dark and magical place – or so the Muggles believe, why, all sorts of fairy tales came from that region.” She walked over to the fireplace and threw some powder into the fire.

“Headmaster’s office, Hogwarts,” she called and vanished.

Hermione blinked. “I don’t want to know,” she muttered. “Fleur, we need to go to your parents. Harry thinks he may have been a bit hard on them.”

“Do you want me to come?” Ron asked, standing up.

“No,” Hermione said. “I think it will be better if we don’t outnumber them. But thank you.”

Ron nodded and sat back down.

Fleur kissed Bill quickly. “I will see you in a bit,” she promised.

Together, the two of them took the Floo to the south of France.

They arrived into a full kitchen. Eric was talking to some Aurors, while others were congregating around the door to an office.

“Fleur,” Hermione whispered, “can you get rid of the Aurors?”

She smiled faintly and nodded. “Gabrielle will certainly owe me for this,” she muttered. She took a deep breath. “My sister has been *kidnapped ?*” she wailed in French.

Every single Auror turned to her. Her face was glowing, and she looked close to tears. As one, they all rushed to help her.

Hermione shook her head, impressed. Fleur could be amazing when she used her Veela power deliberately.

Eric and Marie were looking shocked.

“Gabrielle’s in Germany,” Hermione stated. “Harry will have her back in England within a couple

of hours.”

“How can he do that?”

“Because he is Harry Potter and he *is* Gabrielle’s Prince and nothing on this planet will be able to stop him. This is the man who defeated Voldemort, the most feared Dark Lord in a thousand years, at the age of fourteen! This is the man who had three Quidditch clubs try to sign him today, before he’s even tried to play Chaser. This is the man who managed to get the drop on Albus Dumbledore and then re-unite him with his estranged wife. This is the man who is called friend by the goblins – and he’s only been awake for a few days.

“There is no force on this planet that can stand in his way,” she paused, “and if this was serious, he would have legions of wizards and goblins right behind him. It is not serious – we know that because Fawkes, a phoenix, who is another friend of his – said so. Harry can handle this, and we think it is important that he does.”

“But…”

“But Harry can act faster than any Auror force in the world. He knows more spells than most Aurors, and he’s got enough power and ability to make most of them think twice about attacking him. Do not underestimate him, because Harry Potter does not lose!

“Now, we’re going to go and sit down, and we’re going to talk about sociopaths. We’re going to talk about child geniuses, and then you’re going to make your minds up.”

Thoroughly cowed, the two adults nodded and walked into the living room. They were joined a few seconds later by Fleur. “The Aurors have left,” she announced. “They will be giving me a report in the morning.”

“Thanks,” Hermione said. “I know you hated doing that.”

“For Gabrielle, I would do anything,” Fleur said with a challenging look at her parents.

Hermione lightly placed her hand on Fleur’s knee, and started to speak.

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Harry flew over Basel and over a forest, when his broom started to slow down. He frowned and flew down, trying to keep it under control. As he neared the ground, the broom stopped completely, and he dropped the last few meters.

He was in a small clearing deep inside the Black Forest. He shrunk the broom, grabbed his wand, and started to walk north. He wasn’t going to let a small thing like a malfunctioning broom stop him.

It was dark, but the full moon shone down, bathing everything in its silver glow.

From up ahead, he could just make out a high-pitched voice singing. “Half a pound of tuppenny rice, half a pound of treacle, that's the way the money goes, pop goes the weasel.”

He hurried forward, and saw a small child skipping merrily along. She had a red cloak, and was carrying a basket.

“Hey,” he called, placing his wand in his back pocket.

The girl stopped. “Who’s there?” she asked in a scared voice.

“I’m Harry,” Harry said, moving forward slowly. “Isn’t it a little late for you to be out?”

She giggled. “I’m on an adventure,” she said seriously. “Granny is ill and I’m taking her some fruit to make her feel better.”

“Do your parents know you’re out here?”

“Of course not, silly,” she replied. “They’d never let me out alone at night. I snuck out the window!”

“Why don’t I take you home,” Harry suggested. “The woods are dangerous at night.”

“No! I’m going to Granny’s!”

Harry sighed, “Then why don’t I at least make sure you get there safely?”

The girl giggled again. “Okay. I’m Trudy. We’re on holiday here, staying near Granny.”

“That sounds like fun.”

“It’s boring. There’s nothing to do but look at trees.”

“How can you be bored with trees?” Harry asked. “They’re wonderful. You can climb them, sit under them, play with them, and if you can get a rope, you can swing from them. Trees are great.”

Trudy looked at him in awe. “Wow,” she said. “I didn’t think of that.”

Together they headed down the path, and after five minutes, they came to a small farm. “There’s Granny’s house,” Trudy cheered and started to run.

“Wait a second,” Harry said, grabbing her. Trudy looked up at him. “Why is the door open?” he asked. “Wait here for a moment while I go and check things out, okay?”

Trudy nodded.

Harry walked in to the cottage slowly; something felt very wrong. “Hello,” he called. There was no response. He walked through the living room silently, his senses on high alert. He pulled his

wand out and slowly opened the door to the bedroom.

On top of the bed was a huge wolf, its jaws dripping drool as it stared down at the woman underneath his paws, intimidating her into silence.

Harry folded his arms, put his wand away in his left boot so that the Muggle wouldn't see it, and leaned against the doorframe. "Looks like someone's being a bad doggy," he said calmly. "Or perhaps I should ask 'who's afraid of the big bad wolf?'"

The wolf howled and jumped off the bed, heading toward Harry at a frightening speed.

Harry moved forward and rolled forward, under the jump of the wolf. The wolf crashed into the wall. Harry threw a quick wink at the terrified Muggle, before he kicked the wolf as hard as he could between the legs. The wolf howled in pain, and Harry jumped over him, heading outside. "Trudy," he yelled. "Wait until we're outside, then run and hug your Granny."

"Okay," Trudy's terrified voice responded.

"Here wolfie, wolfie, wolfie," he called. There was another roar, and the wolf bounded after him.

"Now," Harry yelled, as he dropped to his back, caught the wolf on his feet and heaved. The wolf flew into a tree.

Harry smiled and pulled out his wand, banishing the creature into the forest. He followed after it. "What am I going to do with you?" he asked, as the wolf started to regain consciousness. Harry absently bound him up, using *Incarcerous*.

"You're obviously a werewolf," Harry continued. "And the very fact that you're in this forest attacking Muggles says to me that you're a very naughty little puppy. Obviously, it was your bad luck to run into a wizard who knows how to handle werewolves, otherwise there might have been all sorts of unfortunate results. And that cute little girl might have ended up as a werewolf, and that would have been bad.

"So, I'll think I'll just stun you and I'll send someone to get you in the morning. *Stupefy* .

The struggling werewolf somehow managed to free himself from the charms Harry had placed on him, and dodged the curse. He jumped forward, and Harry was too slow. The werewolf managed to knock the wand out of Harry's hand.

Harry jumped backward. "This is your last warning," he said softly. "I know you can understand me. Back off and let me stun you, or you won't see another Full Moon."

The werewolf smirked at him and Harry knew he had his answer. The werewolf started to circle him, taunting him.

Harry reached into his boot and pulled out Gabrielle's wand. The werewolf growled and attacked, only to have Harry to banish him over a tree stump. Sadly, he conjured an axe with a silver head.

“I’m sorry,” he said, as he raised the axe and swung down as hard as he could.

The wolf’s head rolled along the ground, and turned back into a human. A human with whiskers and matted grey hair.

Harry cast a charm on the body, to hide him from the Muggles so that the Aurors would be able to find him, and notify his next of kin. He swung the axe over his shoulder. He picked up his own wand and put Gabrielle’s away. He walked back toward the settlement, whistling to himself.

“Hello,” he called, as he moved nearer.

Trudy peered out the window. “Harry!” she yelled and ran out to meet him. “You fought the wolf!”

“I did that,” Harry agreed, catching her as she jumped into his arms.

Behind Trudy, an older woman, who he had last seen terrified under the wolf, came out. Two lights pierced the darkness, and a car drove up the farm lane quickly, screeching to a halt in the driveway.

“Trudy!” the man yelled as he climbed out of the car, closely followed by a woman who exited from the passenger side.

The old woman shouted something Harry didn’t understand in German, and followed it up with a rapid dialogue. The woman ran over to her and hugged her tightly.

Harry put Trudy down. “I think your parents would like to see you,” he suggested.

Trudy gulped. “They’re gonna be mad at me,” she mumbled and tried to hide behind him.

“They are,” Harry agreed. “You probably scared them witless.”

“No probably about it,” the man said. “Stephan Bond,” he introduced himself. “You’ve met Trudy. That’s Jessica, my wife, and Paula, my mother.”

Harry nodded. “I think someone has been reading too many fairytales.”

“They’re not fairytales,” Trudy stated. “They’re true, and today proved it.”

“Oh?” Stephan asked.

“I’ve got my red hood,” she said, coming out from behind Harry. “I was taking things to make Granny feel better and I met a woodsman.” She pointed at Harry’s axe. “When I got here, there was a wolf trying to lock Granny up in the cupboard, and Harry fought him.”

“There really was a wolf?”

“I think it was rabid,” Harry explained.

“Thank you,” Stephan said. “If you ever need anything...”

Harry grinned. “Just happy to help,” he said cheerfully. He picked up Trudy. “Did you know the other rule about these stories?” he asked.

Trudy shook her head.

“You only get one adventure,” he said seriously. “You’ve had yours now, so no more night-time trips alone, okay?”

Trudy nodded hard.

Harry passed her back to Stephan. “Don’t be too hard on her,” he asked. “I think she’s learned her lesson.”

Stephan took his daughter, and then shook Harry’s free hand seriously. He reached into his pocket. “I meant it,” he said, “I owe you my family, and I don’t forget.” He passed Harry a card announcing that he was a British solicitor, specialising in corporate law.

Harry slowly smiled. “I might just take you up on that,” he said cheerfully. “I’m going to be looking at expanding a couple of my businesses in a few months time. I won’t accept free work, but having a friendly contact is always useful.”

Stephan smiled and hugged his daughter tightly. “In different circumstances, I would have discounted you as being too young to have a couple of businesses, but any man who can save my mother and daughter with the grace and courage you have, is definitely old enough.”

“I’m actually twenty-two,” Harry said. “I just *look* young.”

“My wife would love to know your secret,” Stephan grinned. “Anyway, I should get this one to bed.”

“Night,” Harry said, and turned to walk away.

“Harry,” Trudy called.

He turned back.

“Who are you?” she asked.

He winked at her. “You know what the bogey-man is?”

She nodded.

“If you asked the bogey-man who his bogey-man is, you know what he would say?”

“You?” Trudy guessed.

Harry nodded. He reached out and lightly patted her on the head. “Stay safe.”

He turned and walked away, whistling cheerfully, his axe on his shoulder. As soon as he was out of sight, he vanished the axe and replaced it with his wand. He came to a cross roads and cast ‘point me’ again. With a smile, and a cheerful jaunt to his step, he continued on his path to rescue his Princess.

As he walked, he started to notice small white stones that were on the ground. They were spread at an even distance, one to the next. He frowned and gripped his wand carefully. Up ahead was a clearing in the woods that made his senses itch. It was definitely magical.

The small stones led straight to the door, and he followed them. He knocked, and an old crone opened the door. She was fat and bent almost in two. Her nose was crooked and had warts on it, and she smelled like she hadn’t bathed in a month.

“Yes?” she asked.

“Sorry to bother you,” he said, “I’m just doing a quick survey.”

“Then you better come in,” she said. “There’s a nasty werewolf around here causing trouble at night. I feel sorry for some of them, but not the ones who go looking for victims.”

“Ahh,” Harry said. “You’ve just answered my question. You can relax, the werewolf was a bad puppy and now he’s paid the price. I’ll leave you in peace.”

“Wait,” the witch said. “You killed him?”

“I gave him a choice,” Harry sighed. “He made the wrong one.”

“Then come on in, please. I’ve got some hot stew on. I don’t get many visitors out here.” She sighed, “Not many people trust someone who looks like I do.”

Harry resisted the urge to look at his watch. “I am a little hungry,” he admitted. “But I do have business to attend to, so I can’t stay long.”

The witch smiled. “My name is Matilda,” she introduced herself.

“Harry,” Harry said.

“What’s a nice young man like you doing out here?” she asked as she bustled around the small cottage.

Harry took a seat out of the way. “It’s a long story,” he said. “I’m going to Staufen Im Breisgau to meet someone very dear to me.”



Matilda nodded – which had the knock on effect of making her chins wobble – “And what happened with the werewolf?”

Harry smiled. “Would you believe that he tried to eat Red Riding Hood’s Gran, and I had to step in?”

Matilda shot him a long look, before she pulled a loaf of bread and a large cauldron of stew over to the table. She passed him a bowl, and cut the loaf into thick slices. She ladled out a bowl each of the stew, and instantly started to eat, dipping some of the bread in the stew.

Harry waited for a moment, and when she seemed to be having no ill effects, he took a bite of the stew himself. Automatically he swashed it around his mouth, and only when he couldn’t detect any of the signs of poison, did he swallow. “Wow,” he said, “that is fantastic.”

“Thank you,” the witch beamed. “I may be an old crone, but I do like to cook.” She hit herself on the side, adding, “which is why I’m the size of a bungalow.”

Harry smiled at her and dug in; he hadn’t eaten since the lunch Dobby had provided earlier. As they ate, he recounted what had happened between him and the werewolf.

As he finished, the old woman stood and started to gather the plates. “Let me,” Harry said.

“Oh no,” the woman replied firmly. “You’re the guest, I will clean up. And before you start arguing, I’ve got over a hundred and fifty years on you, and I’m a lot more stubborn.”

Harry laughed softly. “If you insist.”

“I do, it’s nice to have a handsome young man to talk to. All my family died out a long time ago. An evil wizard killed them.”

“Voldemort?” Harry asked.

The witch nodded.

“He’s dead.” Harry said. “Harry Potter killed him eight years ago.”

“Really?” the witch gasped.

Harry nodded.

“That’s the best news I’ve heard in years,” she said. “I’ll have to send this Potter fellow a thank-you.”

“I believe he’s at Hogwarts,” Harry said, “or so the papers say.”

The witch nodded. “He must be a hero,” she said.

Harry shrugged.

“Do you know the qualities of a hero?”

“Not really,” Harry replied.

“One of the key ones,” the witch continued, “is modesty. And not even admitting that you killed Voldemort is extremely modest.”

“But...”

“Your scar is very famous,” Matilda said dryly. “I knew who you were immediately. I don’t often let strangers in,” she continued. “But you, who kill Dark Lords and evil werewolves, you had to at least show a part of my gratitude.”

“It was nothing,” Harry protested. Matilda ignored him and pushed back a rug. There was a small trapdoor under it, and she lifted it up and pulled something out. It was long and slim and wrapped in rags.

“This,” she said, as she placed it on the table in front of him, “is a family heirloom and I want you to have it.”

“I can’t...”

“Harry,” Matilda said sharply, “Remember what I said about my age? I’m going to win this argument in the end, so just say ‘thank you!’”

Harry smiled. “Thank you,” he said obediently.

Matilda removed the rags completely, and Harry gasped softly. It was the most beautiful sword he had ever seen. The hilt seemed to glow with the same golden light that Gabrielle’s wand glowed with. It was longer than the previous sword he had held – the sword of Gryffindor – and straighter. “I can’t accept this,” he whispered. “It’s beautiful!”

“You can and you will,” Matilda stated firmly. “It is useless in my cellar, and I have no one to pass it on to. If you have it, I know you will use it for good, as it was used in the past.”

Harry took a deep breath and took the handle. The sword seemed to sing to him as he grasped it. It moulded itself to his grip as he pulled it out of the scabbard. The blade was bright silver, and had runes etched down the centre. “Thank you,” he whispered as he sheathed the blade. “I swear that I will never let this sword be used for evil.”

Matilda smiled. “Now, get going. It’s late, and I have to get my beauty sleep.”

“Can I come and see you again?” he asked. “I know someone else who would love your stew.”

The old witch beamed at him. “I’d be delighted,” she said, urging him out the door.

Harry turned, bent over, and kissed her cheek. "Thank you," he said.

To his surprise, Matilda actually blushed. "Get away with you," she commanded. "I'll see you again."

"You will," Harry promised. He tied the scabbard to his belt, and continued on his journey.

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The old witch watched him walk away. "You are a true Prince, Harry," she whispered. She seemed to blur, and she lost the weight she was carrying, and doubled in height. The cottage faded into the ruins it had been a few hours before.

Minerva turned and hurried in the opposite direction, using her wand to trace Harry's path. It wasn't long before she found what she was looking for. She smiled and Apparated back to Basel, and then took the Floo back to the Weasleys'. The house was empty, but a note said that they had all decamped to Hogwarts, so she took the Floo to Hogsmeade and walked up the path.

She smiled faintly. For so many nights they had all stayed like this, talking about Harry, while he slept. This time was the same, only he wasn't sleeping, he was off proving himself worthy of leading.

It was close to eleven at night, and everyone who had been at the Weasleys' earlier was sitting around, talking and laughing, wine glasses in their hands.

"May I have your attention please," she called.

"Yes, Professor McGonagall," Fred and George replied in unison.

She didn't blush, even if she had been caught in a teacher mode. "Harry is well on his way to rescuing Gabrielle," she said. "And, as I'm sure it will be no surprise, Harry can't even rescue his Princess without having an adventure on the side."

"Ooo," Fred said, dropping to the floor in front of Minerva. "Story time."

"It seems that Harry was walking along, when he stumbled across a girl in a red cape, taking a basket of goods to her Granny."

"Little Red Riding Hood?" Hermione asked.

Minerva grinned.

"Please," Hermione continued, "tell me that there wasn't a wolf involved!"

"It would hardly be a story if there wasn't a wolf," Minerva replied with a smile. "Or in this case, a werewolf. Harry interrupted him trying to have a snack of Granny. The werewolf obviously didn't recognise that he was fighting a Prince, and well, the werewolf is no more."

“Who was he?” Remus asked softly.

Minerva smiled at him gently. “Who else could it be?”

“Greyback?” he gasped.

Minerva smiled broadly.

“Err, who?” Su asked.

“Fenrir Greyback,” Bill explained. “A supporter of Voldemort, although he did not carry the mark. He was responsible for creating more werewolves than anyone else.”

“Including me,” Remus added.

“And he’s dead now?” Su continued.

“I don’t think there’s a creature alive who can survive being decapitated with a silver axe,” Minerva stated, a high degree of personal satisfaction in her voice.

“Damn,” Remus grinned as Sirius pounded him on his back. “This calls for a toast.”

“Minerva,” Albus said from his comfortable seat with Doris, “how do you know this?”

“Well, Harry happened to follow some small white stones...”

“Hansel and Gretel?”

“Only without the house made of sweets, I didn’t have enough time to create that. I was hideous – hooked nose, short, fat, warts and all. And you can guess how Harry reacted?”

“Hmm,” Ron said with a teasing smile on his face. “I’d’ve run a mile screaming ‘Hag!’ So I’d say that Harry was charming, polite, cheerful, and friendly.”

Minerva laughed. “Precisely. But he wasn’t foolish either. He checked the food for poison, and made sure I ate everything first – and he had his wand within reach at all times.” She paused.

“Many years ago, when times were dark, there was not the separation between Muggles and Wizard that there is now. Wizards were considered Gods, for they had power beyond belief.

“Manannán mac Lir was one of these wizards. He was thought of as the god of the sea and a psychopomp – a spirit that helps people move from this world to the next – and he was a necromancer. The Muggles at the time knew that he had connections with the Otherworld islands.

“He was a great man, who acted fairly. He taught Cormac mac Airt humility and modesty by exchanging Cormac’s family for money. Cormac quickly realised what he had done, and tried to undo it. Manannán taught him the lesson, and then graciously allowed him his family back, and

even gave him a magical chalice, which would break if three lies were spoken over it, and would reform if three truths were spoken. Cormac became a great and powerful leader of the people, thanks to Manannán.”

She paused and picked up a glass of wine and took a sip. The faces in front of her were entranced. This was the greatest secret of an educator. A story such as this would be remembered far longer than dry facts.

“Manannán had a sword, and he used it to defeat a dark wizard. And when he died, it went to Lugh Lamfada, who passed it on to Cúchulainn, who himself passed it on to Conn of the Hundred Battles, the High King of Ireland. In the fifth century, an adventurer took it to Scotland, where it was bequeathed to Artur, the son of King Aidan of Dalriada.”

Hermione gasped, “But...”

“Even we don’t know that for sure,” Minerva said gently.

“What?” Ron asked.

“A fifth century king with a name like Arthur, carrying a magical sword?” Bill said. “That sounds mighty familiar to me!”

“Oh,” Ron agreed. “Yeah.”

“Records from that time are spotty and annoying inconsistent,” Minerva continued. “Some do believe that he was King Arthur of Camelot. What is known is that in the ninth century, Constantine I, the High King of Scotland, placed this sword with the clan McGonagall, and commanded that we search for a suitable person to hold it, and decreed that this person would herald a new age of reason and clarity for the world.

“For the past thousand years we have held this sword, waiting for one who would live up to its history. Waiting patiently, as the times turned, for the man who could pick up this sword and wield it as was intended.

“Tonight, I gave Fragarach, known as ‘The Answerer,’ to Harry. It is with pride that I fulfilled my duty to my ancestors.”

Su slowly started to clap. Padma and Hermione joined in instantly, and soon everyone was applauding. Minerva smiled and bowed softly.

“Masterful,” Doris praised. “I will be borrowing this story to tell in class.”

Padma looked at Su. “Didn’t I tell you?”

“You did,” Su agreed. As everyone looked at her, “She said that agreeing to follow Harry would be the best decision I ever made. And here I sit, welcomed into this family based on friendship without hesitation or reluctance. And I sit, surrounded by powerful people, who can laugh and

joke like normal humans, and I hear stories of legend, and realize that I am in the middle of one – that years from now, people will tell stories where I’m one of the characters. Following Harry has given me immortality, and I cannot ask for anything more than that.”

“Mum always said we were going to be famous,” George said cheerfully.

“I believe her exact word was ‘*infamous*,’” Charlie pointed out.

“Close enough,” Fred replied.

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Harry walked up to another crossroad in the forest. There was actually a signpost this time; it only had one destination, pointing to the town on the left. His route had taken him over a couple of roads and a train track so far.

The route toward the town looked open and inviting.

“Point me Gabrielle Delacour,” Harry tried. He’d been trying this for the last hour without success.

This time his wand wobbled, before it pointed to the right and deeper into the forest.

Harry grinned and started to jog. He kept his hand on the hilt of the sword, as he’d found that was the only way to ensure that it didn’t get tangled in his legs, sending him sprawling (again).

A cloud blotted out the moon, plunging everything into eerie darkness. Ahead, a wolf howled, filling the air with its mournful cry.

Harry tightened his grip on his sword, but didn’t slow down. He kept at the same distance-eating pace, determined not to arrive and be out of breath. It was hard – part of him wanted to sprint. His Princess was close, and she needed him.

He emerged into a large clearing that appeared totally empty. The soil had been moved away in the middle, revealing the gleaming white stone underneath. It seemed like nothing was there at all, and he was about to turn around, when he realised that he had no need to turn around.

That the very idea of turning around had not been his.

He growled and concentrated, trying to clear his mind. He knew the basics of Occlumency, but had so far not needed to actually try to use it.

As clearing his mind wasn’t working, he tried the opposite, and filled it with images of Gabrielle – or rather, a topless Gabrielle asking him to remove her knickers.

He was concentrating so hard on that image, he almost forgot to block his mind from outside influence, but as he did, the clearing in front of him started to waver, and then with a clarity that was shocking, a large castle was there.

Turrets and towers reared high in to the sky. The white stones gleamed in the moonlight, beautifully offset by the dark blue slate roof tiles. There was a heavy wooden portcullis in front of him.

He raised his wand with his left hand, but the sword pulsed in his right. He drew it and examined it closely. The runes were glowing in the moonlight, but he didn't recognise them. He turned the sword over to look at the back and frowned. There was an indentation at the base of the blade that looked around twelve inches long. He looked at his wand and then the indentation again and shrugged.

It wasn't hard to see the correlation. He slowly placed the wand in the indentation and the air filled with magic. The sword seemed to sing again as it vibrated and started to glow so brightly he had to look away. When it faded, there was no sign of his wand, and the indentation had gone.

He smiled and looked at the portcullis. "*Reducto* ," he whispered.

The sword bucked in his hand and spell worked perfectly – reducing what was once a sturdy barrier into something that could only be used as kindling for a fire.

He walked in slowly, his sword held low, ready to use it. He found himself in a tunnel piercing the thick wall of the castle, with another portcullis at the far end. The only light came from a single torch in a bracket on the wall.

"Stop," someone yelled in French. A hulking figure stepped out of the shadows at the end of the tunnel. Harry guessed that this was one of the henchmen that Marie had described earlier. He didn't stop -- he wasn't very good at following orders, but then, as a Prince, the only one ones he would have to follow would be those issued by Gabrielle.

The man cast a few spells at him, but they weren't very accurate. The ones that were, Harry swayed to avoid. Even in the narrow confines of the tunnel, it was easy to avoid being hit. "Tsk," said Harry. "It's so hard to find good minions these days."

The henchman gave up on spells and charged. Harry noted that intelligence was definitely not on the employment checklist for henchmen any more than accuracy was.

Harry decided to be merciful, even though the henchman had helped kidnap Gabrielle. It didn't feel right to use the edge of the large sword he was holding on the rapidly approaching idiot.

He dodged out of the way easily and slapped the flat of the blade against the back of his head. The man fell to the ground with a solid sounding thunk.

Harry shook his head and the second portcullis met the same fate as the first. He entered the courtyard beyond, only to retreat a second later, narrowly avoiding being burnt to a crisp by a large dragon. He sighed as he peered out of the tunnel; it had to be a Hungarian Horntail – and a particularly cranky one at that. There didn't seem to be any way around the dragon, and he couldn't even fly as Gabrielle's broom wasn't working.

The dragon was dominating the space between the entrance and the Keep, which looked close to a hundred yards back. Harry peeked out again. The dragon was in the middle of an ornamental garden. Around the exterior walls was a stone colonnade similar to the one that edged Hogwarts' main courtyard.

“Can we talk?” Harry called hopefully. The only response was another burst of fire. Instead of retreating into the tunnel again, he ran forward, and dived into a roll. He headed to the right, for the cover of the colonnade. He dived and rolled at the last minute, and felt the heat of the fire through his shoes. He gasped for breath as he stood with his back to the first column.

“I don't want to hurt you,” he called. “But I will!”

The dragon roared in defiance and anger, and flames bracketed him as it tried to attack again.

Harry took another deep breath and ran for the next column. As far as he could tell, the dragon was not tied down, and was acting on its own free will. That made things easier for him as he didn't have to worry about hurting something that was being coerced.

There was a swishing noise, and at the last moment, Harry dived forward. The column behind him collapsed into rubble as the dragon's tail slammed into it.

The dragon swivelled, and Harry started to run for cover again. The dragon whirled the other way, and Harry tried to jump the tail aimed at him. He didn't quite miss it, and yelped as the tail smashed into him.

Luckily it wasn't a direct hit, but it still hurt and sent him spinning. He tried to roll out of it, but landed on some rubble. As he got back to his feet, he felt his back, and looked at his hand. It was red.

“*Stupefy*,” he snarled. As before, the sword bucked in his hand, and while the red bolt of magic did knock the dragon back, it didn't seem to do anything else.

“*Protego*,” he called, and ran toward the dragon. The dragon seemed to smirk, before it launched another torrent of fire at him. His shield held – barely – protecting him from the heat. The dragon swung its tail, but he was ready this time, and he jumped and swung at the same time. The sword cleaved through the dragon's scales and bit deeply into muscle and bone.

The dragon roared in pain as it jerked its tail free, and swiped its front left claws at Harry, in an effort to protect its damaged appendage.

Harry parried the thrust, and launched a vicious riposte – cutting the tendons. The beast retreated to get some space, and then tried to attack with fire again. Harry ran forward, yelling “*Wingardium Leviosa* !” and flicking the tip of the sword down at his shoes. He flew up, over the flames, his legs still pumping until he was higher than the startled dragon. Then he cancelled the spell.



As he started to drop he swung his sword so that it was pointing down, and grasped the handle with both hands. His aim was perfect. The sword point landed directly above the dragon's eyes, and not even the thick, magic resistant scales and the heavy crest were any hindrance to the sword.

The dragon's head slumped to ground, and Harry twisted the blade twice.

There was silence, and a curious groaning noise as the Horntail breathed its last.

Harry took a deep breath and raised the sword slowly. He spun it, the centrifugal force shedding the blood, and then placed it back in its scabbard. He walked off the dragon and headed toward the keep.

The castle was empty; it looked like it hadn't been occupied for centuries, but it had once been a grand palace.

He knew where Gabrielle was going to be, of course – she had to be in the highest turret, and he wasn't going to be stopped before he got there.

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Gabrielle looked around her prison, trying to decide what to do. Her Prince was about to come through the doors, and she hadn't yet decided in what position she should be.

She could try being asleep, but not even a dumb princess would have been able to sleep through Harry first breaking the door down, and then beating the nasty dragon. There was also the fact that she was so proud of her Prince that she could burst.

Never, not even in her wildest dreams, had she truly expected her Prince to kill a dragon for her!

Perhaps she should be tied up. Maybe he'd take advantage of that for a kiss or two before he released her – and that could be fun.

She looked around the bedroom she was locked in. There was a set of manacles attached to the far wall. Judging by the padding on the inside, she wasn't the first princess to have this idea.

"Mirror," she called. "Do I look sexier like this," she asked, as she raised her hands over her head. "Or like this," she said, putting them out to her sides.

The mirror on the mantelpiece ignored her.

"I swear," she grumbled, "whoever had this room before me had a warped sense of humour.

*"Mirror mirror, on the wall,  
How do I look sexier,  
tied against this wall?"*

The mirror chuckled. "That's better," a female voice said. "It has been many years since anyone worked out how to talk to me. Let me see those poses again."

Gabrielle raised her hands over her head and held them there for a second, and then spread them out wide.

“The first,” The mirror stated firmly. “And take off your shoes and skirt, there is nothing like a half-naked Princess to get a Prince’s blood flowing.”

“Ooo, good idea,” Gabrielle agreed. She kicked her shoes under the bed and removed her skirt. She smoothed down the shirt so that she was still decently covered. She looked at herself in the mirror, and then smiled. She had waited all her life for these boobs, so she might as well make sure they were shown off in the best light.

She undid the top two buttons of her shirt and then ran her hands through her hair hard – so that she would look a little ravished. She moved back over to the manacles, and tightened the chains so that they were shorter, forcing her onto to the tips of her toes. She placed her hands in them and used her fingers to slam the manacles shut.

“How do I look?”

The mirror didn’t answer for a few seconds, and when it did, it was in a voice that Gabrielle had never heard from it before. “Thou, O Princess, art the fairest of all.”

Gabrielle blushed.

“I have waited for hundreds of years to see royalty return to this palace,” it continued solemnly, “and at long last it has happened.”

Before Gabrielle could ask any questions, the door to the room disintegrated – and in the dust and debris stood her Prince.

His jacket was singed and burnt, he had a smudge on his cheek, and his hair was more unruly than ever. He stood there for a second, a scowl on his face and his sword in his hand. He looked at her and slowly smiled. “Princess,” he whispered.

“My Prince?” she asked.

He nodded and sheathed his sword, before he walked over to her. As she had hoped, his first action was to kiss her. The kiss was different than anything she had shared with him before. It was hot, possessive, firm, and more than anything it screamed to her that he had accepted that he was her Prince, and that nothing in the world was going to stop them from living happily ever after.

He pulled back; they were both breathing heavily, and he pointed his sword at the manacles.

“Wait,” she said – she really didn’t want this fine bit of workmanship ruined. “They’re on a catch. I can’t open them myself, but you can.”

He leaned up and nodded, his fingers quickly undoing the catches, and she sagged down, as if

exhausted.

He caught her, and carried her to the four-poster bed. He laid her down gently. “How are you?” he asked intently.

Sadly, Gabrielle knew that there would be no delightful ravishment tonight. The Prince would take her home, and she’d have to wait until later to show how grateful she was.

She smiled up at him and stretched. Of course, that didn’t mean that she couldn’t accidentally show him a few things – just to keep him interested.

“Irritated,” she admitted. “I was ‘stupefied’ and carried here. And since then, I’ve had Van Neuman talk endlessly about my destiny.” She frowned. “My *destiny* is to rule with you, be loved by all, and make everyone happy. And I’m doing that.”

“No, it’s not!” the voice of Dr Van Neuman shouted. They both turned to look at the door. Her psychiatrist was in the doorway, pointing his wand at them. In his other hand was her wand. He was all of four feet tall.

Harry blinked. “You have got to be kidding me!”

Gabrielle felt embarrassed. “I was fighting the other two,” she confessed. “I didn’t expect him to hit me in the back. I mean, look at him.”

“I am,” Harry agreed. “I think I’m even angrier at your parents. You would think they would have looked at him and just laughed.”

Van Neuman sneered. “You’re forgetting who has the wands,” he said. A vicious smile appeared on his face as he suddenly snapped Gabrielle’s wand in two.

Gabrielle gasped. It almost hurt her physically to see her wand snapped like that, but her Prince just smiled – and that smile boded nothing but ill for her psychiatrist.

“And you,” Van Neuman continued, “raise your hands so I can see them and keep them away from that pretty toy.”

Harry did as he was told, raising his arms but nudging Gabrielle with his knee as he shifted his weight. She glanced down, to see the handle of a wand protruding from his right boot.

“Tell me something,” Harry said. “If I guess your first name, will you let us go?”

“What?” Van Neuman demanded.

“Oh, so you’re saying that you’re not Rumpelstiltskin?”

Van Neuman’s face turned an ugly shade of red, as he danced on the spot in absolute rage. “How dare you,” he spat. “You’ll pay for that, oh how you’ll pay. In fact, I’ll torture your *Princess*,” he

sneered the word, “first.”

Gabrielle put a terrified look on her face, and clung to Harry’s side, reaching down and slipping the wand free.

“He won’t be able to…”

Whatever Harry wasn’t going to be able to do was largely irrelevant, as she pointed the wand at Van Neuman and shouted “*Diffindo!*”

The wand burst into life, and she suddenly wished that she had used a different curse.

“That,” Harry said softly, “is a lot of blood.”

She grimaced. “I do hope the house elves here know how to get it out of the carpet,” she agreed.

Harry grinned at her. “So, do you like your new wand?”

“My new wand?” she asked in surprise.

“Yes, I had a chat with Fawkes, and we decided that we needed to make amends for the evil that Voldemort did with one of Fawkes’s feathers. So I had that wand made for you. It’s a brother wand to mine.”

She hugged him as tightly as possible, and then started to examine her wand closely. “It’s beautiful,” she whispered.

He reached out and raised her head so that he could look into her eyes. “It doesn’t come close to how beautiful you are.”

Gabrielle felt all her insides melt at the same time, and she wrapped her arms around him and kissed him gently.

He sighed against her lips. “As much as I want to continue this, I think we should get out of here. We don’t know who this castle belongs to.”

“Ooo,” Gabrielle said. She jumped out of bed and stood in front of the mirror.

*“Mirror mirror on the wall,  
Who does this castle belong to?  
Portcullis and all”*

Harry moved behind her, and wrapped his arms around her stomach, holding her against his chest. “A couple of portcullises less than there used to be, actually,” he whispered in her ear.

“Thou, oh Prince and Princess, are the rightful heirs of Camelot.”

Harry coughed. “Excuse me?” he asked in a hoarse whisper.

“This castle, long abandoned, was once named Camelot. It was built by Merlin in the mists of the past. He who bears Fragarach, known as 'The Answerer', also known as Excalibur, is the rightful prince of Britain, and master of Camelot.”

“See,” Gabrielle said, twisting to look at him. “I told you that you were a Prince!”

Harry blinked at her for a second, and then started to laugh. “Can we have a bit more detail?” he asked the mirror politely.

“Certainly, My Lord,” the mirror said. “For an eon, I have been here, awaiting the return of someone worthy. At times I slept, other times I watched the world turn.

“Then, eight years ago, magic brought me out of my daze. I watched from afar as evil was vanquished by one who was honourable and just. I watched as his Princess swore a solemn vow to herself that she would be worthy of his name.” Gabrielle felt herself start to blush. “I allowed myself to be found again, and that miserable dwarf persuaded himself that *he* was my rightful ruler, and many a night he spent refining his plan to turn the Princess into his Queen.”

“Ewww,” Gabrielle mumbled.

The mirror ignored her. “He would use her intelligence against her and teach her to be cold-blooded, and he would bind her to him. But many a night did he rage unto the sky, for his plan was not working. The Princess seemed immune to his work. Her heart was already given to another, and no one, and no thing would distract her – but alas, he did not know this.

“At last, her parents sent him a message; the Princess had fulfilled her vows and had woken her Prince.

“Verily, did the dwarf scream unto the heavens. He would have her, or no one would. In desperation he acted. Two brothers of intelligence slim did he acquire, through promises of great wealth, and he embarked on his most cunning operation yet. And he did succeed, or so he thought, as he kidnapped the Princess, knowing not that he had sealed his own doom.

“A creature of the light appeared, sent by the Prince, and I allowed him to find me. But before he could rescue the Princess, I called out, and behold, he did listen.

“Together we talked, my first conversation in an eon, and he agreed with me. A message he did take back, and the Prince was soon on his way.

“A Prince must be honourable and kind; more, a Prince must be able to protect the Princess and me. And so I watched, and I caused his broom to fail. Tests of three must he pass, so that he may prove himself worthy of dominion of all that I am.

“A girl, innocent and sweet, was sent into the woods. How would the Prince act? That was the test of the first. The Prince befriended the girl with charm and gentle words. He protected her,

unknowing of the danger ahead. I caused a werewolf, evil and dark, to attack a dwelling, although I did not let the owner be harmed.”

Gabrielle felt herself lost in the story; her heart was pounding as she listened.

“The Prince drew away the foul beast, into the forest, where he tried to reason with it. Alas, the werewolf did not listen, and attacked the Prince, disarming him. But the Prince was cunning and smart, and believed in constant vigilance. He had a second wand. And the werewolf was vanquished, a silver axe ending his life.

“With modesty and tact, the Prince played down his heroism, and checked that the family was unharmed, and continued on his mystical quest, his confidence high, even as his heart sorely called out for his missing Princess.

“A Prince must be gracious and fair, and see beyond what is obvious. I called forward the Sword-Bearer. A grotesque creature she did become, but one full of kindness. The Prince treated her with respect and affection, and Fragarach she did pass unto his hands. The test of the second was passed.

“And so the Prince continued; his fair maiden close.

“A Prince must be brave and bold, and so a dragon, corrupted by greed and promises from the dwarf, was allowed into my courtyard. This was the test of the third.

“And my eternal heart sang, for the Prince did slay the dragon. Fragarach had accepted him as the rightful bearer. I rejoiced, for not only did I have a Prince worthy of leading, I had a Princess.

“Back in the days when I was born, Princesses were pretty and short; they listened to their men, and had little influence out of their chambers. And yet times have changed. How would a Princess fare in this modern world of enlightenment, when non-magical people had cultures that dwarfed our own?

“The Princess talked to me, discovering my secret on her second attempt. And so I responded, wondering if the Princess would be vain and empty of the head. Instead, I found a Princess worthy of any Prince in the mists of time.

“Beauty? She had that, and not one caused by magic, but by purity of heart, soul and purpose. She was a Princess because she felt that was the best way she could help make everything better.

“Empty of the head? This Princess was well versed in her responsibilities, and in events, both current and ancient. Philosophy, math, religion, magic, in all subjects did she excel.

“Worthy of leading? This Princess believed that her Prince was the true leader, and that she would support him until the end of time. She gave no thought to her own elevation, only unto his.

“And so I bless this pairing. I awake from my centuries’ long rest, and I rejoice, for a Prince and Princess will soon marry, and they will become King and Queen, and will alight upon my dais and

sit upon my thrones of gold, and once more will light and reason be bought to this realm.

“For I am Camelot, wrought from magic and hewn from stone. My duty and my destiny are clear. Unto thee do I pledge my unending service.”

Gabrielle moved forward slightly, and with as much grace as she could, she curtsied toward the mirror. Next to her, Harry bowed deeply.

“Camelot does make a good point,” Harry said. He moved and took her hand, before he knelt before her. “Gabrielle, my Princess, will you marry me?”

“Harry,” she said, taking his hand in hers. “I love you, Harry Potter; you are my Prince for now and for eternity. I release the bands on my heart, and give you everything that I am. Yes, I will marry you.”

Harry smiled and slowly rose to his feet. “Gabrielle Delacour,” he said, “you have changed my life so much in ways that can never be truly explained by mere words. You have awoken me to my destiny. I love you, for now and for eternity.”

She moved closer and kissed him; her first kiss as a betrothed woman was just as wonderful as her last kiss as a single woman. “If you think this means we’re waiting until our wedding night to sleep together, you’re very wrong.”

He laughed and hugged her tightly. “How are we going to get home?” he asked.

“If I may suggest,” Camelot suggested. “You could always fly me back to Britain.”

“You fly?” Harry asked in awe.

“Of course.”

“Oh yes,” Harry said, “oh yes indeed.”

“Then you should proceed forthwith unto my dungeon.”

Gabrielle felt Harry take her hand, and pulled her along. They both jumped over the decapitated body of the dwarf-sized psychiatrist, and ran downstairs. As they did, lights appeared to guide their way.

The dungeon was like the rest of the castle – old and decrepit. Deep cracks ran through the stone floor. In the centre, was a large stone; a tall mirror sat to one side.

“Place your sword in the stone, for only the rightful king of England can proceed.” Camelot’s voice came from the mirror.

Harry pulled Fragarach out of its scabbard. He saluted the mirror, before pressing the sword deep into the stone.

A great feeling of magic emanated from Harry and the Sword. Gabrielle moved over, so that she could share the burden, taking his hand.

A golden light appeared in front of them, and the floor started to change. The flagstones mended themselves, and the effect continued.

“Behold, I am returned to life,” the mirror whispered.

The magic faded, and Gabrielle dropped to her knees with Harry, feeling exhausted.

“My apologies.” Camelot’s voice had changed, and before them appeared a spectral figure, that of a woman; she had long black hair, and carried herself with pride and dignity.

“Nimue?” Gabrielle asked.

“So I have been called,” she agreed. “Many names have been given unto me; and yet I am Camelot.”

“What would you prefer being called?” Harry asked politely.

“I am returned to form because of your magic,” Camelot said. “Onto you falls the right to name me.”

Harry smiled. “I asked what you would like to be called,” he pointed out.

Camelot smiled at him. “Nimue,” she said. “For that was the name I took when I separated from this castle and carried Arthur’s body to Avalon.

“Take hold of Fragarach, and we shall away. But be aware, the castle you saw is not my appearance; in my limited power, I cast an illusion so that the dwarf would not be suspicious. Others shall perceive me as I truly am; as will you when you alight from my ground.”

“I can’t wait,” Harry said. “I thought you were beautiful before. I’m sure I will be blown away by your full beauty.”

Images appeared in front of them, of the Black Forest. And as Harry pushed the sword, so did Camelot move.

“Take us home, Harry,” Gabrielle said, as the sun rose behind them.

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Albus found himself slightly concerned about Harry. As much as he trusted Fawkes, he had yet to hear anything since Harry had invaded Germany late yesterday, and Minerva had reported the death of Greyback.

There was a fifth table in front of him, full of Harry’s friends and family. The group had been seen so often at Hogwarts that it was no longer remarkable to the students, although there was



some surprise that they had reformed after Harry had been awakened from his coma.

The previous night had been immense fun, and once more he castigated himself for losing sight of what truly mattered in life. He had come so close to crossing the line, and was eternally grateful that he had been stopped.

Everyone had decided to stay the night at Hogwarts, a decision influenced by the amount of wine that had been consumed.

His musings were interrupted as the door flew open and Fawkes soared in. His phoenix hovered, fire shooting out of his tail feathers as he spread his wings. He opened his mouth and sang, and Albus felt excitement race through his veins.

Phoenix song had many properties, but this was the first time Albus had ever heard so much unadulterated joy and anticipation from the bird. Fawkes swept out of the hall majestically, and flew outside through the great oaken doors of the castle, which opened on their own before him.

“Headmaster?” Remus asked.

There was a slight tug on his magic, as an early warning ward announced that something was approaching.

“I think,” Albus said clearly, “that we should delay the first lessons of the day, and congregate outside. I truly believe that no one will want to miss anything that can make a phoenix so happy. We will move one table at a time,” he announced, before the students could dash out. “First year Ravenclaws, after you, please.”

Eight minutes later, he was on the green grass in front of Hogwarts. It was a grey morning, with no sign of the sun yet.

“What is that?” Bill asked, as what looked like a dark cloud approached them.

“Does anyone happen to have any Omnioculars?” Fred asked plaintively.

The cloud slowly drew closer, and as it did, what they thought had been a relatively small nearby cloud, turned out to be something much larger.

“No,” Hermione gasped. “It can’t be.”

“What?” Ron asked.

The grey clouds over Hogwarts slowly parted, and beams of sunshine suddenly shot through the clouds and illuminated the object in a multitude of dazzling colours.

“*Sacre Bleu*,” Fleur whispered. “That is not possible.”

“Professor,” George said softly, “did anyone spike the wine last night?”

“No,” Minerva responded.

“Then,” Fred continued, “There really is a humongous castle floating toward us?”

“So it seems.”

“Blimey.”

No one seemed to say anything as the castle moved closer.

“Well, Hermione,” Charlie said a few minutes later. “I can only think of one castle of that size that we’ve mislaid.”

“Camelot,” she whispered.

Albus found himself agreeing.

“Did you say Camelot, miss?” Zach’s voice rang out.

Hermione nodded.

“All right!” Zach cheered. “You know what this means?”

“What?” one of the seventh year prefects demanded.

“That Harry and Gabrielle are in there – Harry rescued his Princess, and they even found themselves a castle!”

Albus couldn’t find a single flaw in the logic of his theory, no matter how much a part of him said that it was completely illogical.

The castle floated to a stop over the great lake. Four beams of light shot out from corners of the castle, anchoring it in midair. A fifth beam shot out from the front, and two figures slowly descended. One was tall, with unruly black hair. He carried a sword on his left hip. The other was slightly smaller, with radiant blonde hair. She had a glowing wand in her right hand. His right arm was around her shoulders, her left arm around his waist.

Together, they descended to the ground, and the light vanished. They walked up, the children parting before them, allowing them to pass unhindered.

“Harry!” Natalie called.

Harry paused and smiled, and gestured with his head for her to join them. The small Ravenclaw tugged on the hem of Harry’s shirt until he bent down to hear something that she whispered. Harry smiled and put his hand on the sword, before she stepped behind them, and walked proudly, carrying the hem of Gabrielle’s newly conjured cloak as if that was the position she had chosen for herself in life, and nothing, and no one, would be able to tell her otherwise.

Harry and Gabrielle stopped in front of him, and the others. “Hey,” Harry said casually. “What’s for breakfast?”

Albus blinked at him, and then looked at the castle floating in the sky, before he started to laugh.

The laugh was quickly taken up by the other students, as the sheer incongruity of Harry’s statement rippled through the crowd.

“I think,” Albus said, “that you’re going to have to answer a few questions.”

Harry sighed, “We’ve not eaten in a while, so we’re going to need something first. Camelot didn’t have any food.”

“Then it truly is Camelot?” Hermione whispered.

Harry grinned. “Wait until you meet her.”

“Harry,” Hermione groaned. “She? Do you *have* to anthropomorphise a castle?”

Gabrielle laughed. “Hermione, you can’t anthropomorphise something that really does have human characteristics. Camelot is alive!”

“Oh,” Hermione blushed. “You really are going to have to answer a lot of questions!”

“After breakfast,” Gabrielle said firmly.

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“What happened next, Grandma?”

“Why, they lived happily ever after,” Hermione said softly.

“But that’s not the end of the story!”

“I know, Sebastian,” Hermione replied, ruffling his hair gently. “There are many more stories, but not all of them can be told tonight.”

“Aww,” Samantha pouted.

“It’s time for bed, you two.”

“Okay,” Sebastian said and kissed her on the cheek. “Night.”

“Night, sweetheart, don’t let the bed bugs bite.”

“They won’t,” he said confidently. “Great-Uncle Harry charmed the beds.”

“That he did,” Hermione agreed.

“Night Grandma,” Samantha said, giving her a big hug.

“Goodnight, darling,” Hermione whispered and watched as the two scampered off.

“I’ll check on them in five minutes,” Ron said from his chair in the corner. “Sometimes I can hardly believe that we lived through that story.”

“I know,” Hermione agreed. “None of us suspected before Gabrielle woke Harry that a legendary relationship was forming, but I think we started to get a clue shortly afterward.”

“‘Merlin and Morgana’, ‘Godric and Rowena’, ‘Isis and Osiris’, and now ‘Harry and Gabrielle’.”

“I do wish Harry had a slightly more exciting name,” Hermione murmured. “But you’re right, we’ve always known Harry was going to be a legend – that much energy and smartness wasn’t going to do anything but – but when he added Gabrielle, the combination was unbeatable.

“Over the last hundred years we’ve had to add four new schools to cope with the numbers of students we are getting. Only Harry, Gabrielle, Percy, and the goblins know how exactly many people they are employing. I tried to work it out once, and gave up when I started getting to silly numbers.”

“We helped,” Ron pointed out. “MuggleTech was our idea.”

“True,” Hermione agreed. “A little unfair to the competition, but it was Harry and Gabrielle who worked out how to make a magical transistor, and Fred and George who worked out how to mass produce it.”

Ron laughed. “One day you’ll tell their other stories, and I’ll sit here and listen, thinking about the uncensored version, and relive halcyon days when the sun never seemed to set, and we could do anything.”

“Like yesterday?”

“Yeah,” he grinned.

“Still, that was almost poetic.”

Ron looked hopeful. “Really?” he purred.

“Check the grandkids are asleep, and maybe we’ll see if you can still chase me around a room.”

“I’m only a hundred and thirty,” Ron pointed out. “I’ve got decades left in me yet.”

“Then what are you waiting for?”

Ron bounced to his feet eagerly and dashed out the door.

Hermione shook her head and laughed to herself. She stood and walked to the mantelpiece, absently touching Harry's face as he looked out at her from a picture. He turned and kissed Gabrielle, then grinned out of the frame again. The picture had been taken at the charity ball, the biggest party of the year, and the one that had started things off properly. In quick succession Weasley Wizard Wheezes opened and Dobby's Delights had thrown open their doors, and the goblins had started their Muggle banking venture. And that had just been the start. As more traditional businesses tried to fight back, they realised that all the best talent was already working for either Harry or the goblins, and they couldn't change fast enough to keep up.

Not that all their ventures succeeded – some sank without a trace – but most seemed to make money hand over fist. Sirius, Harry, Gabrielle, and Sirius's girlfriends *de jour* took high society by storm, creating scandals left, right, and centre, but having such fun doing it that no party was complete without them.

She shook her head. Minding her grandchildren always made her slightly maudlin, pointing out that she was indeed approaching middle-age and she hadn't seen Harry and Gabrielle for a few months now – they were off in America planning the first step to colonising the Moon.

A pair of hands covered her eyes. "They're asleep," Ron said.

"Good."

"I do love you, you know that?"

"I do," she replied as Ron started to kiss her neck.

She smiled. After all this time, she was convinced of one thing. Gabrielle was right; life was indeed a fairytale, one where everyone lived happily ever after.