

The Legend of the Serpent's Tongue

By

Esined

Table of Contents

The Legend of the Serpent's Tongue.....	1
Part 1 - Homecoming	3
Part 2 - Encounter at the Burrow.....	25
Part 3 - A Day with Dumbledore	48
Part 4 - Happy Birthday Moony.....	70
Part 5 - Potions and Aurors	93
Part 6 - Relationships	111
Part 7 - Order of the Phoenix	128
Part 8 - Ancient Legends.....	150
Part 9 - Graduations and Reunions.....	170
Part 10 - The Actions will Determine the Outcomes	192
Part 11 - By the Dark of the Moon.....	211
Part 12 - Yea, Though I Walk Through the Valley of the Shadow of Death.....	233
Part 13 - A Storm Called Phaedra	250
Part 14 - A Matter of Trust.....	278
Part 15 - Relationships	293
Chapter 16 - Day of the Serpent.....	311
Part 17 - Night of the Wolf.....	330
Part 18 - Professor Potter	354
Part 19 - Halloween.....	378
Part 20 - A Crisis of Soul	395
Part 21 - A Perfectly Abnormally Normal Evening.....	418
Chapter 22 - Plots and Secrets.....	444
Chapter 23 - A Secret Revealed	459
Chapter 24 - Hippogriffs Quidditch and Christmas	484
Chapter 25 - The Yule Ball	506
Chapter 26 - To Have and to Hold from this Day Forward	529
Chapter 27 - Till Death Do Us Part.....	551
Chapter 28 - Into the Serpent's Lair	572
Chapter 29 - Never Wake A Sleeping Dragon.....	590
Chapter 30 - New Beginnings	615
Chapter 31 - Heart of the Dog Loyalty of the Wolf and Cunning of the Serpent	639

Part 1 - Homecoming

As the Hogwarts' Express neared its destination of King's Cross Station in London, Harry stretched and looked fondly at Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger, Harry's school chums. They had met seven years ago on this very same train as they began school at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Hermione was a Muggle born witch, which meant that her parents were not magical. Ron was a Pure Blood, from a long line of wizards. Harry was what was termed a Half Blood since Harry's dad, James Potter was a Pureblood, but his wife, Lily Evans Potter, was Muggle born.

The evil wizard, Lord Voldemort, had murdered Harry's parents, and in his attempt to kill fifteen-month-old Harry, Voldemort's spell had backfired, leaving him disembodied and weak. Harry had then been placed in the care of the Dursleys. Petunia Dursley was the older sister of Harry's mother. Petunia and her husband, Vernon, along with their only child, Dudley, were not kind to Harry.

Harry had lived there until the age of sixteen when a series of Prophecies was revealed indicating that Harry would defeat Lord Voldemort, who had regained his physical form and was wreaking havoc in the wizarding world. Up until then Harry had been disguised as a boy, when in fact Harry was female. Her parents had done this at birth to protect her from Lord Voldemort, since Dumbledore, the Headmaster of Hogwarts, and the greatest wizard of the age, had recognized that Harry was the child in the Mathias Prophecy. This prophecy had predicted many of the events in Harry's life. Chandra Mathias had been a Muggle who had been married to a wizard, but she was also a powerful seer. Another prophecy had predicted Harry's coming birth and that Voldemort would mark this child as his equal. It said that the child would have powers unknown to the Dark Lord. It also foretold that one would kill the other. This second Prophecy had come from Chandra Mathias' descendant, who had been the Divination teacher at Hogwarts, Sibyll Trelawney. Sibyll had been killed in the war with Voldemort.

Harry's friends had always known she was special, but it had taken them a bit of getting used to the idea that Harry was in fact, female. Hermione had adjusted much faster, but Ron had been furious that he was never told the truth by his best friend. He did finally come to grips with the idea, after Harry had a brief show down with him, making him realize that his best friend was still the same person on the inside. Once he adapted to the idea, he backed Harry one hundred percent, and had become the Keeper of the Goblet at her Rites of Protection. This had been a special ceremony where Harry had been joined with three wizards who swore their allegiance to protect her life from any evil that might befall her in the fight against Voldemort or any other dark magic that might threaten her.

Harry had selected her three actual protectors with the approval of the Board of Governors in the Ministry of Magic and the Order of the Phoenix. It had been a rocky road, but when she convinced the wizarding community of her abilities as a healer, and made them realize she was an empath as well as an animagus they had agreed to her terms.

She had of course asked for her Godfather, Sirius Black, who had just been cleared of the murder of her parents and thirteen other people. He had been framed by one Peter Pettigrew, another school friend of her mother and father. Peter had joined the dark side and betrayed his friends to Lord Voldemort. Harry had helped to bring him to justice, but he had escaped from prison and Sirius had killed him in the final battle in the war. Another of Harry's protectors was Remus Lupin, another old friend of her parents and a werewolf. He had also been the

Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher at Hogwarts, and would be teaching Charms in the fall owing to the death of Professor Flitwick in the war.

Finally, there was her last protector, who at one time had actually loathed her. This was Professor Severus Snape. He had an old grudge against her father, but had a life debt to repay since her father had saved his life when he was almost killed by Remus Lupin. Snape had almost been attacked by Lupin in his werewolf form when Sirius had sent him into a secret passage leading from Hogwarts to the Shrieking Shack, where Lupin used to transform in secret. He would stay there until the moon set and he could return to Hogwarts. This was done in order to ensure the safety of the other students. Harry's father had gone in after Snape to prevent his being attacked. He had not been a moment too soon. To repay the debt to her father, Snape started watching after Harry when she had started at Hogwarts. He had been unable to save James Potter, but he could make sure Harry was safe from Voldemort.

Harry and Snape had a rocky relationship until her sixth year, when he found out that Harry was not really a boy. He had been shocked to discover that she was the witch in the Mathias Prophecy. This had given him renewed hope that Voldemort would be defeated. Of course, he denied ever really having disliked her, and claimed that it had merely been an act since he was a former Death Eater, and Voldemort supporter, who had deserted the dark side and had become a spy for Dumbledore. He said that being nice to the son of his former rival would cause suspicion, since James Potter had fought valiantly against the Dark Lord. Still, Harry knew Snape was a powerful wizard, and a Potions Master. He knew many things about the Dark Arts, and she wanted him on her side. Since choosing him as one of her protectors their relationship had matured into one of mutual understanding and friendship.

Finally, Professor Dumbledore had been the Trust Keeper and advisor to all of them. It was his responsibility to oversee that the Protectorship was carried out according to the laws and customs set down by the wizarding world in times long past.

Hermione had not been a part of the ceremony, but this had been just as well, since she had fallen victim to Lord Voldemort's *Imperious* curse and betrayed Harry, almost costing the lives of her parents, Harry, and Hermione herself. If it had not been for Harry and Ron she would have had to live as a Muggle and her memories of Hogwarts and all things magical would have been erased. Fortunately, Dumbledore believed in second chances, and Hermione had been cleared of conspiring against Harry willingly. She had been suspended from school for a brief time, but because of the circumstances, was allowed to continue her education and remain a part of the magical community. Harry was glad that Hermione had been cleared of any deliberate wrongdoing, and happy that Hermione was now going out with Ron.

Sirius and Remus were meeting her at the station, since she was still in danger due to the Death Eaters who had escaped death or imprisonment following the final battle. She would also be testifying at many of the trials, which were scheduled to begin in August. Her Protectorship was also meant to last for life, unless she herself released them from their obligation. It was considered more than a guardianship and less than a marriage, and a great honor to be chosen. Harry believed that she would also probably marry one of her protectors, but was far from ready to make any kind of commitment. She would not formally come of age for another six weeks, and knew that while her three protectors all had feelings for her, they all understood that she was still young and not yet ready for a deep relationship.

She was mulling all these thoughts over in her head as the Hogwarts Express pulled into Kings Cross Station, and the trio of friends got up to give each other one final hug. Ron,

Hermione, and Harry were all embracing one another when Ginny Weasley, Ron's younger sister and the only girl in their family, entered their compartment to say good-bye to Harry and Hermione.

"What am I going to do next year with the three of you gone?" Ginny asked tearfully.

"Don't cry, Ginny, you will still be seeing us," Hermione hugged her, "after all, I am going out with Ron and we're all going to be at the formal graduation ceremony at Hogwarts in July. We will see you then if not sooner."

"Yeah, and I'll be teaching at Hogwarts starting in September," Harry winked, "of course you will have to call me Miss Potter during school hours."

"Well, Miss Potter," Ginny quipped, "I hope you will remember your old friends when it comes time to give or take house points, not to mention detentions."

"Why Miss Weasley," Harry teased her friend striking a formal pose, "that's one of the reasons I will only be teaching the first through fourth year students. We wouldn't want old friends seeking favors, now would we?"

"Oh, Merlin, she sounds like one of the professors already," Ron groaned. They all laughed as he looked out the train window towards the waiting throng of parents. "Oh no, Harry, the Daily Prophet is here. I'll bet they want to try and interview you about what happened with Lord Voldemort."

"I already informed them that I was giving the exclusive story to the Quibbler. Rita Skeeter is still working there for Luna's dad," Harry explained referring to their other friend, Luna Lovegood, a sixth year Ravenclaw.

Luna's father was both owner and editor of the weekly wizard paper, The Quibbler. Rita Skeeter started working for him when the trio threatened to report her to the Ministry of Magic for being an unregistered animagus. Rita then agreed to work for Luna's father and only printed factual articles so that the authorities would not prosecute her failure to report her ability to transform into a beetle.

"It looks like they still aren't going to let you alone," Hermione remarked worriedly. "I also see someone from the Wizarding Wireless Network," she said referring to the WWN, the wizards' radio station.

"Yeah, now that you aren't at Hogwarts they probably think you are fair game," Ron announced warily. "Dumbledore was able to keep them away from the school, but there is nothing he can do at a public train station."

"No, I suppose not," Harry agreed, studying the crowd from the window, before making a final decision. "If I wait until the crowd thins out I may have a better chance of avoiding the reporters."

"Why don't you just transform and fly over them?" Ginny asked curiously, referring to Harry's ability as an animagus. She had been able to transform herself into a Phoenix since the middle of her sixth year.

"I would, except we still aren't supposed to do magic until our O.W.L. and N.E.W.T. level exams are finalized. That's why Hogwarts doesn't have its graduation until the end of July. Besides, I think a phoenix in a crowded train station is bound to attract some attention. I am only being allowed to apparate since Dumbledore arranged for me to take my licensing exam with the Ministry early for added security."

"How come Fred and George were able to do magic then when they left Hogwarts early?" Ginny inquired referring to her twin brothers.

The twins owned the joke shop in Hogsmeade with a soon to reopen store on Diagon Alley. The Diagon alley shop had been closed during the war when the twins moved to Hogsmeade for security reasons.

"Fred and George were already eighteen when they left Hogwarts even though they hadn't yet finished their seventh year," Ron explained, remembering how the twins had fled on their brooms following the now notorious swamp diversion they had created so that Harry could contact Sirius from Umbridge's office, "but they still had to notify the Ministry."

"Then why don't we follow their example and create a diversion so Harry can get over to Sirius without being seen?" Hermione suggested with a wicked smile.

"That might just work, but I'm sure they will be watching the Protectors too. We will need to get the reporters to move aside and have Sirius and Remus stay behind."

"We can have Ginny tell Sirius or Remus to meet you by the gateway," Ron mused, "they won't be looking for her. She can put a note in their hand while someone yells that you're on the other side of the platform."

"Who can we get to distract them into believing that Harry is trying to run from them?" Ginny asked just as the compartment door opened and a tall slim boy with blond hair entered.

"Malfoy!" they all exclaimed at once, looking at the young man who had just entered.

"I just came in to say good-bye and that I will be seeing the lot of you over the summer. My aunt and Black are cousins you know. Apparently they are planning some kind of reunion," Draco Malfoy stated looking at them cautiously.

He and Harry had only come to speaking terms over the past year. Draco's father, Lucius, had been Voldemort's number one Death Eater. He had recruited Draco, but when he saw that the Dark Wizard was merely a mad man controlling his father, Draco had escaped with Harry's help. Unfortunately, his mother had been murdered by his abusive father, who had also planned to kill his son for having betrayed the Dark Lord.

"Draco, I will be looking forward to the reunion. In the meantime I need your help."

"Since when does the great Harry Potter need my help?" Malfoy sneered.

"Well, if you think you're not capable..."

"I didn't say I couldn't do it!" Draco interrupted arrogantly.

"Good," Harry grinned, "I want you to create a diversion on the platform. I need to get away from the press."

"Hmm...And what if they see you anyway?"

"Harry can use her invisibility cloak to get around them and over to her protectors. My sister will tell them not to move," Ron explained frowning at the smirk on their former rival's face. "Everybody knows you and Harry didn't get along so you are the ideal candidate to make them think she is pulling a fast one."

"Sounds like fun," Draco drawled, his smirk growing larger.

"What about my trunk?"

"You can get it at my house later," Ron directed, "along with Hedwig's cage. I know Mum and Dad won't mind taking them for you."

"Draco, I will pretend to be Harry," Hermione suggested. "I can pull my cloak up over my hair and keep my head down, while I head away from the barrier that protects the platform from Muggle London. All you have to do is follow me and create a commotion using Harry's name."

"I said I would help," Draco sneered impatiently, "so let's get going."

"Draco, don't cross us on this or you will find yourself hexed from here all the way back to Hogwarts," Hermione whispered quietly as she and Draco prepared to leave the train with Ginny.

"He won't," Ginny said looking at Draco with a strange expression.

Harry busied herself with getting her cloak out from the trunk, but stole a look in Ginny and Draco's direction. Using her empathic powers, she realized that the two were quite taken with one another. Quickly scribbling a note to her two protectors, she moved over to Ginny, stuffing it into her hand. She hoped Ron would not be too upset when he learned about Ginny and Draco's feelings. The two boys did not get along, and like Harry, he had only just made a shaky truce with the young Slytherin.

"Okay, I'm ready," Harry said donning the cloak. Leaving only her head exposed, she scanned the platform for Sirius and Remus, who should be waiting for her. Snape was to join them later for dinner with his sister Circe, and niece, Phaedra, who would be spending the summer.

"There they are," Hermione pointed towards the left hand side of the platform. Sirius and Remus were surrounded by reporters. Remus looked like he was trying to keep Sirius from losing his temper.

"Draco, I am really counting on you," Harry winked as she slipped the cloak over her head, "let us see some of that Slytherin cunning you're always bragging about."

Harry watched as Ginny left the train and slowly moved over to where Remus stood waiting. Sirius appeared to be engaged in trying to free himself from the clutches of an overzealous

female reporter. She saw Ginny smile and greet Remus, shaking his hand, slipping the note into it before moving off to where her parents were waiting.

Arthur and Molly Weasley looked worried, but Ginny hugged them, and Harry was sure she whispered something to them about the plan to get Harry safely away. Harry then slipped off the train with Ron and Hermione behind her, discreetly followed by Draco. Hermione and Ron moved off towards the opposite side of the barrier, while Draco headed towards his cousin, Nymphadora Tonks. She was also Sirius' second cousin, and Draco now resided with her family. Halfway there, he saw Remus nod, and he turned and yelled in the direction Ron and Hermione had been walking.

"Hey Potter, where are you and that git Weasley going? The barrier is the other way."

Ron and Hermione started to run, and sure enough, the reporters went after them running pell mell.

Harry popped her head out from under her cloak, winked at Remus and Sirius, and raising her wand, called out, "Ottery St. Catchpole," and disappeared from the station.

Sirius and Remus followed suit and they appeared just outside of the village a minute later. Hugging each other, Sirius grinned down at her while Remus patted her on the back.

"That was terrific strategy, Princess," Remus praised, using his pet name for her, while Sirius laughed.

"Did you see the looks on the faces of the Press as we disappeared?" Sirius asked amused. "They couldn't believe it when they heard Harry's voice and Hermione lifted that hood from her face."

"Do you think the others got away okay?" she questioned the two men draping the cloak over her arm.

"I think so. Moody was there standing by the barrier, and Tonks was there to pick up Draco," Sirius replied.

"I'm sure Arthur and Molly were able to get Ron and Ginny off without a problem. I saw Moody going to help the Grangers just as I disappeared," Remus added knowingly. "I am going to assume the Weasleys will bring your trunk and Hedwig?" he questioned, referring to her owl.

"Yeah, Ron told me not to worry, that I could get them both later on at the Burrow," Harry said as they turned and started walking towards their house, about a mile down the road, halfway between the village and the Weasley home in the Burrow.

"Molly invited us all over for dinner tonight. She is having a barbecue and asked us to come," Sirius remarked. "I told her I would let her know since Severus is coming with Circe and Phaedra."

"How are they getting here?"

"Floo system, since Phaedra can't apparate. They are coming from London since Circe had to work today," Remus explained, referring to Circe's job at the Ministry of Magic. "Severus has gone to get Phaedra at her school, and will also bring their puppy."

"How is the little stinker?"

"Which one, Phaedra or the pup?" Sirius teased.

"You know I mean Phaedra," Harry shoved him good-naturedly.

"She's fine and anxious to see you. She can't wait for you to see Hannibal. She says he misses Snuffles."

"She named the puppy Hannibal?"

"Yeah, Severus says he's built like a baby elephant, so their uncle Tiberius started to call him Hannibal," Remus chuckled. "I can just imagine how big he must be getting, after all Fang is a Boar hound and Snuffles is a Newfoundland. That makes for a real interesting combination."

"Yeah, big furry and drooly," Sirius commented laughing. "I can still see the look on Harry's face when Hagrid told her Snuffles was pregnant and Fang did the deed."

"Humph, that canine lothario raped my sweet puppy. I do not expect either of you to sympathize with me since you both fall into the same category as Fang, always sniffing out a nice piece of tail!" Harry joked unable to keep from blushing as she referred to both their sexuality, Remus' being a werewolf, and Sirius' animagus form of a large black shaggy dog.

"Actually, I am more of a bird dog myself," Sirius mocked. "I especially like chasing a good Phoenix," he teased, referring to when he used to follow her after she first learned to transform.

"I wish I could transform right now. I guarantee you would never catch up to me. I can fly faster than your four legs can run," Harry taunted playfully, "his too," she added looking over towards Remus.

"We will just have to see about that when the moon is full in two weeks."

"I would love to except I have not yet been registered."

"Wait till you see all the paperwork involved," Sirius grimaced. "Albus has arranged for you to go to the Ministry first thing on Monday morning for the registration process. I did mine while you were taking final exams."

"I take it that it will be an all day thing?"

"Almost, all morning in any event, there are the usual innumerable forms to fill out and then you go before the committee who will want to see your animagus form. They will examine you from head to toe and write down all your markings. You will also be photographed. I went the same day as Rita Skeeter. They had to put her under a magnifier since she is a beetle."

"Oh great, now she will go back to writing trash for the Daily Prophet."

"I don't think so Princess. She had to sign a sworn statement that she would not use her form to harm others or misuse her ability in the line of her work. Besides, I saw Mr. Lovegood and he says she has decided to keep working for him. She is really writing noteworthy news again and has started to write a book about her exploits all across the country."

"Now that, I will have to read," Sirius shook his head.

"Gee, maybe Sirius should write a book. He could call it, 'My Life on the Run as a Fugitive Animagus.' It would be a real eye opener; I'll bet he really saw some interesting things as well as how he had to survive."

"I guarantee it would be a best seller," Remus laughed, "It would have something for everyone. Men would like the action and survival skills and women would go for the lost dog and the maligned handsome young fugitive, falsely imprisoned without a trial."

"What no sexual content?" Sirius quipped with a wicked smile that reached to his eyes.

"I am going to pretend I did not hear that remark. I do not want to know about any more of your sexual exploits. I heard enough of them when I was at Hogwarts. Did you know your reputation is legendary?" Harry looked up at the sky, trying desperately to feign innocence, her cheeks scarlet.

"Am I really?" Sirius asked, knowing that his boyish activities in the Astronomy Tower and elsewhere were still talked about among the staff.

"Remus, would you kindly tell my godfather that I have been a very good girl, but I could change that very easily if he keeps up this line of talk? After all, George Weasley is living back at the Burrow with his folks," Harry taunted, knowing that Sirius worried about her reputation and wanted her to wait until she was truly ready before having any kind of sexual relationship. He knew Harry and George occasionally dated, and that George being a few years older than Harry was already experienced with sex.

"Harry, would you really do something just to get me upset?" Sirius asked concernedly. "I was just joking with you."

"Ah...payback is a bitch," Remus frowned.

"Sirius, when are you going to trust me? You know I have told you repeatedly that I am not ready for an intimate relationship, especially after what happened with Lord Voldemort," Harry replied, looking at him fondly as they entered the front gate to their house.

"I do trust you, and I thank Merlin every night that you were able to stop Voldemort before he was actually able to rape you."

"Yeah, me too," she sighed as he hugged her gently.

Harry shuddered inwardly as she recalled the final battle with Voldemort. She had killed him as he had attempted to rape her. Harry had to fight off an *Imperious* curse, but allow him to believe he would succeed. She was able to destroy him with the *Avada Kedavra* while

physically stabbing him through the heart. She had used her mother's old wand as he tore her clothes and pinned her down beneath him.

"Hey you two, look who's here!" Remus interrupted in an effort to lighten Harry's mood noting the scowl on her face.

Phaedra was running around from the back of the house to meet them, with Severus Snape in tow.

"Miss Harry! Miss Harry!" she called excitedly, as she flung herself into Harry's arms. "I missed you."

"I missed you too. Let me look at you. You must have grown at least another inch since Christmas," Harry beamed hugging the little girl. "Did you make it into second grade?"

"Yes, I got all A's except for science. I got a B in that. I don't like it at all."

"Oh no, you need to like science to be able to mix potions. What did your Uncle Severus say?"

"He gave me a galleon for getting such good marks, but says I have to do better in science. Will you help me over the summer? I will be seven and that's when Uncle Severus says I will be old enough to mix the potions. He said after first grade and I will be seven in September."

"I will be happy to help you, and maybe we can find a way to make you like science better."

"Did you like science?"

"Some of it, there are different sections of science. The one that deals with mixing potions the Muggles call chemistry. It was not my best subject. Muggles make up all kinds of unnecessary symbols for things and it makes it harder."

"Mummy says you are going to be the new Potions Master at Hogwarts."

"No, I am merely going to teach the younger students Potions while I study for my Potions Master exam. Your uncle will be my supervisor and help me to prepare for the exam."

"Will you be as good as Uncle Severus and Uncle Tiberius then?" Phaedra asked as they went into the house, the three men trailing."

"I don't think I will be as good as they are for a long time. Potions take practice and you need a certain amount of magical feeling for the ingredients. I have only just begun to realize that and am learning how to make it work."

"I am glad to see you actually did learn something in my class for the past seven years," Snape sneered, arching his left brow in the familiar fashion

"Now here I thought you and I were on relatively good terms today. I did help to secure your new position as Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher. Not to mention removing a certain mark."

"I am grateful for both, but if you think my classes were difficult wait until you see the Potion Master Exam. It is an all day written exam where you will have to define, describe, and explain how to mix at least seven advanced level potions from a list of ten. The next day you will have to actually brew them, or show how to do so if it is a potion that will take several weeks, such as the Polyjuice."

"Ouch, that doesn't sound too pleasant."

"I have the utmost confidence that with both mine and my uncle's help you will pass. We both plan to help you with the more difficult ones over the summer. The exam is not until next May, so I will continue to work with you while you teach."

"Your uncle is coming? Where on earth will we put everyone?"

"Take a look off the back of the house. We have added two more rooms downstairs and a second floor bath," Remus grinned as they entered the kitchen. Sure enough, there was a new door with two adjoining bedrooms.

"Doesn't your uncle have to work over the summer?"

"He will be doing some work for the Order. As soon as you are eighteen you will be formally allowed into the Order."

"You know, that is really unfair," she frowned, "I took out the greatest Dark Wizard there ever was, and I still have to wait to become a member of the Order."

"Miss Harry, what is the Order?"

"It is a kind of club and the members make sure bad wizards are kept from getting too powerful," she explained in a manner the child could understand.

"Humph, you should be the leader of the club," Phaedra snorted tossing her blond curls vigorously. "Mummy says you killed the bad wizard. Were you scared?"

"Phaedra, I don't believe Harry wishes to talk about what happened," Snape reproved his niece.

"I'm sorry Uncle Severus," Phaedra apologized. "Miss Harry I didn't mean to be so nosy. It is just that everybody in school knows that I know you. They all asked me to tell them all about how you killed the bad wizard."

"Phaedra, I want you to listen to what I have to say and try to understand," Harry said taking her hands, looking down at her seriously, "what I did helped to save a lot of people's lives, but in order to do that I had to kill another person."

"But he was bad, and wanted to kill you."

"Yes, he was bad, and he would have killed me and a whole lot of other people if he hadn't been stopped. Now this is what you need to understand. He was a very sick man in his mind. He did not understand the difference between good and evil, all he wanted was power. I had to kill him, but taking the life of another person, no matter how bad they are is not always

right. If there had been another way to stop him, I would have used it. Miss Harry has to live with the knowledge that she killed a human being."

"I think I understand. You want me to know that killing is wrong, even if you have to do it for a good reason."

"Yes, baby, that is exactly right," Harry hugged her.

"I could not have said it better myself," Dumbledore's familiar voice came from the door to the kitchen where he was waiting with Phaedra's mother Circe.

"Mummy, Headmaster Mr. Dumbledore," Phaedra shouted happily, running over to hug her mother and Dumbledore.

"Thank you Headmaster," Harry said moving over to give him a brief hug. "It is good to see you again, Circe," she greeted the older witch with a kiss on her cheek.

"It's good to see you too. How are you feeling dear?"

"I'm okay," Harry answered noncommittally knowing she was referring to her emotional state since having to face off with the Dark Lord.

"Are you sleeping all right? Severus said you are still having nightmares."

"Sometimes," Harry glared at Professor Snape. "When is your uncle going to arrive?"

"As a matter of fact, I arrived with Albus and Circe," the elder Snape commented, coming from the rear kitchen door. "I was seeing to Hannibal. I put him out back with Snuffles."

"Snuffles is here already?" Harry queried.

"Yes, Child," Dumbledore nodded, "Hagrid portkeyed her here about half an hour after you left on the train."

"We all came early since the Weasleys have invited us all over tonight for a barbecue. I stopped at the store to bring some food too. Arthur said I didn't have to, but I insisted. I saw him at the Ministry and I felt we should contribute, so I got some additional burgers and the ingredients for some salads. I thought Phaedra would like to help make them," Circe smiled at her daughter.

"Yummy, can we make them now?"

"My aunt had a great potato salad recipe, and I know how to make it if you'll allow me to help," Harry volunteered.

"What can we do?" Remus asked pleasantly.

"Make sure the house is secure," Circe replied taking charge, "we don't need any of the missing Death Eaters paying us a visit."

"Circe, I told you Albus put a number of wards around the house already," Severus informed his sister.

"Circe is correct, we should do some more. With all of us in one area, it will be a great temptation for them to try something. Moreover, the Weasleys live close by making it an even more attractive opportunity. Just because Voldemort is dead does not mean that all of his followers will suddenly disappear," Dumbledore remarked calmly. "Tiberius, will you assist me outside. Severus and Sirius can do the inside while Remus makes sure everyone's trunks have been secured in the proper rooms. By the way, Harry, Arthur has your trunk at his house along with Hedwig. He will have the twins drop it off later. I understand George is anxious to see you," Dumbledore's blue eyes twinkled.

"Headmaster, George and I are just friends, nothing more. He is even running a poll to see who will win my heart."

"Is he now? Who is in the lead for your affections?"

"I have no idea. It will be interesting to see who wins."

"Honey, who are the lucky fellows that are being named as your potential suitors," Sirius asked flashing his best smile.

"Well..." she began slyly, "Severus, and Remus, George has included himself and Draco Malfoy I think...and...Oh yes, Dumbledore!"

"Now wait a minute, what about me?"

"You?" she teased, unable to hide her grin.

"Miss Harry, I think you like to tease Mr. Sirius, you are all red," Phaedra giggled, and the adults all smiled.

"Phaedra, I happen to know they all voted in the poll."

"Indeed, Child, and who did they vote for?"

"I didn't ask. I only know who I voted for," Harry laughed mischievously.

"Who?" Sirius, Remus, and Severus all said in unison.

"Why the most wonderful man in this room," she smirked as she began pulling out potatoes to make the salad.

"You aren't going to tell us are you?"

"I hope it is Uncle Severus. I know he really cares about Miss Harry. I heard him telling Mummy," Phaedra remarked deviously.

"Phaedra, it isn't nice to listen to private conversations," Snape reprimanded her gently, his normally pale features tinged with pink.

"I bet she voted for the Headmaster," Remus winked affectionately, "that way she was honest and didn't hurt our feelings."

"As a matter of fact, I did. He's handsome, and smart, extremely good with magic, and has a heart of gold," she laughed as they smiled at each other over their glasses.

"Oh my broken heart," Sirius joked throwing one arm up and over his brow, "how can I go on?"

"Maybe Snuffles will be interested," Snape remarked wryly, "she seems to be your type."

"Uh oh, here we go again," Harry frowned, "the two of you were getting along so well too. Just because Voldemort is dead is no reason to go back to acting like overgrown boys."

"Honey, we were just kidding, weren't we Sevie?"

"Absolutely, Black," Snape glared at his rival. He hated being called Sevie. "Harry should know that we have put our petty differences aside."

"Kidding my ass...either you two grow up or I'm going to...to...do what I told Dumbledore we should have done in the first place," Harry said turning back to face the old man. "You do remember, don't you Headmaster?"

"If you are referring to the actions taken by your teacher in Primary school with the two children who kept fighting, then yes, I remember."

"That's it exactly," she shook her head vigorously; "I think we should do it just to make sure they have really put their differences aside and all is forgiven."

"Are you certain it is actually necessary?"

"I am. It will help them to see how alike they are and learn to accept their differences."

"Princess, you said this would also affect me, but you never told me what it is. Will you tell me now?"

"Only if Dumbledore is serious and will go ahead with it for me."

"Harry, I will be delighted to do so. They are two of my best Professors, and both are exceptionally talented in their own right. They also have a responsibility to you, and while they have carried out that duty admirably, I know you would like to see them become friends. Your father accepted Severus and I think it is time that Sirius did too," Dumbledore stated firmly, referring to the spirit of her father, which was freed when Harry had broken Voldemort's wand after taking his life.

"Miss Harry, you aren't going to hurt Uncle Severus or Mr. Sirius are you?"

"No, Little One, she just wants them to realize they really can be friends," Dumbledore reassured Phaedra. "Miss Harry cares about them and wants them to care about each other the way Sirius and Remus do."

"I'll believe that miracle when I see it Albus," Tiberius Snape pursed his lips frowning. "I'm amazed that they have gotten along for as long as they have. We both knew it couldn't last."

"I believe that Harry is right in her assumptions. All they need is a little push in the right direction to see how much they truly have in common. They have shown admirable tolerance for one another so far, but that is all they have done. Now we need to show them that it is possible to forgive a childhood transgression and learn to live together in friendship."

"Harry, what are you going to have Albus do?" Remus queried as Circe looked on curiously.

"Remus, Circe, if I can see you in the hall for one minute, I will explain. Headmaster while we are gone if you will see to what we have discussed, I know they will be unable to stop our little plan."

"Of course, Child," Dumbledore's eyes twinkled as Remus and Circe followed Harry into the hallway.

Harry briefly explained how she had a primary school teacher who had tied two students together at the wrists every day in class for a week, with their parents' approval, to stop them from fighting. It had worked and they became the best of friends. One could not make a move all day without the other and they learned how to get along and compromise.

"Now I see why you say it would concern me," Remus said, hazel eyes wide with mirth, "since they will be bound together day and night. I guess Sirius won't be changing into his animagus form either."

"No, I don't expect he will unless he plans on pulling Severus along behind him, and even Sirius wouldn't be that nasty."

"I'm sorry Remus, but I have to remind Harry that he sent my brother down a secret passageway and almost into the jaws of a werewolf."

"That was done in a fit of adolescent anger and without really thinking of the consequences. We all have things we regret doing, even me. Sirius was almost killed because of my stupidity and falling for Voldemort's plan. Going to the Ministry of Magic in my fifth year was just plain dumb. I have done other stupid things too, but now that I'm getting older, I am beginning to realize how reckless I really was. Besides, I'm sure Severus was not always the innocent victim all the time either. Your brother got in a few good hexes of his own on both Sirius and my father. All I want is for them to see how childish they are both acting and that it is time they both grew up!"

"You really do care for the both of them, don't you," Circe smiled placing a gentle hand on Harry's shoulder.

"Actually, I care about the three of them. They're my family," Harry smiled at Remus; "I just want them to all be happy. We've all suffered a good deal from the evil of Voldemort. It's time we all got on with our lives. Petty differences belong in the past."

"Harry, I know..." Remus began, only to be interrupted by the startled voices of Sirius and Severus coming from the kitchen, along with the sardonic laughter of Tiberius Snape.

"Albus you can't do this to us! It is absolutely ludicrous!"

"Severus is right, how are we going to protect Harry, let alone get anything done?" Sirius agreed indignantly.

Harry, Remus, and Circe all reentered the kitchen at that moment and were grinning at the two men. Dumbledore had bound them magically by the wrists, just as he had told Harry he would. The two men glared at her simultaneously, as she faced them.

"Now don't you both look at me like that! I am doing this for your own good. You will stay bound at the wrists until you both realize you have been behaving like children. I can't have the two of you squabbling all the time. I care about you both and want you to get along!"

"Potter we have been getting along. You are expecting miracles if you think we will ever be friends!"

"Why?"

"Because he is such a nasty git!" Sirius sputtered angrily.

"And he is a stupid idiot who never gives a thought to how others will feel!" Snape glared furiously, his dark eyes glittering dangerously.

"Fine, if that is how you both feel then I will have the Headmaster release you. Professor Dumbledore, could you arrange for me to go back to the Dursleys for a while until I can find somewhere to live? I would also like to know how to go about dissolving the Protectorship."

"Harry, you don't mean that?" Sirius asked sharply, a note of anxiety creeping into his voice.

"Yes I do. You and Severus are always fighting and he still can't get over his animosity towards both you and my father, even though he's been dead for almost seventeen years, and after his spirit accepted him as a friend."

"Child, what makes you say such a thing?"

"Potter, Albus is right. I have no reason to speak ill of your father."

"Then why do you still call me Potter as if it is some kind of a disease?" she demanded, voice shaking with anger, unshed tears forming in her eyes.

"Miss Harry, you can't go back to those mean Muggles. I love you..." Phaedra gasped anxiously, holding onto Circe. "Uncle Severus, you have to make her stay. Please say you're sorry to Miss Harry for calling her Potter."

"Harry," Snape started slowly, "I merely call you Potter out of habit. It is your surname, and after seven years of Hogwarts, it is understandable that I call you Potter."

"You seem to have no problem calling Draco Malfoy by his first name, only me!"

"She has you cornered, Snape," Sirius sneered gleefully.

"You see, you're provoking him again! This whole thing has just been a mistake."

"No Harry, it hasn't. We all have one thing in common," Sirius told her sternly, "and that is that we care for you."

"I'm sorry but I..."

"Don't interrupt me," Sirius argued, holding up his bound hand and dragging Severus' up with it. "I know you feel that Severus does not care for you as much as Remus and I do, but you're wrong. If he calls you Potter, it is because he is merely guarding his own feelings. I have seen him sit by your bedside and hold your hand talking to you while you were asleep or unconscious. You know he is your soul mate. He is just afraid to show his feelings. He was deeply hurt by Voldemort, we all were. Severus just does not want you to feel guilty should you choose someone other than him when you are ready to marry. So he is keeping his distance to protect you both."

"See, Miss Harry...I told you I heard him talking to Mummy about you," Phaedra looked up at her coyly.

"Harry, I meant what I said. I will even agree to keep our wrists bound if it will make you realize I am telling the truth. Don't go back to your aunt and uncle. You don't belong in their world."

"I agree with Bl...Er...Sirius," Severus stared at Harry, "you belong here with your family."

Harry looked to Dumbledore for help, and he nodded his agreement.

"All right, but you are to stay bound together for one week. If I don't see any changes in your attitudes at that time, I will dissolve the Protectorship. I cannot have the two of you starting your nonsense again. Draco Malfoy and I get along better than the two of you do."

"They do too," Remus agreed. "Now how about we set about our chores and get settled in before we have to go to dinner at the Burrow."

"Excellent idea," Tiberius Snape replied, "come along Albus, I learned a new ward while I was in Turkey last month. It was used to guard the tombs of the Sultans."

"Indeed, and what are the particulars of..." Dumbledore's voice trailed off as he and Tiberius exited out the back door.

"Come on Sev," Sirius grinned wickedly, "we have to make sure the inside is secure too."

"I'm coming, Starman," Snape smirked to annoy Sirius for calling him Sev, "and quit pulling on me," he grumbled as Sirius pulled him out of the kitchen.

"I will see to the luggage. Circe do you want your same room?"

"Yes, Remus, that will be fine. Harry do you mind sharing with Phaedra again? I know that we have two new rooms, but Albus and Uncle Tiberius enjoy each others company, and I know that Remus and Sirius like to share....Oh my..."

"This is going to get really interesting," Harry giggled, "I wonder if they realized that they will have to room together for at least a week?"

"They managed it last summer at Severus' London town home," Remus reminded the two women.

"Yes, but they weren't bound together. They will have to sleep together, bathe together, and find a way to get dressed and undressed," Harry laughed turning red. "I can just see the two of them yelling now."

"So can I..." Circe burst out laughing, unable to contain herself at the thought of her brother's face.

"Mummy, why are you and Miss Harry laughing?"

"Never mind, dear, we will explain later," Circe smiled at her daughter as Remus left the kitchen whistling a jaunty tune. "Now let's get started making those salads, before it gets too late."

Circe, Harry, and Phaedra spent the next hour making the salads. There were four in all, potato, pasta, tuna noodle, and a large tossed salad, which they had Phaedra prepare under their supervision. The little girl had a good time and was delighted, since the skills were some of those she would use to chop and mix while making simple potions.

Harry made her Aunt Petunia's potato salad and gave Circe a sample. The older witch loved it and asked Harry for the recipe.

"The salad is not really different than most recipes, but you need to use the gold potatoes, so I was happy to see those were the ones you purchased. The real secret is in the use of the lemon pepper. Otherwise, it is just salt and regular black pepper and mayonnaise. You also need to use one yellow onion and one red onion."

"Why, it is so simple. I thought you did something unusual, but now I see what you are talking about; Phaedra would you like a taste?"

"Mummy, you know I don't like potato salad."

"I don't usually either, Phaedra, but I'll bet you will like this one," Harry coaxed offering her a small fork full.

"If I don't like it can I spit it out? Mummy usually makes me swallow it."

"Yes, here is a napkin," Harry smiled as Circe arched her brow and Phaedra accepted the bite of potato salad.

"Umm...it's good Mummy! I like this one. Miss Harry will you teach Mummy how to make it?"

"I already told her, but we can make more later on in the week and she can practice and you can help."

"Can I add the spices?"

"Of course, dear," Circe nodded, "I know you like to practice for making potions. Now I think we should clean up and get ready to go out. I hear Sirius and Severus talking in the hall, and I thought that was the bell a few minutes ago."

"Can I go and see who it is Mummy?"

"No, you need to help clean up. Part of potion making is also having to clean up your work area."

"Oh, let her go, Circe. She needs to have a little fun and I can see she is just bursting with curiosity over who is paying us a visit."

"Very well, but you are spoiling her," Circe consented and Phaedra skipped from the room giving Harry a hug on the way out.

"Circe, I'm sorry for acting the way I did earlier. I know you worry about Severus, but he and Sirius both mean a lot to me. So does Remus."

"How do you feel about George Weasley?"

"Yes, how do you feel about George Weasley? I happen to know he thinks you are the prettiest girl in the entire district."

Harry spun around to see George leaning casually on the doorframe smiling, with Phaedra standing next to him. His twin brother Fred was standing behind him grinning."

"George," Harry chuckled, her cheeks red, "how nice to see you. I gather you and Fred brought my trunk along with Hedwig's cage?"

"We did, and you still didn't answer my question."

"In that case, I think George Weasley is funny and a lot of fun to be with," she said giving him a quick peck on the cheek. "What do you think, Fred?"

"I think he's one of the best looking blokes in the district. I only know of one fellow who is better looking."

"Oh, and who might that be?" George asked his brother.

"Me of course!" his twin joked, nudging him in the ribs.

"You two are daft," Harry shook her head smiling at their antics. "How is the new joke shop coming? Will you reopen in Diagon Alley again soon?"

"Next week, and we are already taking orders for our new line," George told her excitedly. "Would you like a piece of fudge?" he asked sweetly, taking the candy from his pocket.

"I would," Phaedra beamed reaching for the candy.

"Phaedra no!" Harry yelled startling the child. "I'm sorry, don't cry," she soothed going over to the little girl and taking the candy, "it's just that I am sure this candy is a joke candy and will do something to you."

"Is Miss Harry right Mr. Fred and George?"

"Yeah," Fred answered sheepishly, "it will make your face grow a hot pink beard with purple spots."

"That's funny, can I try it Mummy? I want to grow a funny beard."

"No you may not," Circe replied firmly, "we have no idea how long the spell will last."

"One hour," the twins responded in unison.

"That is if she eats the whole piece of fudge," Fred explained. "It really is quite safe."

"Please Mummy? I think it would be funny."

"No Phaedra, I do not want my little girl to have a beard, let alone one that is pink and purple."

"Why? It will make everyone laugh."

"Because I am your mother and I said NO!"

"Miss Harry, please tell my Mummy to let me grow a funny beard!"

"Phaedra, I love you but Circe is your Mum and you really should listen to her. Why do you want people to laugh at you anyway?"

"I want to make them happy."

"You already do. You are funny and sweet and we all love you. You do not need a beard to make us happy; you do that just by being you."

"I still want a beard. Headmaster Mr. Dumbledore has one."

"What do I have Little One?" Dumbledore asked coming in through the back door.

"The twins new joke item is a piece of fudge that makes you grow a colored beard for an hour. Phaedra wants to try it," Circe replied shaking her head in exasperation.

"I think you would look quite interesting with a colored beard. You should let her try it," Dumbledore's blue eyes twinkled as he looked at Circe over his half moon spectacles.

"Goody, Headmaster Mr. Dumbledore says I can grow a beard like his!" Phaedra exclaimed snatching the fudge from George Weasley, eating it as she ran down the hall, Circe running after her.

"Oh my, I think we have a problem," Dumbledore mused.

"What did my Great-niece do now?" Tiberius Snape inquired as he came in behind Dumbledore to see Phaedra running out of the kitchen.

"I'm sorry Mr. Snape, she just grabbed the Fuzzy Fudge right out of my hand," George apologized. "It makes you grow a colorful beard."

"I see...and how long will Phaedra be looking as if she is in need of a shave?"

"It will fall off in an hour," George replied shifting uncomfortably under the stare of the elder Snape's ice blue eyes.

"It won't hurt her Mr. Snape. She will just have a hot pink beard with purple spots. If she were a boy it would be blue and orange," Fred informed him coming to his brother's rescue, unable to conceal his grin.

"Hmm...Blue and orange eh? Remind me to buy some for a few of the disreputable importers I know," Snape said throwing his head back with laughter.

The twins visibly relaxed as the elder wizards just shook their heads at their antics. They knew the twins joke shops were doing a splendid business and they were a great success. The two brothers' reputation was one of Hogwarts' best stories.

Circe reentered the kitchen with a tearful Phaedra in tow. She was sporting a pink and purple beard.

"Well, I hope you are all happy, now Phaedra can't go to the barbecue," Circe fumed in annoyance.

"We're sorry, Miss Snape. It really was an accident. She grabbed the fudge before I could stop her," George answered meekly.

"Circe, I see no reason why Phaedra should not come with us," Dumbledore spoke soothingly.

"Albus, just look at her! Is there any way you can reverse this spell?"

"Probably, but I won't, and before you ask neither will Tiberius."

"What...why not? Surely you don't think this is funny?"

"Actually, Phaedra is just being a happy child. Her only real misbehavior was thinking you would allow her to eat the candy when I told you I saw nothing wrong with her having a beard. Circe, to coin a Muggle phrase, you need to loosen up," Dumbledore pursed his lips, but his blue eyes were sparkling with laughter.

"Mummy please can I go to the barbecue?"

"Circe, please let Phaedra come. I know she will have a good time. She was just having fun and acting like a normal six year old," Harry pleaded with the older witch.

""No Harry, she disobeyed me. I told her no and I meant it."

"Then I won't go either," Harry pouted leaving the kitchen before erupting with anger. Stomping up the stairs, she nearly knocked Sirius and Severus over.

"Honey, what's wrong?" Sirius asked grabbing at her elbow. He could hear Phaedra sobbing below in the kitchen.

"Ask his sister," she scowled pointing angrily at Severus. "Obviously Snape children are not allowed to act like normal kids. No wonder Severus is so screwed up!" Harry yelled over her shoulder storming the rest of the way upstairs. Reaching the attic bedroom she shared with Phaedra, she slammed the door, and flung herself down on the bed. A few minutes later she heard the door open quietly and Phaedra's timid voice.

"Miss Harry are you mad at me?" she asked cautiously from the door.

"Oh, no baby," Harry answered fondly, motioning the little girl over to sit on the bed. "You just wanted to have some fun. It is not your fault your Mum is upset. She is just afraid people will make fun of you. Either that or some Muggle will see you and ask questions."

"Mummy is just a worry wart. She hasn't let me do anything fun since we came home from Hogwarts last Christmas."

"I see..." Harry answered thoughtfully. She realized that Circe was being over protective after both she and Phaedra were kidnapped and held captive for Lord Voldemort six months earlier. "I think your Mum loves you very much. I think you should go down and tell her you are sorry again and that you love her. She is afraid after what happened to us with the bad wizard and wants to keep you safe."

"Okay, but I still want to go."

"I know," Harry hugged the little girl. "You wouldn't have any more of that fudge, would you?"

"Mr. Fred gave me another piece," Phaedra replied conspiratorially taking a piece from her pocket and giving it to Harry.

"Good, we can make a fashion statement together," she grinned popping the candy into her mouth. A few seconds later, the hot pink and purple beard began to grow all over her chin. "You should have warned me that it itches."

"Miss Harry," Phaedra giggled, "you look so funny."

"So do you. I wonder how Dumbledore and your Uncle Severus can stand these things," Harry stated thinking about the short beard and mustache Snape had grown at her request.

"Facial hair is not uncomfortable once you become accustomed to it," Severus said from the door.

"Yeah, but I'll bet no one has ever seen it so colorful as this!" Sirius added popping his head in from the other side of the door jam. He too had grown one of the colorful beards, but his was blue and orange, just as the twins had predicted.

"Mr. Sirius, you have a beard like us!" Phaedra exclaimed with delight.

"I'm not the only one," he grinned flinging the door wide open and coming into the room with Severus. The twins, Tiberius, and Circe had also grown the colorful beards, as well as Remus who had shaved off his goatee at Harry's request.

"Does this mean that we are dining with the Weasleys tonight?" Harry questioned tentatively.

"Yes, Child, we will all be going. I am only sorry I already have a beard. Yours are much more interesting," Dumbledore beamed, and everyone laughed as Phaedra ran over to hug her mother. Snape merely rolled his eyes at the Headmaster as Dumbledore offered him a lemon drop.

"Then someone get a camera," Harry laughed, "I think we should remember this fashion statement."

They all went back downstairs and Remus found the camera. They took several snap shots, and then proceeded to leave for the Burrow. Upon their arrival, Mrs. Weasley was aghast at her son's having brought their new joke candy, but in the end she just shook her head and threw up her hands. She was all too familiar with the antics of her two sons, which became even more fun when Ron, Ginny, and their other brothers joined in the fun before slipping their parents some of the fudge too.

Part 2 - Encounter at the Burrow

"Oh, you two boys, I don't know what demons possessed you the day you were born," Molly Weasley gently scolded her twin sons, Fred and George, looking down from where she was sitting at the picnic tables which had been set up in the yard. "I do not find having a pink and purple beard all that funny."

"I don't know dear, I think you look stunning in anything you wear." Arthur Weasley chuckled, hugging his wife. "What do you think of mine?"

"I think the orange clashes with your red hair too much," she smiled giving him a quick kiss.

"We could always come up with some new colors," Fred offered with a grin. "I have been working on chartreuse and periwinkle."

"I think you should try and get them to turn out the colors of the Hogwarts houses," Ron remarked eyeing Dumbledore to see his reaction.

"Excellent idea," the old man beamed, "we can give out the candies to each house at the Halloween Feast!"

"There you go Ron," his brother Charlie grinned, "you will forever be remembered as the Beard Man of Hogwarts by the faculty."

"Hey, we created the candy," George huffed playfully.

"Then maybe the entire staff will hex you two instead," the eldest Weasley son, Bill, added amused.

"Not to mention what they will do to poor Ginny. She has another year to go in Hogwarts, and I will be teaching there," Harry looked at them over her glasses, pretending to look stern, and failing miserably.

"Headmaster Mr. Dumbledore, the teachers won't really hex the twins, will they?" Phaedra asked in confusion.

"No, Phaedra, we are only teasing them."

"Good, I like them, they're funny. I think I will marry them."

"Both of them?" Mr. Weasley asked taken with Phaedra's charm and quick wit.

"Yes, they are both the same, so they must come as a set," she replied pertly.

"Fred, what are you up to? You are writing a mile a minute on that parchment you took from your pocket," Sirius inquired.

"I am taking Dumbledore's suggestion to heart and trying to come up with the proper mixes to make the beards in the school colors. I think it really would be fun for the students and faculty at the Halloween feast."

"I agree, let me know if you get the formula in time for this year's feast," Dumbledore laughed. "In the meantime, would you pass some more of this excellent potato salad?"

"I know, it is absolutely fabulous, isn't it? It is a recipe of Harry's aunt," Circe informed them.

"Harry dear, could you give me the recipe too?" Molly Weasley begged. "It is really delicious."

"I will write down the ingredients for you. There is no set amount on the spices, you just have to season it till it tastes right," Harry replied looking at Molly Weasley affectionately. She was the closest thing to a mother Harry had ever had, and she loved the entire Weasley family.

"When do you start your Auror training, Ron?" Sirius inquired. "You know I was an Auror before I was sent to Azkaban."

"I remember Harry telling me. I start on Monday. My Dad and Dumbledore spoke with Mr. Moody and he decided to put me into the summer course. He is giving me the day off for the ceremony at Hogwarts."

"When did this occur?" Harry asked immediately alert. Ron had not been scheduled to start the training until September. "Moody and Sirius were going to spend some time training me to free lance."

"And so we are," Moody's gravelly voice interrupted from the other side of the garden. "I'm sorry I'm late, Molly, but there was a report of some Death Eater activity over in Little Hangleton, not far from the Riddle House."

"Were any of the Death Eaters apprehended?" Severus questioned tersely.

"No, but we did find Voldemort's snake in the house. A trap set going down into the basement also injured Shackbolt. The stairs were charmed to give way and he fell onto a bear trap, and caught it right in the ass. Fortunately, he missed the spikes set up on the floor. Broke his leg in the fall though, and he will be spending the night in St. Mungo's."

"Do you have any idea which of the missing Death Eaters was there?" Dumbledore inquired studying his glass of lemonade.

"We spotted Zachariah Firelight and William Ghostly, along with Nott, but none of the other suspected Death Eaters. The problem is many of the people we suspect of being his followers have suddenly disappeared. The others are trying to keep up an appearance of respectability."

Harry had been listening quietly when she realized that Phaedra was listening too. This was no conversation to be having in front of a child.

"Excuse me, but I think this conversation should wait until later," she remarked deftly nodding towards Phaedra.

"But I want to hear what happened to the bad wizards and the snake," Phaedra pleaded.

"Harry is absolutely right, you will be having nightmares with all this talk of dark wizards," Circe replied sternly.

"Alastor, I have forgotten my manners," Molly apologized, "please sit down and have something to eat."

"Thank you Molly, I am starved," Moody replied helping himself to some chicken, hamburgers, salads, and corn on the cob. He then took out his flask helping himself to a long drink. "I see the twins have a new formula for coloring hair," he chuckled.

"It actually grows these beards," Arthur responded showing off his colorful face, while Moody grunted and took another drink.

"I see you still prefer your own flask," Harry grinned.

"Constant Vigilance, my dear, I can't stress that enough. You will learn. Just you wait until Sirius and I start working with you. Young Weasley will also find how important it is when one is responsible for both their life and the life of their partner."

"Professor, we already know. We learned it the hard way, battling Lord Voldemort," Harry said quietly, Ron nodding in agreement.

"I still want to know what happened to the big snake," Phaedra sulked.

"Ah...Lass, we took her to the zoo. She'll be better off there and no threat to anyone," Moody answered.

"Miss Harry, can we go and visit her and you could talk to her?"

"My instincts tell me that Professor Moody would very much like it if I did so, although for other reasons," Harry considered looking at Moody with interest. He merely winked his brown eye, giving her a crooked smile, while casting his blue eye around, before turning to talk to Dumbledore, Arthur Weasley, and Tiberius Snape, who had been listening intently.

"Bill, "Harry directed her attention to the eldest Weasley son, "are you still working in Egypt?"

"Actually Harry, I am going to be going to Mexico, Central America and finally to South America not far from where Charlie is working with the Peruvian Vipertooshs. I will be curse breaking at some ancient Aztec, Incan, Mayan and Toltec ruins while doing a comparison to the beliefs of the ancient Egyptians. Some of their gods are based on the same principles. One that occurs quite frequently in all ancient cultures is the serpent god. Dragons are also considered as serpents."

"Gee sounds like fun, if the curses don't get you the dragons and snakes will," Harry grinned. "You Weasley boys really love living on the edge."

"Harry, you will find if you ever have sons that they never stop getting into trouble. The more dangerous the better," Molly shook her head, rolling her eyes heavenward.

"Oh, I don't know Molly," Remus laughed, "Harry is a girl and she seems to get into quite a bit of mischief."

"Humph, I never asked to be a celebrity and slayer of dark wizards. It was sort of foisted on me. Of course, I did get this rather sexy scar along with it."

"Since when do you think your scar is sexy?" Sirius asked amused.

"Since I started parting my hair on the side as my bangs grew out, I can pretend I am a slinky movie star from the 1930's or 40's," Harry quipped throwing one arm over her head and tossing her hair so that it fell into her face over one eye.

"Don't quit your teaching job, Sarah Heartburn," Severus remarked drolly.

"That was Sarah Bernhardt, which you would know if you had taken the trouble to study Muggle Theater or cinema. Besides, I was trying for more of a femme fatale look, like Veronica Lake. Then again I could be rather Vampy like Theda Bara."

"Harry I didn't know you liked old movies," Tiberius remarked looking up from his conversation with Moody and Dumbledore, startling Harry who was unaware he had been listening.

"I kind of got to know some of them because my Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon used to watch them on the telly. They would also rent videos once in awhile. My aunt loved to pretend she was Gloria Swanson or Betty Davis."

"Are you telling us that Petunia Dursley thought of herself as a glamorous woman?" Severus inquired looking at her askance.

"Not only that, but Uncle Vernon thought he could sing like Nelson Eddy and dance like Fred Astair," Harry replied laughing so hard at the memory she nearly choked on her pumpkin juice.

"You know Harry, I haven't a clue who any of those people are," Ron said looking around at the grins on the faces of the older wizards, while his sister and the twins looked as puzzled as he was. His other two brothers were more aware of the Muggle world and seemed to know what Harry was talking about.

"Harry is referring to some Muggle movie stars of a bygone era," Dumbledore explained patiently, "who have all long since passed away."

"Would Hermione know about them?" Ron questioned looking from Harry to Dumbledore.

"Probably, her parents are both Muggles, so it is likely she has at least heard of them," Dumbledore responded.

"Maybe we should get a television. It would help us to all be more familiar with what is going on in the Muggle world and their culture," Arthur Weasley suggested with an excited glint in his eyes.

"Not on your life, Arthur Weasley," Molly responded adamantly, hands on her hips. "I know you just want one to see how it works! Why, you would have it in a million pieces inside of half an hour. Besides, I don't think it would show us how the Muggles really live or behave."

"Uncle Severus, can we have a television? My friend Althea has one."

"I will consider it Phaedra, but everyone in the house must agree. The house actually belongs to Sirius and he may not want one."

"Your uncle is right," Lupin smiled at Phaedra, "with so many of us sharing the same space we should all agree."

"I'm all for it!" Sirius exclaimed raising his arm, which was still bound to Severus' at the wrist, jerking the other wizard's arm into the air as he did so. "Sorry Sev, I keep forgetting," he blinked feigning innocence.

"Do you?"

"Miss Harry, they're at it again."

"I can see that Phaedra."

"Did I miss something here?" Moody's gravelly voice asked in confusion. "Black, why are you and Snape bound together?"

"It was Harry's idea to make them see how much they have in common," Molly nodded, "and a darn good one if you ask me!"

"How long will the two of you be mutually impaired?"

"At least a week," Sirius chuckled, smiling sheepishly at Moody.

"Unless we kill one another first," Snape glared, sneering evilly at Sirius.

"Well I guess we're about to have our first trial," Sirius rose from his seat, "since I need to use the lavatory."

"At least your timing is half way decent," Snape replied rising, "because I need to go too."

The two men moved quickly in the direction of the house, each pulling on the other, acting more like a pair of boys than grown men. Harry watched them go with a smirk, and Ron noticed she was blushing.

"Harry, what are you thinking that your cheeks are so red? They're only going to the loo."

Harry looked at Ron, leaning over to whisper in his ear, "Do you think they'll keep acting like little boys and compare?"

"Christ Harry," Ron started laughing so hard he spit out the mouthful of Butterbeer he had just taken, realizing she was talking about their private parts.

"Ron, watch it! You've gotten Butterbeer all over me," Ginny sputtered, spinning around from where she had been talking with Remus

"Sorry Gin, but Harry just said something a bit naughty."

"I know," Remus smiled winking at Harry, "I heard it."

"Oh Merlin, I forgot about his super sensitive werewolf hearing. Come on Ginny, lets help your Mum clear the table for dessert and I'll fill you in," Harry said getting up hurriedly and starting to discard the paper plates with Ginny in tow.

A few minutes later Ron and Lupin grinned at one another, as they heard Ginny let out a loud whoop of laughter, as she saw Sirius and Severus returning. The two men looked decidedly uncomfortable as they resumed their seats.

"Excuse me Professor Moody, but how is Tonks?" Ginny asked. "I had hoped she would be here tonight."

"She's fine, but had to be on duty tonight. I gave her the afternoon off to pick up young Malfoy at the station."

"I thought I saw her there, but they left before I could say hello. We were all too busy with the diversion to get Harry away from the reporters."

"And I will be eternally grateful," Harry stated matter of factly. "I hope Malfoy isn't giving her father any trouble."

"Her father may be a Muggle, but he has been very patient with the boy. Draco has a lot to learn, but he is young enough to change his ways of thinking."

"Well he has made a remarkable recovery after all he has gone through," Ginny replied adamantly. "I know he will turn out fine."

"Gin, we're talking about Draco, not some innocent little kid. He was being groomed to be a Death Eater for Christ sake," Ron retorted annoyed at his sister's defense of the young man. He and Draco had come to terms with one another following the murder of Draco's mother by his father, but he still did not trust him.

"And his father was a cold blooded murderer who was going to kill his only son just because the Dark Lord wanted it!" she argued growing angry with her brother. "You have no idea what Draco is really like."

"Ginny Dear, why don't you and Harry take Phaedra inside so she can use the bathroom and then bring out the desserts?" Molly Weasley asked putting her arms around her daughter reassuringly to diffuse the situation.

"Yes, Mum. Come on Phaedra you can help too."

"Thanks," Harry whispered into Molly's ear as she got up to follow the two younger girls into the house. She suspected that Mrs. Weasley knew Ginny had started dating Draco Malfoy, and knew Ron would be furious.

"Now what brought that on?" Arthur Weasley asked looking at Molly curiously. "Ginny seems to be on the defensive concerning Draco Malfoy."

"She was just being kind dear. All these kids have seen too much and had to grow up too soon. I think she just feels sorry for him," Molly replied, wondering if her suspicions about Draco and Ginny were true.

"What are we having for dessert Mum?" Charlie Weasley asked in an effort to steer the subject away from the Malfoys.

"We have ice cream, fruit salad, and chocolate cake. Harry also brought along some marshmallows, chocolates, and something called graham crackers. She said Muggles like to toast them over the grill for a fun treat. She thought Phaedra would like them."

"Sounds cool, here come the girls now. I am looking forward to some of your home made cake."

"Now you know I made it special for you since you have to go back to South America. It was nice having you and Bill home, even if it was under such dark and sad circumstances."

"I know Mum," Charlie replied giving his mother a hug. He was more than aware she was referring to the war with Voldemort and the death of their other brother, Percy, whose ambition had led him to join the Death Eaters.

Percy had redeemed himself when his family was attacked for a second time and the Dark Lord had wanted him to kill them. He had saved both Bill and Charlie, who had been seriously injured, and helped his father to stave off the attack on the Headquarters of the Order, but it had cost Percy his own life.

"Here come the goodies!" Phaedra cried with delight as they reached the table. "Can I have a piece of cake and some ice cream Mummy?" she questioned Circe.

"Of course dear, but don't overdue it or you will get a tummy ache."

"Umm...I love chocolate. Miss Harry said she is going to teach me how to toast marshmallows and make smores."

"I think you mean smores, Phaedra," Dumbledore beamed, looking at the array of treats Harry and Ginny had brought, "you take the toasted marshmallow and put it on a graham cracker with a piece of chocolate candy on top."

"Yummy! Did you ever have them Mr. Headmaster Dumbledore?"

"They're one of my favorites," Dumbledore whispered conspiratorially, "I can't wait to taste some."

"I should have guessed you would know about smores," Harry laughed. "I don't think there is a sweet that has been invented that you haven't tried during your life."

"Well, I am one hundred and fifty, so I have had a lot of time to try them."

"Hmm...If I understand the aging process in the wizard world, you are middle aged. Many wizards live to be quite old, well over two hundred, and often around three. We have all seen

the witches and wizards who come to Hogwarts to administer our O.W.L. and N.E.W.T level exams which means you still have plenty of time to discover more treats."

"I would very much like to explore the candy store you and Severus visited that time in London."

"Ah, yes, the one with the silly name of Dentist's Delights. I am sure Hermione's parents love the place," Harry joked and they all laughed, knowing that Hermione's parents were both dentists.

"Harry I have never had a smore, would you make me one?"

"I would love to Remus, and while I am at it I will show Phaedra how to toast the marshmallows," Harry told him taking the little girl over to the barbecue and putting a marshmallow in a stick. Once the marshmallow melted enough she put it on the graham cracker and added a piece of chocolate. "Here you go Phaedra, there is one for you and one for Remus."

"Mr. Remus, they're good," Phaedra licked her lips as she gave the smore to Remus.

"Delicious, I'll have another, Phaedra."

"I want one too," Sirius chimed in.

"Miss Harry you had better make a bunch of them, everybody wants them."

"Will do, Phaedra, if you will help."

"Okay, will it help to teach me how to do potions?"

"It might since you need to know how long to heat things just right. This will help you to see what happens when you wait too long or undercook something."

"Really? Then I better do the cooking."

"All right, but you be careful. Don't get too close to the fire, and if the marshmallows start to burn, you pull them out immediately."

"Yes Miss Harry," Phaedra agreed putting marshmallows on a stick to toast. She then made the smores, and brought them over to Remus and Sirius.

"Hmm..." Sirius studied the little girl as he ate his smore, "this is even better than your Uncle Severus could have done. Why don't you make him one too, this way he can see how good you are at cooking, and start you off on the potions," Sirius grinned wickedly at Snape, knowing he could not refuse his young niece.

"Uncle Severus, Mr. Sirius says I did a good job. Would you like to watch me cook? He says I am ready to make potions."

"I will be happy to watch you, Phaedra, but Mr. Sirius is not a Potion Master. I will decide if he is right," Snape glared at Sirius for putting him on the spot.

"I will watch you also, Phaedra," Tiberius Snape said coming over, "since I would like to try one of your smores. You will be seven soon and we should start you over the summer with some simple potions."

"Did you hear that Miss Harry? Great Uncle Tiberius says I can start to make potions!"

"Then you had better show them how well you manage to toast the marshmallows and make the smores so you will be allowed to mix a simple potion."

"I will teach both of my uncles how to do it," she stated matter of factly motioning her uncles to follow her over to the fire. Severus got up with Sirius in tow, and Tiberius followed, shaking his head at the battle of wills between the two young men.

"Now, what do you do first?" Tiberius asked, humoring his niece.

"First you must lay out your 'gredients."

"You mean ingredients," Severus corrected.

"Uncle Sev, I am teaching you how to make them. You have to listen to what I say!"

"Who ever says she is not a Snape needs to have their head examined," Sirius snickered in Severus ear, who then elbowed him sharply in the ribs.

"Mr. Sirius you need to listen too!" Phaedra admonished, as Severus sneered back at his rival. "Now first you have to lay out the in-gre-di-ents," she stated, pronouncing each syllable this time as she laid out the graham crackers with the pieces of chocolate beside them. "Next you put the marshmallows on the stick and hold it over the fire. You do not want it to burn, just get nice and soft so it is all gooey, but gold on the outside. You have to keep turning it, like this," she said demonstrating as the marshmallows cooked. "This one is done," she stated removing it from the flame, "so now you put it on the cracker, and then this piece of chocolate goes on top," Phaedra explained, putting the smore together and giving it to her Uncle Tiberius. She then repeated the process for Severus and Sirius, waiting patiently for their opinions.

"You have done very well," Severus stated with a slight smile, "what do you think Uncle?"

"I think with the proper supervision we can all start to teach Phaedra some simple potions. It will also be good practice for Harry, since she will be teaching in the fall herself. She can supervise Phaedra, and we will supervise her."

"Harry, I think you have opened up a can of worms," Sirius chuckled. "You have found yourself back in Potions with not one Professor Snape, but two."

"Miss Harry, where is the can of worms? I only see the marshmallows."

"No, honey, it's an expression, like out of the frying pan and into the fire."

"Miss Harry, what is out of the frying pan?" Phaedra asked confused.

"It means I thought I was finished with Potions lessons with your uncle, but instead I will now be taking lessons from both your Uncle Severus and Uncle Tiberius while I teach you potions."

"Is that why my uncles are so happy? They are both smiling at you, and they are doing that thing with their eyebrow."

"Yes Phaedra," Harry laughed rolling her eyes, knowing both Snapes had maneuvered her into a corner, "they are really enjoying themselves."

"I'm glad you made them so happy," Phaedra smiled innocently.

"Yes, Harry, I haven't seen Severus so happy since he cornered me in the Shrieking Shack," Sirius teased with an evil smirk, remembering the night Snape had trapped him after his escape from Azkaban.

"I can make him even happier, but unfortunately you will be rather...um...put out."

"What do you mean?" Sirius asked suspiciously.

"Well...you are going to be stuck downstairs with all of us since I have decided to start working with Phaedra on Tuesday since I will be at the Ministry on Monday. Unless some kind of miracle occurs, you and Severus will still be bound by the wrists in unholy matrimony," Harry snickered with an overly wide smile, her green eyes glittering wickedly.

"Now wait a minute honey, I don't need a potions lesson."

"A refresher might just be a good idea, Black," Moody's gravelly voice remarked from where he was sitting, munching on a piece of watermelon, "that is if you are still planning on doing some free lance Auror work besides training Harry."

"Yes, Alastor I have every intention of helping you, but I really don't think..."

"Nonsense son, a brush up on some of our draughts will come in handy. You are probably quite rusty in that area."

"All right, whatever you say," Sirius growled glaring at Snape, whose sneer had gotten wider.

"Don't look so ecstatic Severus," Harry chuckled tilting her head coquettishly, smiling like a vixen, "it works both ways. Professor Moody and Sirius are going to start working with me on Thursday and Friday, so you will have no choice but to follow along. If I know Sirius he will probably think of something involving subterfuge and shadowing."

"I can assure you I am skilled at both," Snape replied.

"We will just have to see about that," Sirius looked at Snape, his brown eyes bright with mischief.

"It seems to me we are going to have a very interesting week," Dumbledore said looking at the two men shrewdly. "They will either kill one another or Harry's plan will work and they will become more than just tolerant of one another."

"Harry... Bill and Charlie want to get a game of Quidditch going, are you up for it?" Ron called over to her, changing the subject.

"Who else wants to play? Do we have enough people?"

"We have seven with the twins and Ginny, which means we're one short if we do four man teams," Ron responded.

"I will be happy to help out," Remus volunteered since neither Sirius or Severus are able to play owing to their situation. It would be too dangerous."

"Great!" Ron and Harry chorused.

"Miss Harry, I can't play Quidditch, I don't know how to fly." Phaedra's face fell at the notion of the others playing a game without her.

"Ron, Phaedra's right, it won't be fair to leave her out. Isn't there something else we can do?"

"We could teach her how to fly. Do you think Circe will let us?"

"Did I just hear my name?"

"Yes, Circe, we were going to play Quidditch, but that would leave Phaedra out. So we were wondering if instead we could teach her to fly," Harry inquired doubtfully.

"Harry, I don't know...."

"Please Mummy, you said when I was seven I could start to learn. I'm almost seven now...please?"

"Phaedra, even if I said yes, you don't have a broom."

"That won't be a problem, Circe," Molly Weasley interceded. "We have a small broom that all the children used when they started to fly."

"I don't know," Circe said nervously. "What if she falls?"

"Then we'll catch her," George quipped.

"Yeah, we've never lost a trainee yet," Fred agreed grinning.

"Now you two stop it!" Molly scolded the twins. "You will get Circe even more nervous than she is already."

"Sorry Mum, we just wanted her to know that we would all be up there with her," George apologized.

"Please Mummy....I really want to fly. I want to learn how so I can play Quidditch too."

"Circe, if it will make you feel better, I will go up with Black. We are both skilled fliers and can manage to fly side by side without difficulty," Severus assured her. "That is if Black has no objections."

"Of course not, I think it is high time Phaedra learned how to fly," Sirius adamantly tossed his head.

"But none of you has a broom with you. We all apparated or used floo powder," Circe protested anxiously.

"Circe, you are just making excuses," Tiberius admonished his niece gently.

"You know how nervous I am about letting her fly."

"Circe, you don't like to fly, do you?" Harry inquired gently.

"I had a bad fall when I was in my third year at Hogwarts, and have never liked to fly since."

"Yes, yes, I remember it well. It was during a Quidditch practice and you were hit with a bludger," Dumbledore remarked thoughtfully. "But you shouldn't let your dislike of flying influence Phaedra. Let her learn and decide for herself, Circe. As I recall you were quite good yourself before your accident."

"You're all sure she will be okay?" Circe looked at them doubtfully.

"Yes!" came the resounding replies from all around her.

"Very well," Circe sighed, "you can let them show you how to fly, Phaedra. Just promise Mummy you will be careful."

"Yes Mummy, I promise," Phaedra beamed flinging her arms around her mother, hugging her tightly. "But what will Miss Harry, Uncle Severus, and Mr. Sirius do about their brooms?"

"Headmaster, if I may?" Harry asked pretending to pout.

"And if I say no?"

"Then Sirius will just have to summon it for me along with his."

"Sorry Honey, but I am rather tied up at the moment," Sirius pursed his lips, shaking his head negatively, eyeing his bound wrist.

"Severus?"

"Unfortunately I am in the same situation as your godfather so I will be unable to assist you in securing your broom."

"Remus, they won't let me have my broom. Will you get it for me?"

"I'm staying out of this one, Princess."

"You mean to tell me, not one of you will summon my broom?" Harry knew they were just playing with her, but was growing annoyed.

"I guess not, Honey. You will just have to sit this one out."

"Accio Harry Potter's broom!" George Weasley's voice rang out, and Harry gave him a big smile.

"Thanks George, at least someone here really cares about my feelings," Harry remarked snubbing her three protectors, and giving Dumbledore a genuine pout.

"Harry, you didn't ask me if I would have summoned the broom," Dumbledore reproved her.

"You didn't volunteer to summon it either," she stated coldly, letting him see she was truly disappointed in him.

"Miss Harry, look!" Phaedra suddenly squealed from her mother's lap.

She was pointing at the sky and Harry's boom was coming to them. George caught it deftly, and handed it to her.

"Here is your broom, My Lady," he said bowing with a flourish, as Phaedra giggled at his antics.

"Thank you George," Harry said giving him a quick peck on the cheek, noting the dark looks from her three protectors. "Do you have the broom for Phaedra?"

"Mum went to get it," Fred answered. "We'll meet you in the air," he indicated the others already waiting.

"Okay," Harry and George replied in unison.

Harry turned at the sound of Sirius and Severus summoning their brooms, but did not say anything; she merely looked at Remus, who had opted to play chess with Bill. Alastor Moody, Arthur Weasley, and Tiberius Snape were playing cards with Dumbledore, who was beating them at Gin Rummy. Molly returned shortly with the small broom and handed it to Phaedra.

"Here you go Phaedra, be careful and have a good time," Molly beamed.

"I will Mrs. Weasley."

"Phaedra, what do you say to Mrs. Weasley for letting you use the broom?"

"Thank you," she hugged Molly with a big smile. "I'm ready Miss Harry, what do I do first?"

"Put the broom on the ground. I want to show you how to pick it up."

"Ah...shades of Madam Hooch," George laughed playfully.

"Harry is quite right, she needs to learn to pick up her broom first," Severus' voice came from behind her.

"You mean like this?" George quipped undaunted. "Up!"

"Mr. George, the broom came up for you!" Phaedra's brown eyes were wide. "Will it do it for me?"

"Give it a try and find out," Harry winked.

"Up!" the broom did not move. "Up!" still no result. "UP!" Phaedra said forcefully for a third time, and the broom shot up into her hand. "I did it! I did it!" she exclaimed with delight.

"Very good, Phaedra. Now get on your broom from the right side, and hold it steady like this," Harry demonstrated the proper way to hold onto the broom, and Phaedra placed her hands on the broomstick.

"Now what do I do? It isn't flying."

"You have to kick off," Sirius smiled, "like this," he showed her how to push up from the ground. Severus, moving in perfect harmony, did the same, the two men separated by only six inches of magical rope. They both waited, hovering about ten feet in the air.

"Go ahead, Phaedra, give it a try," George urged.

"Miss Harry will you go with me?"

"We both will. We will go on the count of three. Are you ready?"

"Yes."

"One," George started counting.

"Two," Harry followed.

"Three," they all said together pushing off from the ground, rising slowly into the air.

"Splendid!" Severus arched his brow, giving his niece a thin smile.

"Look everybody," Phaedra called, "I'm flying!"

The adults sitting round the table all looked up, Circe somewhat nervously, to see the small group hovering in the air with Phaedra. Her Uncle Tiberius gave her a wave, nodding his head in approval, and Molly Weasley clapped with delight. Bill Weasley and Remus were grinning with pleasure, Remus taking advantage of the distraction to move his Bishop, capturing Bill's Knight, much to Bill's chagrin.

"Excellent, Little One!" Dumbledore beamed with pleasure. "You will be playing Quidditch in no time."

"Phaedra, you be careful," Circe smiled anxiously.

"I am Mummy. I have lots of good flyers for company," she called down to her mother. "How do I make it go?" Phaedra asked the others animatedly.

"You lean forward in the direction you want to fly, and use your muscles to tell the broom how fast you want to go," Harry explained, gently leaning forwards very slightly to proceed in a forward fashion for a few feet then guiding the broom in a circle to return to Phaedra and the others. "Go on and try it. We will all be here with you."

Phaedra leaned forward, but her muscles were tense and, she had tightened her grip on the broom, whose enchantments took it as a signal for speed. The broom jumped forward and sped upwards. Harry was reminded of Neville Longbottom during their first flying lesson at Hogwarts, as she flew pell mell after Phaedra, the others in pursuit.

"Miss Harry, what should I do?" Phaedra yelled as Harry came abreast with her.

"Relax your grip and sit upright, letting your body go limp," she responded firmly, "the broom will slow down and stop."

Phaedra did as Harry instructed and slowed the broom to a gradual stop, looking at Harry with a delighted smile. "That was fun; can I make it go fast again?"

"Absolutely not!" Snape stated firmly. "You need to practice getting control of the broom first. You can fly around in slow circles with us to learn how to manage it, then Harry and I will let you go faster with one of us!"

"Okay Uncle Severus, but I'll bet Mr. Sirius would let me go fast," she teased noting the smirk on the other man's face.

"Not unless he wants me to hex him from here to China," Snape sneered at his companion.

"I hear those Chinese women are fantastic in..."

"Sirius, not in front of Phaedra!" Harry cut him off blushing furiously.

"I was going to say in their ability to give a back rub," he laughed mischievously.

"Now why don't I believe that?" she answered unable to look him in the face.

"Nor do I," Severus agreed, left brow arched in amusement over Harry's discomfiture.

"Gee, I wouldn't mind hearing about those Chinese women," George joked gleefully.

"Then ask Cho Chang. I'm sure she will be happy to explain," Harry snapped.

"I don't understand. What do Chinese people have to do with me learning to fly?" Phaedra asked innocently.

"Absolutely nothing," Harry stated firmly. "They were just making naughty jokes. Now let's do some flying. Come on Phaedra, hold your broom gently, and lean forward just a little bit like this," she demonstrated again and Phaedra followed suit, flying slowly beside her, the others following.

They all flew together joining along with Ron, Ginny, Fred, and Charlie Weasley for the better part of an hour. Phaedra caught on fast and was fearless once she learned how to

control her broom, and played a game of broom tag with them. Harry and the others were having a wonderful time. It had grown dark and the night sky was lovely with the myriad of stars, Sirius shining brightly above her, eclipsed only by the crescent moon. As Harry swung around to tag Ron, she caught an odd movement out of the corner of her eye. Pulling her broom to a short stop, she stared out into the darkness, and gave a loud gasp. From where she was flying she could see a group of black robed figures attempting to hide behind the trees and rocks which dotted the landscape on the other side of the Weasley's property. Her instincts alert, she knew they were Death Eaters.

"Ron, get Phaedra out of the sky and down to Dumbledore and her Mum now! Sirius, Sev, there are a group of Death Eaters over by the woods!" Harry exclaimed breathlessly, swinging her broom over to where they were flying.

"Are you sure, Honey?" Sirius queried immediately alert.

"Yes, they're moving in a line towards the house. We have to get out of here fast."

"It's too late for that," Snape informed her, his eyes glittering, as they all flew down to the ground. "Moody, we're being watched by a group of Death Eaters, we need to get help immediately. Circe, go with Molly and get Phaedra into the house. We will take up positions out here to try and ward them off."

"I will send Fawkes for help," Dumbledore said closing his eyes and calling aloud, "Fawkes come!" The beautiful red and gold bird seemed to appear from nowhere at his call, and tying a brief note to his leg the bird disappeared.

"Mummy are the bad wizards coming here?" Phaedra asked as her mother and Molly whisked her off towards the house.

"Yes, Phaedra, we have to get inside," Circe told her drawing her wand, Molly joining her anxiously.

"Ginny...Harry...Ron, you three get inside and help to protect the house with Molly and Circe. Let us cover the grounds," Moody directed them.

"I..."

"No, Harry, get inside, you have been through enough already," Sirius argued sternly, scowling at her darkly.

She felt unusually calm, and attributed it to the fact that Sirius was right. She had seen and been through more than enough for a girl of almost eighteen.

"Severus isn't he just so cute when he scowls," Harry grinned moving to do as Sirius directed.

"That is a matter of opinion," Snape replied looking down his nose at Sirius. "Albus you are going to remove these bonds now aren't you?" he asked indicating where he and Sirius remained bound by the wrists.

"Harry, this was your plan," Dumbledore reminded her before she could leave, "Do you want me to free them? I know you would not want them in any more danger than they are already in."

"Professor Dumbledore, should you feel they are in a situation that could be life threatening, then yes, you can free them. In the mean time they will do quite well having to watch each other's back."

"Come on Harry," Ron called, "Phaedra is scared and wants you to stay with her."

"I'm coming," Harry said heading to the Weasley house. As she entered the living room she glanced over at the clock with all the Weasley family names, noting the hands all pointed to 'Mortal Danger' and knew it was more than accurate.

"Miss Harry, those mean wizards are going to hurt us," Phaedra sobbed clinging to her mother.

"Phaedra, do you remember how brave you were last Christmas when we were kidnapped and the Dark Lord was chasing us?"

"Yes."

"Well this is just going to be another adventure. You have to be very brave and help us to guard the house. Can you do that?"

"Can I use a wand?"

"No, you are too young, but you can hide over here behind this chair by the fireplace and make sure no one tries to get in using the floo system. If they do you are to hit them across the knees with this poker," Harry told her seriously, handing Phaedra the poker from its rack by the hearth. "I am making you a junior member of Dumbledore's Army, the name used by the students who helped to defend Hogwarts."

Harry knew that Molly had closed off the floo system as soon as the threat was revealed, but needed Phaedra to stay calm. She felt that if the little girl believed she was helping, she would be less afraid during the battle.

"Mummy, Miss Harry is letting me be a helper for Headmaster Mr. Dumbledore's Army."

"Then I will expect you to hold your head up high and show those bad wizards that they should never mess with the Snapes or anyone else that is loyal to Dumbledore," Circe told her daughter, casting a grateful look at Harry. She knew the teenager would protect Phaedra as if she were her own blood.

The women all took up positions where they could watch the doors and windows without being seen from the outside, and waited for the onslaught to begin. A few minutes later the sounds of wand fire could be heard from the outside. Harry had secreted herself over by one of the living room windows, so that she could see the battle and yet remain secure. She was able to count at least ten persons that were Death Eaters, which meant that there were even sides on the outside if they were the only attackers. She suspected that this was not the case,

and even as this thought was going through her head, she heard a crash from the second floor and the sound of wand fire. Ron was in trouble!

"Ron!" Harry screamed, "Are you all right?"

"It's okay; I was able to stop him from getting inside. It was Jeb Darkwoods; he was in Slytherin at Hogwarts. I think he was in the same year as the twins."

Just then, the house was rocked by an enormous blast, and there was a fire in the kitchen. Molly Weasley was knocked unconscious by the kitchen door, and Phaedra began to cry.

"Mum!" Ginny screamed, running towards the kitchen, which was in shambles.

"Ginny put out the fire, and take care of your mother," Circe yelled as she moved over to comfort Phaedra.

"Ron, Ginny, cover the house. I am going to transform and try to see what is going on outside," Harry yelled.

Pulling open the front door she transformed into her animagus form, a brilliant scarlet and gold Phoenix, and flew up to the roof. She could see at least twenty Death Eaters, and a number of Dementors converging on them from all sides. As she watched, a large ball of fire came towards her and she had to dodge to the left to avoid being hit. She could see Remus and Bill attacking the Dementors with Patronus spells, and Dumbledore was engaged in a battle with a tall thin man whom she did not recognize. Moody was pinned down at the back of the building by two men resembling Crabbe and Goyle. Sirius and Snape were over by the wall trying to help Dumbledore, but they were outnumbered. Harry noted they were still bound together and immediately regretted telling Dumbledore to leave them that way. As she wondered where the Aurors were, there came several loud popping noises, and Tonks, along with several others apparated into the foray. Just then, a rush of wand fire was directed towards Dumbledore, and Fawkes flew over to help him, but there were too many, and a Dementor swooped in his direction. Harry flew down towards him to help but he had disappeared! She also noted that there were two Dementors going into the house by the rear windows and immediately flew back inside and transformed.

"Expecto Patronus!" she yelled along with Ron who had come storming from the other room. The Dementors immediately vanished.

"Harry there are too many of them," Ron called from across the room.

"The Aurors are here, but it is just awful out there. I didn't see your dad anywhere and Moody is pinned down in the rear of the property."

"Christ, and here I thought with Voldemort gone..."

"Miss Harry," Phaedra screamed from downstairs, "help!"

Harry ran downstairs taking two steps at a time, to see Circe unconscious and the tall thin man who had been fighting with Dumbledore carrying Phaedra out the front door. She immediately transformed and flew after him, knowing that she had to get to Phaedra before he could get away. Both Severus and Tiberius Snape heard Phaedra's screams, and were

attempting to make their way towards her when her captor raised his wand to disapparate. Harry saw her chance and the man was shocked when a huge talon snatched the wand from midair, preventing him from leaving.

"*Stupefy*," three voices yelled in unison, and Harry recognized them as the Snapes and Sirius. The Death Eater collapsed severely stunned.

She immediately transformed and was the first one to reach Phaedra, pulling her out from where he had fallen on top of her.

"Where is Dumbledore?" she asked breathlessly as Tiberius reached her. Phaedra was crying and Harry was rocking her gently in her arms.

"He took off with Moody after Nott, and it seems we have captured Mulciber," Tiberius informed her as he bound the unconscious man. "Where is Circe?"

"The bad wizard killed Mummy," Phaedra sobbed reaching for her Great Uncle.

"No, Phaedra, your mum is unconscious, but she is alive," Harry reassured the child handing her over to Tiberius.

"My sister is injured?" Severus asked worriedly.

"Yes, she is in the living room, over near the fireplace," Harry told them noting that the Aurors were searching the grounds, but the other Death Eaters appeared to have fled the area.

"Tonks," Sirius called, "we need help in the house, and Circe is injured."

"So is Mrs. Weasley, where is Arthur?" Harry asked looking about.

"I'm over here, Harry," he responded coming from the other side of the yard. "Where is Molly?"

"Ginny is taking care of her in the kitchen. She was hurt in that explosion."

"Mum is hurt?" Fred asked running over to them?"

Harry nodded, "where are your brothers?"

"Bill and Charlie are over in the garden with Remus. It seemed like the Death Eaters made it a point to go after them, but we don't know why. I can't find George. We got separated out back."

"You guys go inside and see to your families, I will look for George."

"I'm going with you; Dad will make sure Mum is okay. I have to find my brother," Fred wrung his hands in consternation."

"Harry, be careful, the Death Eaters may come back. You should have stayed inside until the fighting ended," Sirius reprimanded her, but his eyes told her he was proud that she had been there for them.

"You should be used to her reckless and impulsive behavior by now, Black, it is not unlike yours," Snape reminded him.

"Come on Fred," Harry took Fred by the elbow, ignoring Severus' remark, "let's go and find George. I'm worried about him."

"Yeah, it isn't like him to be missing like this. He likes to play pranks, but he never would scare us like this," Fred answered leading the way to the last place he and his brother were together. "This is where we got separated. George went into the trees after one of the Dementors, and I was dueling with one of the Death Eaters over near the garage."

"George," Harry and Fred each called together. They were met by nothing but silence.

"Hey little brother, this is not funny," Fred called out again, "game's over. Come on out!"

"George, it's Harry...Please answer me." Silence.

"Here comes Remus with Charlie, maybe they've seen him," Fred told her anxiously, pointing to where his other brother and Remus were approaching them, wands lit against the darkness.

"Remus, Charlie," Harry hurried over to meet them, "have you seen George?" she asked hopefully.

"No, we've come to help," Charlie answered for the two of them.

"On God, he was following a Dementor the last time Fred saw him. He has to be all right," Harry moaned.

"Harry, we will find him, don't worry," Remus hugged her comfortingly. "Let's all divide up and search the field and in the trees. Charlie you try over by the stream, Fred you go to the left, and Harry and I will take the woods."

"Remus, would it be better if I transformed and searched from the air? I can see better, and the moon will provide some light along with that from the wands."

"All right, why don't you fly in a circle around the field and then go over the copse of trees where he was last seen," Remus directed her.

Harry nodded and transformed. Taking flight, she began flying in a slow circle, looking for her missing friend. She was just about to enter the copse when she saw a dim light at the base of an old oak tree. She hovered in the air and let out a loud screeching noise to alert the others on the ground, and then descended to investigate. It was indeed George Weasley, the tip of his wand still lit, lying on the ground beside him. He was lying face down, and at first, Harry feared he was dead, but close examination revealed he was still breathing. His breath was coming in shallow gasps. Harry checked his pulse and found it was weak, but steady. Fred and the others came running over, each with a look of consternation etched onto their features.

"George," Fred gasped going to turn his brother over, but Charlie stopped him.

"We should turn him in the log roll fashion. He may have some broken bones and internal injuries," Charlie said trying to sound calm as he restrained Fred. "Remus you get his neck

and try to keep it stable, while Fred and I turn his body," Charlie instructed, indicating to his brother to take George's legs. The three men gently turned him, and George groaned, but did not wake up.

Harry knelt down beside him, and using her healing skills, began to scan him for injuries, an eerie blue light emanating from her hands. One leg was obviously broken at the knee, and there was a large bump on his forehead, which was an ugly shade of purple. Harry checked for a skull fracture and was relieved that she could not detect any, but he did have a concussion.

Tonks had been scouting for them, and arrived while Harry was scanning George. "Your Mum is going to be fine, she was just knocked out, and suffered some cuts and bruises. She is refusing to let us send for the healer. Your father is with her now."

"Is everyone else okay?" Remus inquired.

"Circe was stunned, but she will be okay after a hot bath and a good night's sleep. Phaedra is prancing around telling everyone how she tried to stop the bad wizard with the fire poker and that she is in Dumbledore's Army. All the others are fine. Nott and the other Death Eaters escaped, and Mulciber has been taken into custody."

Harry was calmly listening to this while she worked on George's injuries, and looked up as soon as she was done. "George is going to be fine. I have mended the broken leg, and made sure he had no skull fractures. He has a mild concussion, but I think he will wake up in a minute."

"He seems to be breathing better," Fred commented with relief.

"I think it would be a good idea if a trained healer checked him too, just to be on the safe side. I don't have experience with head injuries," Harry stated as George moaned again and his eyes fluttered open. He looked up at her for a minute, a confused expression on his face, before giving her a feeble smile.

"Hi, pretty green eyes, were you worried about me?"

"He'll be fine, he's flirting," Fred quipped with a crooked smile, visibly relieved.

"You scared us all half to death," Harry smiled warmly.

"Are you able to tell us what happened?" Remus asked as Charlie helped George to sit.

"I was dispatching a Dementor with my Patronus, one of the few spells Fred can't do," George grinned crookedly at Fred, who glared good-naturedly at his twin, "when one of the Death Eaters jumped me. I tripped backwards, twisting my leg and hit my head on a rock."

"You broke your leg when you fell, and you have a concussion," Charlie informed him soberly. "Harry used her healing skill on you but says you should have a licensed healer check you just to be on the safe side."

"Humph, I don't need one of those quacks, Harry did just fine," George snorted, rising to his feet and weaving unsteadily, Charlie and Fred on either side of him for support.

"Just the same, Dumbledore will want you to see a healer, along with the others," Tonks stated matter of factly. "He always does with members of the Order,"

"Let's get back to the house," Remus said quietly. "I don't think we will be attacked again, but it's better to be safe than sorry."

"I agree," Tonks replied in affirmation, "the others will be worried."

They all walked back to the house, and were met in the yard by Ron and Ginny, who had been watching for them. They both came rushing up and hugged George, the memory of having lost their brother Percy still fresh in their minds.

Once they were all safely inside, Dumbledore insisted they see Angus McBride, the local healer from Hogsmeade. Harry learned that while McBride was not a direct member of the Order, he did the healing for them. He complimented her on her natural healing skills and again told her she should take the required courses to become licensed. Harry just smiled and told him that right now she had enough to do, but would consider it in the future.

Molly, Circe, and George were all given a clean bill of health, but told to take it easy for the next couple of days. The two women were each given a sleeping potion to take before going to bed and George was given a headache potion, and put on bed rest for the next two days. He grimaced at that, but Molly put her foot down, and surprisingly enough so did Fred. He had been more worried than he had been willing to admit about his twin. Moody had assigned Aurors to the Weasley house, and he and Dumbledore had put up extra wards to protect the family from further attacks.

Moody had also sent a number of Aurors to the house in Ottery St. Catchpole, accompanied by Dumbledore, to make sure it was also secure. It turned out that the building was intact. Apparently, the Death Eaters had tried to gain entry, but had been driven back by the wards placed on the property. Fortunately, the dogs had been inside when the attempt to invade the house had occurred, or Nott would have killed them in a manner that no one wished to discuss. Once they were given the all clear, Harry, Remus, Sirius, the Snapes, and Dumbledore all apparated back home, with Dumbledore taking Phaedra with him rather than using the floo system. They were all tired, and wanted nothing more than to go to bed, when Harry remembered that Sirius and Severus were still bound at the wrists.

"Harry, you are going to let us separate for bed, aren't you?" Sirius asked giving her his best smile, batting his puppy eyes at her.

"I would find it most agreeable myself. I believe we have learned our lesson," Severus stated quietly. "We worked together as a team, and managed not to kill one another."

"Severus, Sirius," Harry smiled looking up at the two of them demurely, "I care about both of you. What you both have to learn is to forget the past and start to care for one another as friends, not just coworkers or allies. So no, you will remain together for the week."

"But Honey..."

"Potter!"

"You see, nothing has changed. I'm not expecting a miracle, just some sign that all the teasing and harassing is over between the two of you. Honest criticism is fine, but not deliberate insults. Snape has to get over his old hurts, and you need to realize he is not the slimy git you make him out to be. No one is perfect, not even Dumbledore, but I want us all to be happy and able to live together even if it isn't in perfect harmony."

"Harry," Sirius looked at her with a grin, "when we get loose you are going to find out that pay back is a bitch."

"It will be interesting, to say the least," Snape agreed giving her an evil half smile.

"If it makes you two more aware of how much you actually have in common then it will be worth it. Now, I'm going to bed. Circe is upstairs with Phaedra, and she is waiting for me so she can take a hot tub before she retires for the night. I will see you both tomorrow," Harry said giving them both a kiss on the cheek. "Sleep well... together..." she laughed running from the sitting room as the two men glared at the prospect of having to sleep, bathe, and eat together for the next week.

She then said good night to the others before retiring. Phaedra was still awake, and Harry allowed her to curl up with her in the same bed. The two girls fell asleep nestled together, Harry's arm flung over Phaedra protectively.

Part 3 - A Day with Dumbledore

Following the encounter with the Death Eaters at the Burrow, Harry and the others had spent a quiet weekend relaxing in the little house just outside of Ottery St. Catchpole. All agreed that there had been enough excitement and just wanted to spend some time with each other and establishing a routine for the household chores. Fortunately, no one had been seriously injured, and Molly Weasley had sent Harry word that George was driving her crazy. Apparently, he could not wait to get back to working in the joke shop with his brother. He was recuperating on the couch inventing a spray mist to change a person's voice into that of various animals, depending on the pitch of the voice. Harry just laughed and told her not to worry, that he must be feeling better, since he was being so inventive.

Harry was also pleased to note that Dobby had arrived the following morning. He would be staying with them until the end of August and would be helping around the house. She enjoyed the little house elf, and knew Phaedra was used to the house elves helping to look after her needs. All the same, Harry and Circe had both agreed that Phaedra needed to learn how to take care of her own belongings. It was time she started doing simple chores around the house since she would not always be in a situation where she would have the luxury of a house elf to do it for her. The little girl was glad she was being included but couldn't understand why she would not always have house elves to do things for her. Circe and Harry tried to explain it to her.

"Now, mummy, you know that Hazel has always been my elf at home since I was a baby, so why wouldn't she stay with me when I am grown up?"

"Hazel is very old, Phaedra, and she would not be happy in a new home. She was both your Uncle Severus' elf and mine when we were children, and she wasn't young then."

"But what about Belle or Crumpet? They also could be my house elves when I am all grown up."

"Perhaps, but what if you have to travel a lot? House elves do not generally accompany their master and mistresses everywhere. You may be in a situation where you need to leave them at home. It is their primary duty to care for the household."

"No, I will bring them with me," Phaedra stated stubbornly. "After all they will be mine."

"Phaedra, do you know that my friend Hermione would be very upset if she heard you talking like this?"

"Why Miss Harry? Doesn't she have one of her own?"

"No, she doesn't, but that isn't why she would be upset. Even if you offered her one, she would refuse."

"Doesn't she like them?"

"Yes, she loves them," Harry smiled amused, "but she doesn't believe in keeping slaves."

"What are slaves?" Phaedra asked curiously. "I don't have any, I only have some elves."

"Hermione would tell you that your elves are slaves," Harry told her patiently. "A slave is when you own another person. They are not always treated well, and have no say in when they can take a day off. They can only do what you want them to do, and have no rights. They do not get paid, and are considered property, to be bought and sold."

"Mummy did we buy our elves?"

"Most of our elves have been with the Snape family for many generations."

"See, Miss Harry we didn't buy them. They just work for us because they want to."

"Hermione would say you should pay them and let them have time off and other things. It is wrong to own another person."

"But they aren't people, Miss Harry, they're house elves!"

"They may not be people like us, Phaedra, but they are intelligent, sensitive beings."

"So Miss Hermione thinks we keep them because we don't want to pay them?"

"Miss Hermione thinks they need to be respected and given a chance to make their own choices about who they work for," Harry replied carefully.

"Then we can ask them who they want to take care of. I like having house elves. They keep everything clean, and cook the food, and..."

"That is the problem. It isn't wrong to have an elf, it is wrong to own an elf."

"I still don't understand. Don't Muggles have servants?"

"The Muggles who can afford it do, but they don't own them and haven't for many generations. Muggles pay their servants to take care of things for them. Miss Harry didn't have any servants. She used to have to help around the house."

"So Miss Hermione thinks we should keep our elves but give them money?" Phaedra asked looking from Harry to her mother in confusion.

"Miss Hermione thinks we should free our elves so they can work for money for whom ever they want to," Circe explained patiently.

"You mean give them clothes?" Phaedra demanded horrified at the idea. "Then they will be upset and maybe even cry and..."

"Phaedra, it is all right. We aren't going to give the elves any clothes," Circe comforted, "even if we did our elves are treated well, and would stay with us anyway. We would just pay them too."

"But if we are keeping the elves, then why do I need to do chores and things?"

"So that you know how in case you don't have an elf to help," Circe stated firmly. "None of our elves are here with us now and you can't always ask Dobby to pick up your things. He is also a free elf and works for Professor Dumbledore."

"Dobby likes Mr. Headmaster Dumbledore so why shouldn't he like helping me if Mr. Headmaster Dumbledore tells him to?"

"Dobby needs to look after everyone else too," Dumbledore's warm voice came from the door of the bedroom Harry and Phaedra were sharing. "You can't expect him to be everywhere. You need to learn how to care for your own belongings too. You will need to know how when you get to Hogwarts."

"Don't the elves at Hogwarts take care of the students?"

"Not their personal property. They merely prepare the food and keep the building clean as well as do the laundry. The rest is up to each student. You will need to manage your schedule, and take care of your belongings on your own."

"Hmm...I guess I will have to help then. What do I have to do Mr. Headmaster Dumbledore?"

"Your mother will give you some simple tasks like making your own bed in the morning, or setting the table for dinner, and making sure Hannibal is fed and cared for. I heard your Uncle Tiberius has been doing some of that for you," Dumbledore replied looking at Phaedra over his half moon spectacles, blue eyes twinkling.

"Umm...yes, I know I promised...but..."

"I guess I will just have to take Hannibal back if you can't take proper care of him," Harry remarked pretending to look stern.

"No, Miss Harry...I promise to take better care of him. He is just a bad puppy and likes to chew on my shoes and jumps a lot. Uncle said he would help to train him."

"Very well, but we will talk with your uncle later on and see if you shouldn't be helping him too."

"Okay," Phaedra agreed hugging her, "I promise to do better. I really love him."

"I'm sure he loves you too," Harry smiled.

"Are you ready to go, Child? While you are having your animagus form registered, I have some business to discuss with Arthur Weasley while we are at the Ministry."

"I'm ready when ever you are."

"Can I come too?" Phaedra pleaded. "I have no one to play with today."

"Not this trip, Little One, but I am sure your Uncle Severus and Sirius will have something to occupy you for a few hours," Dumbledore beamed. "You can come with us when we go to the zoo so Harry can talk with Nagini for Mr. Moody."

"Isn't that the big snake that belonged to the bad wizard?" Phaedra inquired her brown eyes glowing with excitement.

"Yes, Little One. Nagini belonged to the bad wizard. You will need to be very good when we go though, and then we will go and have ice cream afterwards."

"When are we going? Is it soon?" Phaedra demanded growing more excited at the prospect of going to the city with Dumbledore and Harry.

"I will talk with Mr. Moody today and arrange a day," Dumbledore replied, "but you must promise to be a good girl and listen to Miss Harry when we go."

"I promise I will be so good...you will forget I am with you!"

"Phaedra we would never forget you are with us," Harry laughed.

"Come on Mummy, I have to do some chores and take care of Hannibal so that I can go with them the next time," Phaedra said tugging on her mother's sleeve.

"All right," Circe shook her head at her daughter's enthusiasm, "we'll go down and speak with Uncle Tiberius right now and he can help you with the puppy."

"I'm coming Hannibal," Phaedra called as she ran out of the room ahead of her mother, as they could hear the puppy barking in the yard.

"How are we traveling today Professor, floo or apparating?"

"We will apparate to the ministry since it is getting late," Dumbledore nodded, his blue eyes sparkling at her smile, "but we need to do so from outside the front gate. The wards prevent us from doing so within the house," he explained leading her downstairs.

"Good morning, Honey," Sirius greeted her as she came down the stairs.

"Harry, you are looking well this morning," Snape also acknowledged her; admiring the pale yellow summer robes she had chosen to wear to the Ministry for the day.

"Thank you, and good morning. Why are you both being so sweet today?"

"Honey, we're sweet to you every day," Sirius remarked giving her a quick peck on the cheek.

"Um...nice aftershave, what kind is it?"

"I have no idea, I borrowed it from Severus," Sirius admitted red faced.

"It is one that was given to me a while ago from an old friend," Severus answered looking fondly at Dumbledore.

"Ah...yes, I recall I gave it to you for your birthday last year. It is called Warrior Wizard," Dumbledore beamed, "if one believes the advertisements it is guaranteed to attract the witch of your desires."

"And am I the witch of your desires?" she grinned eyeing them.

"Time will tell," Snape arched his brow, "as you well know."

"Do I Severus?" Harry teased brushing up against him as she moved to open the front door, "and what about you, Padfoot, am I the witch of your desires?" she questioned heading up the path to the gate.

"What does your empathic talent tell you?" Sirius countered, brown eyes warm, referring to Harry's ability to feel the emotions of others.

"It tells me you are both very happy today. What are you up to?"

"My dear Harry, why would you ever think we were up to something?" Severus sneered.

"Because you are both still bound at the wrists," she snickered. "I know you are driving one another crazy too."

"Now how do you know that?" Sirius asked trying to sound casual.

"I heard you yelling at one another in the shower this morning all the way up into the attic. It seems that Severus prefers his showers cold in the morning, much to your displeasure," Harry laughed. "Don't worry, you only have until Friday if you both continue to get along. I can forgive the incident in the shower; that is if Severus didn't do it on purpose?"

"It was an honest mistake. I thought Sirius knew I preferred a cold shower in the morning. It helps to get you going."

"Going? I was practically blasted into the next life!"

"With you having come back from the veil once, I see no reason to be worried," Severus remarked dryly.

"And that gentlemen, is why you are still bound together," Harry smiled sweetly, rolling her eyes in exasperation at their bickering. "Now behave and try to entertain Phaedra for a little while. She is starting some chores today and needs encouragement. She relies too much on the house elves at home."

"There is nothing wrong with her reliance on the house elves," Severus replied, "that is what they are there for; to serve their masters."

"I would love to see the outcome of this conversation," Dumbledore interrupted, "but if we don't leave now we will be late."

"I apologize, Albus, I didn't mean to delay you from your day," Severus answered.

"Have a good time with Albus. I think he has a bit of a surprise for you today," Sirius hinted giving her a hug by the front gate.

"What sort of surprise?"

"If I told you now, it wouldn't be a surprise, now would it?" Dumbledore laughed. "Now let's go," he directed raising his wand, and she followed his lead.

"The Ministry of Magic," they said together and disappeared, appearing a few minutes later in front of the Ministry.

Harry followed Dumbledore into the building, and as soon as they had gotten their security visitors passes, he brought her up to the third floor. She followed him down the corridor and they made a left turn at the end of the hall stopping at a door with gold lettering, which read, REGULATORY AND REGISTRATION OFFICE. Opening the door, Dumbledore entered with Harry in tow. It was the standard office with a large counter and baskets full of forms, each basket labeled with the nature of the documents. Dumbledore led her over to the one marked *Animagus*, at the end of the row. Scanning the other baskets Harry noted the one marked *Werewolves*, and thought about Remus. She wondered what it must have been like for the little boy when his parents had to bring him here. She was distracted from her thoughts by Dumbledore handing her a large sheaf of forms and a quill, as another man entered from the back of the office. He was bald and rather obese with a black mustache, and bowed profusely to Dumbledore. Harry judged his age to be about seventy, but she could not be certain since wizards aged differently than Muggles.

"Professor Dumbledore, how good to see you again. You have helped us all to see the light, and your presence here is greatly appreciated."

"Good day, Willingham, and how is your family?" Dumbledore inquired pleasantly.

"My dear wife, Eloise, is fine, but I don't know what to do with that son of mine. He is off again on some scheme to get rich quick, and is driving his mother and me to drink."

"Horace always did like to take the easy way out of things. If I recall correctly he used to try and pay some of the other students to do his term papers when he was at Hogwarts," Dumbledore replied amused.

"Yes, well..." Willingham sputtered, embarrassed that Dumbledore would remember his son's apparent laziness. "What can I do for you today? I understand you have to get one of your students registered as an animagus?"

"Actually she is going to be one of my new teachers, and yes she is an animagus."

"Very well, Miss...Er," Willingham turned to acknowledge Harry's presence, "why...you're...you're..."

"Harry Potter," she completed the sentence for the awe struck man. "It is nice to meet you Mr. Willingham."

"Miss Potter...I...I heard the stories...I just couldn't believe...you're a Phoenix?" Willingham questioned still in shock.

"Yes, Bernard, Harry is able to transform into a Phoenix," Dumbledore remarked casually, his blue eyes twinkling merrily.

"Mr. Willingham, are you all right? You seem a bit...well...flustered," Harry stated uncertainly, not sure if she were over stepping her bounds.

"Yes, yes, my dear. I was just so surprised to see you. I never thought I would meet a real celebrity. Please, come this way," Willingham directed her through the gate to the inner offices. "The animagus committee will be right with you. Have you completed your forms yet?"

"I only just got them," Harry replied, looking over at Dumbledore for help, but he was studying the ceiling. Harry knew he was testing her ability to react in unfamiliar circumstances.

"Yes, yes, how stupid of me. Just fill them out and I will return in a little while to escort you to the committee," he said directing her to a chair.

"Harry I need to go and see Mr. Weasley for a bit, but I will be back in time to take you to lunch. I daresay it will take that long with your registration process."

"Yes, Sir, I will be here waiting," Harry glared at his amusement.

"Professor Dumbledore, please give Arthur my regards. I don't get to see him as often as I used to since his promotion to Minister of Magic."

"I will be happy to," Dumbledore replied, and left the office, giving Harry a wink.

Harry spent the next half hour filling out form after form. The ministry asked for all kinds of personal information from the names of her parents to the number of moles on her body. She had no idea why they wanted to know about her human form, but reasoned that since she changed into an animal these must change into some kind of marking too. Finally, she gave a long sigh and put down her quill.

"Ah, finished, I see," Mr. Willingham smiled, "then let's go to the next room and you will meet with the committee."

She followed him inside to a large chamber with three persons, two wizards and one witch, sitting at a long table. One of the wizards had a camera.

"You are Miss Potter?" the witch asked formally.

"Yes, I am Harry Potter."

"I am Melinda Spellbinder, and these two gentlemen are Connor O'Banyon and James Turnbolt. We are the animagus registrars and will be recording the markings of your animal. The whole procedure will take a few hours, and we will be asking you to transform a number of times."

"I understand," Harry answered calmly, but her stomach was in knots.

"First though, I need to take you into the other room to verify any scars, birthmarks, or tattoos on your body. They will be used as identifying marks and depending on your clothing they will change with your animagus form," Melinda Spellbinder explained, confirming Harry's

suspicious as she led her into a small dressing room. She then assisted Harry to disrobe down to her bra and panties. Harry was embarrassed and the other witch assured her that it would only take a few minutes as she carefully logged the marks down on a sheet of parchment. Harry then donned her robes again quickly and followed her back into the committee room.

"Well now, Miss Potter, it is good to meet you. I knew your father and mother," the wizard who had been introduced as James Turnbolt smiled. "You are the image of James, but you have Lily's wonderful green eyes, although I am sure you have been told this a number of times."

"Yes, I have, but I don't mind hearing it. Did you know my parents well?"

"I went to Hogwarts with them, but was two years ahead of them. I was in Gryffindor as well. Connor was in the same year as they were but he was in Hufflepuff."

"I knew your father and his friends, but not well," Connor O'Banyon smiled.

"I'm sorry to say that I didn't know them as I am only twenty-five and didn't go to Hogwarts. My family lived in France and I went to Beauxbatons," Melinda Spellbinder informed her, "but all I have heard for weeks is the antics of the Marauders and all about how Mr. Black was sent to prison without a trial, and more stories than I can recall."

"I'm sure some of them have been exaggerated with time," Harry smiled, but she was wary of the young witch whom she noted was not wearing a wedding ring. She was tall, slim, and blond, and Harry thought, very pretty. She wondered if she were on the committee when Sirius registered and felt a pang of jealousy. Harry could sense that the young woman had been quite taken with her godfather's handsome looks.

"Very well then, shall we get started?" James Turnbolt commented. "I am afraid you will be quite exhausted by the time we're finished, but it can't be helped. If you would like a short rest just let us know."

"I will," Harry agreed.

"Now, Miss Potter, I will need several photographs of you at various angles," the other wizard, Connor O'Banyon explained coming forward with his camera. He took pictures of her face, full front, side face and body, and then photos from the rear.

"Excellent," Melinda Spellbinder remarked when he had finished. "You are quite photogenic, Miss Potter. I will just start documenting these, and put them with the other reports."

"Miss Potter, now we will need you to transform, and Connor will do some more photos and I will examine your markings and write them down. Melinda I want you to add them to the record."

"Certainly, James, I can correlate them with the photos of her human self."

"Are you ready, Miss Potter?"

Yes, Mr. Turnbolt, just move back a bit. I generally like to transform with my wings spread, and I don't want to hit you by accident."

"As you wish," he agreed stepping back a few paces.

Harry then did the transformation spells in her mind and the Phoenix sat trilling up at them. She could tell they were all enthralled to be in the presence of such an unusual animagus, and they were all smiling. Mr. Turnbolt slowly stepped over to her and gently stroked the soft feathers. He then indicated their texture and began to examine the colors. At the same time, Connor O'Banyon was taking photographs of each section of her magnificent plumage and Miss Spellbinder was documenting their findings. This went on for a long time, and Harry was beginning to get tired when the door opened from the outer office and Professor Dumbledore appeared. Deciding to take a few liberties since she was also becoming quite bored, Harry flew over and he extended his arm for her. She sat trilling pleasantly as Dumbledore laughed at her antics.

"Professor Dumbledore," James Turnbolt greeted him, extending his hand, "I am so happy to see you."

"Hello James, it is good to see you again. I see you are almost finished with Harry?"

"Yes, Sir, we are. Connor just wants to get another picture of her beak and the talons, and we should be all done."

"Ah, Connor, I have a student I would like to send to you when he finishes next year," Dumbledore addressed his associate, " he is a friend of Harry's in fact, named Colin Creevey. The young man is a whiz with a camera."

"Professor Dumbledore I would be happy to meet with him. I always need new photographers for the various duties requiring photo documentation. As you can see, I am short handed. That is why I am doing Miss Potter's registration, although it has been a real pleasure to finally meet her," the wizard replied as he snapped his final two pictures, and Harry let out an annoyed squawk when he picked up her tail feathers for the final photo.

"You can turn back now, Miss Potter. You are now an officially registered animagus," James Turnbolt nodded pleasantly as Harry transformed. "I am glad to have been able to meet you. Please tell Remus Lupin and Sirius Black that Connor and I said hello."

"Of course, Mr. Turnbolt. I will be happy to."

"Let Mr. Black know that I send my greetings also," Miss Spellbinder purred in a voice that caused Harry to bite back a snide comment."

"I will tell him," she smiled sweetly, thinking, 'like hell I will,' as Dumbledore led her from the offices and out into the hallway.

"Harry, if I didn't know better I would think you were jealous of Miss Spellbinder," Dumbledore remarked, looking at her thoughtfully.

"You noticed the look I gave her?"

"I did. You have no call to be jealous of her."

"I can't help it. If you could hear how she literally drooled each time she mentioned Sirius..."

"I might remind you that you are still underage and that you have no formal proposal from any of your protectors as of yet."

"So you're saying I am wrong to be jealous if another woman shows interest in any of them?"

"Yes...and no. What I am saying is that you need to be patient. You don't want to make any hasty decisions. You know how they all feel. The question is which one will win your hand in marriage, if any of them. Remember they will be bound to you for life as your protectors. Would you want two of them to be denied the chance of happiness with another person, be it male or female?"

"No, of course not, but I think they would want me to be happy with their choice of mate, regardless of the type of relationship. I have very deep feelings for them all. It is just so confusing at times. How can I choose between them?"

"What about George Weasley? I think he really cares about you."

"He does, but I make sure he sees other girls too. Headmaster, I can tell you I am not in love with him. He is fun and all, but I know inside of me it will never work."

"I see," Dumbledore replied contemplatively, as he led her from the building.

"Are you angry with me?"

"No, Child, I just want you to be happy. I know how the three of them feel and I know each of their weaknesses and attributes. I also know yours. I don't want my children to be hurt," he answered placing his arm around her shoulders.

"Then you could always elope with me," Harry teased to lighten the mood.

"Alas, I am afraid that won't be possible," he beamed, "but I am flattered by the offer."

"It never hurts to ask," she hugged him gently. "If you were only one hundred years younger, you would be in big trouble."

"Indeed?" he laughed happily, not in the least embarrassed by her affection. Over the years, many of the students had professed their love for him, so it was only natural for Harry to do so too, even if she were only playing. He knew that she thought of him as her grandfather and a mentor, as he thought of her as his granddaughter and protégé.

"Now how about telling me where we are going?"

"My dear, first we will go to lunch and then I have something important to tell you."

"Is it something good or something bad?"

"Maybe a little of both," he hinted, "but you will have to be a good little witch and enjoy a quiet meal with me in a fine restaurant first."

"Will anyone else be joining us?"

"Alastor Moody and Arthur Weasley will be there for dessert and coffee."

"Is there some sinister secret you are all keeping from me?"

"Not at this time, but there are things you will be told shortly," Dumbledore replied mysteriously. "I merely want you to be prepared for them."

"All right, but you are scaring me," Harry remarked a knot forming in her stomach.

"There is nothing for you to be afraid of. Not yet anyway," Dumbledore looked down at her kindly. "Ah...we have reached our destination."

Harry looked up to see they were in front of a rather large restaurant in a part of London that was frequented by the wizarding community. It looked rather exclusive, and was called *The Rendezvous*. He led her inside and they were greeted by the host, a young wizard about thirty.

"Professor Dumbledore, I have your private table reserved for you and the young lady," he smiled and then gasped as he noticed Harry's scar. "You're Harry Potter!"

"Hello, Seldon," Harry smiled reading his nametag. I am happy to be in such a fine establishment."

"Thank you Miss Potter. I am sorry if I embarrassed you," he said leading them to a quiet table in the rear of the restaurant.

"That's all right; I am sort of used to it."

"Professor, I will send the rest of your party when they arrive for dessert."

"Thank you Seldon, and tell your mother I said Hello," Dumbledore replied, blue eyes shining with mirth.

"Yes Sir, I will. She will be happy to have heard you were here," the young man replied as Harry and Dumbledore took their seats and he placed the menus on the table before returning to his post.

"Would you like a glass of wine?" Dumbledore asked looking over the wine list.

"Headmaster, are you feeling all right? You just asked me if I wanted a glass of wine."

"You are quite grown up enough now to enjoy a glass of wine with your meal, Harry. I am going to have one."

"Oh, then I guess I will try some. I have never really had any wine before. Not the good stuff anyway," she grinned remembering a few parties she had been to in the Gryffindor common room.

"I see you did attend a few parties while in school," Dumbledore whispered mischievously.

"I won't deny it," Harry answered red faced, hiding behind her menu.

"Have you decided what you would like for lunch?"

"I think I would like the flounder stuffed with crabmeat," Harry stated hoping she hadn't chosen something too expensive.

"Excellent choice, I will have the same. It comes with a salad and baked potato too. We shall also have a nice white wine, which I think you will like."

Harry sat quietly while Dumbledore placed their order and a few minutes later the food appeared on their plates. She was somewhat uncomfortable and he gently placed his hand on hers, and smiled warmly, to ease her apparent discomfort.

"Headmaster, what is going on? Is something wrong?"

"I told you before there is no need for you to be concerned just yet. I just want us to have a pleasant lunch before we talk business."

"Am I in some kind of trouble?"

"What? Oh no, Child, you aren't in any trouble. Now relax and eat your lunch. It isn't every day I get to take a young lady out to eat."

"All right, I guess you will tell me in your own good time, just don't keep me in the dark. I remember what it was like when you kept all that information from me, and then after what happened at the Ministry..."

"Did I not tell you everything when you were finally ready, and the incidents were more easily remembered?" Dumbledore asked recalling how he had erased her memories after Sirius had fallen through the veil in the Department of Mysteries Death Chamber.

"Yes, but it still hurt, and I don't ever want to have secrets kept from me again if it involves the people I love and the things that are expected of me," Harry replied, her green eyes wide with anxiety, as she recalled the memories of all she had been through in her fifth year.

"You won't Harry. You are a young woman now, and your opinion matters to all of us. We only have your safety at heart."

"I know," she smiled looking up at him. "Now, I'm starved, and this wonderful meal will be getting cold," she remarked taking a forkful of the fish.

They talked quietly about Hogwarts while they ate, and Dumbledore was pleased that Harry was so excited about teaching there. He knew that while Potions was not her best subject, she would do a good job, especially with Severus supervising her. He told her not to worry about the Potion Master Exam, which she would be taking in the spring. He was confident that she would pass with the tutelage the Snapes were to give her.

He was also pleased that she liked the wine he had selected but was wary enough not to accept a second glass, since she was not accustomed to drinking it with her meal. Harry was relaxed and was just about to ask when the others would be joining them for dessert when Arthur Weasley and Mad Eye Moody entered the restaurant.

"I see our guests have arrived for dessert," Dumbledore remarked, rising to greet the other two men.

"Hello Harry," Arthur Weasley greeted her as he took his seat.

"Miss Potter," Mad Eye Moody's gravelly voice followed with a nod, his blue eye casting about the room, his brown one on Harry.

"Good afternoon Mr. Weasley, Professor. It is good of you to join us for dessert," Harry replied graciously.

"Harry what would you like for dessert?" Dumbledore inquired studying the dessert menu.

"I think I would like a hot fudge sundae with whipped cream and strawberries."

"I will have the cheesecake and a cup of coffee."

"I will second that," Moody growled with a wink.

"Well, I am going to have the apple pie ala mode with a cup of tea," Arthur Weasley said licking his lips in anticipation.

Their desserts appeared almost as quickly as they had decided on what to order, and the three men sat eyeing Harry and talking about the Ministry while they all ate their treats.

As soon as they had finished, everyone sat back relaxed, and Dumbledore smiled at Harry.

"I know you have been wondering why we are all here, Harry," Dumbledore began quietly, "and it is time you knew. We want to give you this," he beamed pulling a small gold chain from his robe pocket with a small medallion on the end. A phoenix was etched into the medallion. "You will be officially sworn in as a member of the Order of the Phoenix with Ron and Hermione at the meeting on Saturday night," he explained putting the chain around her neck.

"Do Ron and Hermione know about this?"

"Ron will be given his medallion tonight at the Burrow, and Hermione will be there on Saturday. I sent her an owl this morning. This is the first time I have made an exception and did not wait until you were all eighteen."

"We are doing this since the three of you have more than earned the right to be involved, and you and Hermione will be of age shortly. Ron already is eighteen, but I asked Albus to wait until after he had finished Hogwarts," Arthur Weasley smiled. "He doesn't know about this, so it will be a surprise for him after dinner tonight."

"He will be ecstatic," Harry laughed. "Now he won't need his extendable ears."

"Aye, you three will be the best thing that ever happened to the Order," Moody shook his head with pleasure.

"Thank you Professor, I'm flattered. Did Ron start his Auror training today?"

"Ha! He sure did. Got knocked on his ass too during a surprise sneak attack, but came back up fighting. The boy's got spirit, I'll give him that."

"Ron will do just fine; he is a loyal and trustworthy person."

"He should be one of my best people once he adjusts to his partner," Mad Eye laughed.

"Why, who's his partner?" Harry asked curiously.

"Draco Malfoy," Mr. Weasley stated soberly.

"You have got to be joking. They are like oil and water. Whose idea was that?"

"Mine," Dumbledore smiled wickedly, eyeing her over his glasses.

"Next you will probably tell me he is going to be allowed into the Order," Harry looked at Dumbledore, her green eyes blazing.

"Do you think he should be excluded?"

"I think he will still bear watching for awhile, but I believe he will eventually be an asset, much as Severus has been," Harry answered carefully.

"You're a smart one, lass. I said the same thing myself," Moody concurred. "It will be interesting to see how you do with your free lance training. I know you will like your partner."

"If I'm free lancing why do I need a partner?"

"All my people have a back up. You just got lucky though, since yours will be Sirius," Moody laughed. "He and your dad made one hell of a team and I think you two will be even better."

"You just can't beat that Potter and Black combination," Harry quipped, "it is unstoppable," she grinned, and they all laughed.

They concluded their business and then Moody and Arthur Weasley went back to the Ministry. Professor Dumbledore paid for their meal and they left the restaurant. Harry learned that she would be told about the circumstances surrounding the meeting of the Order after she was officially sworn in on Saturday. Her common sense told her there was trouble brewing again, especially after the attack at the Burrow.

"Now Child, let's go and find a present for Professor Lupin. I happen to know it is his birthday today."

"Is it? He never would say when it was. Let's buy him a cake for after dinner too."

"I think he would like that, but unfortunately I will not be there. I am dining at the Weasley's to present Ron with his medallion."

"I will save you a piece and you can have it later."

"I won't argue with that," Dumbledore chuckled.

"What do you think he would like for his birthday? I'm glad I brought some money with me so we don't have to stop at Gringott's," Harry remarked referring to the wizard's bank.

"I think he would like something useful," Dumbledore responded thoughtfully.

"You give useful, I'll give him something for fun," Harry smirked as they walked up the street towards the Leaky Cauldron and the entrance to Diagon Alley.

"Hello Albus, how are you Harry?" Tom asked as they entered.

"I'm fine Tom, and yourself?"

"Doin' just fine," Tom smiled as they passed through the brick wall into the shopping area.

They walked around and browsed through the various shops looking for a gift for Remus. Dumbledore found him a book on counter charms he thought Remus would enjoy, since he would be teaching Charms in the fall, but Harry was stumped as to what to get him.

"I have no idea what to buy for him," she sighed as they passed another shop. "I already gave him a chess set last Christmas. I want to give him something that will make him happy, but I just can't think of anything. If it were Sirius, it would be easy."

"Why not give him a pet?" Dumbledore inquired as they passed the Owl Emporium.

"I would give him an owl except we already have so many animals. Besides, animals become upset around him. They can sense the wolf."

"Hmm...Then why not give him some new robes or a cauldron?"

"No, I don't want to give him clothes, and a cauldron would be better for Severus. I want something he can have fun with, like Sirius does with his motorcycle."

"Then why don't we go over into some of the Muggle shops and maybe you can find something there."

"We aren't exactly dressed for it. No I will find him something," Harry sighed. She searched a little longer and then just shook her head. "Headmaster, I give up. There just isn't anything he might find fun."

"I have an idea for you, but I have one request first."

"Oh?"

"I want you to call me Albus," Dumbledore chuckled, his blue eyes warm with affection.

"You are no longer a Hogwarts student and I am both your Trust Keeper, friend, and soon to be employer. It is time you used my given name."

"I'll try, but I am not used to calling you by your first name," Harry said lowering her eyes shyly.

"Good, now I will tell you my idea," Dumbledore pursed his lips in anticipation, "I happen to know that Remus is an avid poker player. Why don't you get him a game table with a new set of poker chips and cards?"

"Sweet quiet Professor Lupin is a poker fiend?"

"Among the best players I have ever had the pleasure to lose to."

"You lost to Remus?" Harry asked dumbfounded.

"Unfortunately, he took me for two bags of chocolates, and a box of taffy. We usually play for candy or some other treat," Dumbledore explained amused. "Now when Sirius birthday comes you might as well know that he likes to play in the snow. He loves winter sports. In their younger days, your father and Sirius used to go tobogganing often, and sometimes Remus and Peter would join them. He also used to skate, but it's been a long time."

"What about Severus? Does he do anything for fun besides read potions journals?"

"He likes to play billiards, and is especially good at snooker. He fancies himself another Joe Johnson."

"I know what billiards is, but what is snooker, and who is Joe Johnson?"

"Snooker is a variation of billiards where you have to shoot a red ball into the pocket first before you can shoot any of the other colors. Joe Johnson is a champion snooker player. Severus and I usually play for our favorite sweets."

"When do Sirius and Severus celebrate their birthdays?"

"Sirius is in February and Severus is in April."

"Albus, my parent's headstone only gives the year of their births. What months were they born?" Harry inquired softly.

"I don't recall the exact dates, but your father was born in January and your mother in September."

Harry didn't respond, as she followed Dumbledore towards a small shop whose sign read, *Wiznugs Toys Games and Sporting Goods. We specialize in all forms of Wizard and Muggle items.* The shop was located near the top of the street and sandwiched in between a butcher shop and a furniture store. Harry had never noticed it before, but she only had limited experiences shopping on Diagon Alley, and most of that had been either for school or with Professor Snape. A small bell over the door announced their presence as they entered, and the clerk looked up from where she was waiting on another customer and smiled briefly at Dumbledore.

Harry was fascinated as she had never been in a toy store with wizard toys, even though she had her miniature Quidditch game that she had gotten as a gift for her birthday. There were all kinds of games; some were similar to Muggle games, such as Wizard's Scrabble. The pieces floated and could be read from either side, or a version of Monopoly that was based on the Wizarding world. It included Diagon and Knockturn Alleys, the Ministry of Magic,

Gringott's, Azkaban Prison, Hogsmeade, and Hogwarts! The pieces were made to look like witches and wizards, and they flew around the board on little brooms. The play money was made to look like galleons, sickles, and knuts and instead of railroads, you could own major floos in the network.

She was so fascinated with the game she decided to buy it to play with Phaedra. She felt that the little girl was bright enough to learn how to play, even though she was still a little bit younger than the recommended age of eight. She then moved over to where the card tables were located and Dumbledore helped her to select one. Next, she found a carousel with poker chips and cards. Harry then paid for her purchases, keeping her scar covered to avoid being recognized, and they left the store.

"Remus will be pleased," the old man remarked as they walked back towards The Leaky Cauldron.

"I can just see the lot of you all playing on Saturday nights. It should be quite interesting. Do you think Phaedra will like the Monopoly game? I never knew there was a wizard version."

"I think she will enjoy learning how to play. She really loves being with you."

"I love being with her too. We are almost like sisters. I like to think she is the sibling I never really had."

"I'm glad you feel that way. I know Severus is delighted that you care about her so much."

"There was a time when Severus Snape would have been furious if I had shown his niece any kind of attention. Now he has done a three hundred and sixty degree turn around, although he is still rather aloof with me at times."

"He is a good man, Harry. Like you, he suffered a great deal from Lord Voldemort. It made him very bitter, and he is still coming out of it. Voldemort put a stain on his soul that you are finally beginning to erase."

"I know, but Sirius suffered just as much. Albus, I never asked you this before, but why did you believe he was guilty of betraying my parents? You never even went to question him and as Chief Wizard of the Wizengamot and his friend, I would have expected you to look into the matter. You knew he was an Auror and a member of the Order of the Phoenix, yet you turned your back on him. You didn't do so for Severus, why?"

Dumbledore frowned, and his blue eyes studied her intently, as he formed his thoughts. He needed her to understand how things had been during the first war.

"Harry, when Voldemort was in power the first time, it was chaos. People we all thought we could trust were being implicated, and everyone was suspicious of the least little thing. When your parents were killed, I believed that Sirius was still the Secret Keeper. He never told anyone what he had done, and I had no reason to believe otherwise. He was in such a state of shock and hysteria, that we all believed he was totally mad, and in fact, he was, but not in the manner we all thought. I was shocked and had to act quickly, for your safety and well being."

"But you never even went to see him, or saw to it that he got a fair trial," she responded shortly.

"No, but he never tried to contact me, or even Remus for that matter. Remus was devastated. Moreover, you must remember, we all thought that Peter was dead. No one knew they were animagi."

"Sirius could have proved it though, if you had just gone to see him."

"Possibly, Child... Have you ever asked Sirius why he didn't try to contact any of us?"

"He told us the night he confronted Peter in the Shrieking Shack that he had felt dead himself. He blamed himself for failing and believed he should be punished. He was given the incentive to escape when he saw the picture of Peter disguised as Scabbers the rat in the paper. When he realized he was here at Hogwarts, well...you know the rest."

"I know I have disappointed you at times, but I have only had your welfare at heart."

"I know," Harry said stopping to look at him, her green eyes sad, "but I still can't help feeling angry at times. I was really lost when I thought Sirius had been killed, and that whole year you kept your distance from me. You thought you were protecting me, but all that happened was that I very nearly lost it," she stated flatly, as they started walking up the street again. "I wanted to tell you what you could do with your so called plan that night after the fight in the Ministry."

"I was more than aware of your anger," he answered gently. "When you disappeared from your aunt's house the week following your return from Hogwarts, I knew I had made a terrible mistake."

"I think that was the worst part. Up until then I thought you were all powerful, but that's when I realized you were human, and could make mistakes. It came as such a shock to me. I couldn't understand how Albus Dumbledore, the greatest wizard of the century, could make such a grievous error."

"Harry, you were only fifteen. You believed that I was perfect. All you knew was what had been told to you by others, and I was equally to blame. That day at Grimmauld Place, when you saw Sirius alive, I knew I had to do something drastic or you would completely break down. That's part of the reason I wiped your memory of what happened for that year," Dumbledore explained, his face serious. "The other reason was that I was afraid."

"Afraid?"

"Yes, I was afraid you hated me, and I couldn't bear the thought that I had made such a complete mess of your life. I knew I would one day have to tell you the truth, that's why I put your memories into the pensieve. I had hoped that when you were older you would be able to understand and forgive me."

"Albus Dumbledore, how could I not forgive you? You're the only real parent figure I have ever had. I think that's why it hurt me so badly. I was afraid you were just using me as a means to an end."

"In the beginning, that may have been true, but I grew to love you and hated watching the way your mother's people were treating you."

"Why did you leave me there? You knew Voldemort hadn't returned yet."

"I still felt it was the safest place for you, besides it made you independent and headstrong and fearless in the face of adversity."

"I still think you should have sent me to live with the Weasleys, or at least some other wizard family, but it no longer makes a difference. Voldemort is dead and I have a home with people who care about me now. So I guess I can forgive you," she smiled. Turning to face him, she abruptly and kissed him on the top of his nose.

"Now what brought that on?"

"That is so you will know that I do forgive you and I still love you. Your mistake was not giving me the time I needed to grow up and feel secure with the people around me. Now that I have, I just wanted you to know that I still cared."

"I'm glad," Dumbledore smiled his features relaxing.

"You still haven't told me about Severus."

"Severus' sister came to me with him when his wife died. He was in shock and very nearly on the verge of a complete breakdown. He confessed everything, and begged my forgiveness. He agreed to spy for the Order. It was a perfect arrangement since he was a member of the inner circle. He wanted revenge for the deaths of his wife and son. I am not going to violate Severus' confidence and go into any of the other details with you. If he wishes to tell you, he will do so himself."

"Maybe I should just let sleeping dogs lie. I know he was bitter about his school days, and my Dad and Sirius were absolutely hateful to him."

"He is getting over it. After Voldemort's death, when your father's spirit was in the house, and told Severus he should have chosen him for his friend, I know Severus was moved. I think he always wanted to be with them, but was too proud to admit it."

"I think you're right, now let's go into this bakery and buy Remus his birthday cake. If I recall, he loves chocolate and strawberry short cake," Harry told him pointing to the bakery sign a few doors down.

"Then we will see what we can do to make his birthday a happy one," Dumbledore beamed.

Dumbledore insisted on paying for the cake, and purchased a large strawberry short cake and a box of cookies. In addition, he got a cheesecake to bring to the Weasleys for dessert. Harry just smiled and shook her head.

"Albus Dumbledore, your sweet tooth is showing," she teased, pretending to sound stern.

"I just thought that Phaedra would enjoy the cookies and I can't go to dinner at Molly and Arthur's house empty handed."

"Why don't you and the Weasleys come back to our house after dinner and have dessert with us? We could make it a double celebration. Mine and Ron's being taken into the Order and Remus' birthday."

"Ordinarily I would say yes, but I will be going back to Hogwarts tonight from the Weasley's house. I have some arrangements to make for the graduation ceremony, but don't forget to save me a piece of birthday cake. I will be back by tomorrow evening, if only for a few hours."

"You better be, or I will eat your piece of cake myself!"

"Hasn't anyone ever told you you're supposed to respect your elders?"

"Sure, but all's fair in love, war, and strawberry short cake!" Harry laughed, rolling her eyes and running her tongue over her lips in anticipation.

"Then I had better make sure I collect my piece," Dumbledore's blue eyes sparkled with mirth. "Now I think we should be getting back to Ottery St. Catchpole. I want to see that Dobby hides the cake from Remus as I suspect you would like to surprise him."

"I think he would like to feel special for a change. You know how shy he is. It is one of the things I love about him."

"Why?"

"He gives you the impression that he is so vulnerable at times, and yet sometimes I think he is the strongest one out of all of us. It's amazing how he can live in the moment, even though he is fully aware of the beast that he is harboring. He's taught himself how to coexist with his animal half, and uses it to his advantage."

"Yes, he is more than aware of the wolf, it has heightened his senses, and he has used it to his advantage in helping the Order, and as your protector."

"I know. He has the best self control of almost anyone I know, except maybe you."

"You don't think Sirius and Severus have self control?"

"Hah! Sirius is as impulsive as I am, and Severus has nerves of steel, but he shows his anger, and will let you know it when he's pissed off. I am hoping he will not be so intimidating anymore now that Voldemort is dead. He has a soft side that is incredible, and when he lets it show he positively glows. It's as if he is two different men."

"Severus has had to work through a lot of pain and humiliation, as you well know. You have helped him to begin to feel and trust again. You have reached him in places that even I couldn't touch."

"I don't believe that. I think he just needed to know he was loved and not just a tool for the good of the Order, the same as me."

"Perhaps, Child," Dumbledore responded thoughtfully, "but you see him in a way that the rest of us do not. As his soul mate you are able to break through the walls he has set up around himself in such a way that he has to examine his true feelings."

"Gee, if I had known that sooner, maybe he wouldn't have been such a nasty bastard for the first five years I was in Hogwarts. He certainly did an about face with me over the past two years."

"Do you deny you have feelings for him like you do for Sirius and Remus?"

"No, I have come to see the man he really is, if only he'll let him out. That's why he is bound to Sirius. They are so alike and yet they don't see it, how come?"

"Different reasons, mostly because of the way they were both brought up. Their differences come from the fact that Sirius was always outgoing, unafraid, and had the handsome looks that attract others to him. Severus was quiet and reserved, it made people think he did not want to be bothered with them, and he does not exude Sirius' charm. Add that to his tall thin build and angular features...well," Dumbledore shrugged.

"I see what you mean;" Harry replied thoughtfully, "Sirius was still quite handsome even after the horrors and harshness of Azkaban. Something in Sirius helped him to survive when others could not. Severus would not have been able to stand up to the Dementors. He has the same courage as Sirius, but not the strength. It has been whittled away a little bit at a time and he is only now beginning to find it again."

"Exactly!" Dumbledore exclaimed, "your powers as an empath gave you the insight into each one of them when you chose them as your protectors. Did you not make Sirius your strength and Severus your courage?"

"You're right and Remus is my endurance. He has helped to keep me going when I thought things were too tough. He is always there to let me talk things out and advise me when I can't talk to anyone else."

"You see, when you chose them you knew inside of you what it was that had drawn you to each of them," Dumbledore smiled as they approached the area where they would disappear.

"And the one person in all the world we all trusted and came to with our innermost secrets just happened to get the job as Trust Keeper," Harry grinned meeting Dumbledore's blue eyes.

"Are you ready to disappear?"

"Can I say something first?"

"Of course, Child, what is it?"

"I'm glad we had this time together. I like it when we talk."

"So do I," he winked, "now let's get home and hide this cake!"

"Ottery St. Catchpole," they said in unison, and vanished.

Remus was out back with Phaedra when they went into the house, and summoning Dobby they had him take the cake to the kitchen and told him it needed to be kept cold. Harry then sneaked upstairs and wrapped her gifts, the table having been magically reduced in size for easy handling. She then went in search of the others, and found Sirius and Severus working in the Potions Lab Severus was setting up in the basement. She was pleased to note they were getting along. Tiberius was away on business for the Order until the evening and Circe was shopping in the village with Molly Weasley.

Harry spent the remainder of the afternoon with Phaedra, and the little girl was delighted with the new game Harry had brought home. Harry, Phaedra, and Remus spent the rest of the next two hours playing until Circe returned and Harry went in to make dinner with the assistance of Dobby and Circe's elf, Hazel, who had arrived from London to assist her mistress.

Part 4 - Happy Birthday Moony

Harry smiled in anticipation as she sat peeling carrots for dinner. Remus would be totally surprised. She was just sad that Dumbledore would not be present for the celebration. She had found out that Remus' favorite food was roast beef, medium rare, which given the fact that he was a werewolf made sense.

Dobby had secured one large enough to feed them all from the butcher shop that catered to the Wizarding community in Ottery St. Catchpole. Harry had volunteered to cook dinner that night and with the help of Dobby and Hazel, Circe's elf. Her planned meal was well underway. In addition to the roast and the carrots, she had decided on mashed potatoes and broccoli in cheese sauce. They would have the cake and cookies Dumbledore had purchased for dessert. She was humming a happy tune to herself when Sirius and Severus entered the kitchen.

"Now what are you so happy about?" her godfather asked jovially.

"I can guarantee she never hummed like that when she was peeling the wormwood bark for her potions lessons," Snape remarked casually.

"I am in a good mood, and I think Sirius knows why."

"Albus gave you your medallion?"

"Actually that is one of the reasons, but not the primary one."

"He admits her into the Order early and it isn't the reason she's so happy?" Snape questioned looking at Sirius askance.

"Beats me why she is in such a good mood. Maybe we did well today and she will set us free," Sirius looked at her with a wry smile, turning on his charm, indicating where he and Severus were still bound at the wrists.

"Forget it Padfoot, you and the Potions Master will be best mates until the end of the week unless you both do something so extraordinary that you become true blue to one another for the rest of your lives."

"You have about as much chance of that as you do of beating the Headmaster at gin rummy," Snape scoffed.

"What makes you so sure I can't beat the Headmaster at gin rummy?"

"That's easy, no one ever does. He's a pro when it comes to the game," Sirius laughed.

"Just like you are a pro on the toboggan and Severus at snooker?"

"I believe our little witch has been having a tête-à-tête with Professor Dumbledore," Snape remarked with interest. "What else did he tell you?"

"Only when your birthdays are," Harry grinned eyeing Snape gleefully.

"That would explain what she's up to," Sirius ruffled her hair, "it is Remus' birthday."

"I suppose you are planning a party?" Severus rolled his eyes.

"Now, Professor Snape what ever gave you that idea?"

"You're smiling and cooking dinner."

"So, maybe I just like to cook."

"I sincerely doubt that. You aren't the domestic type."

"Sirius am I the domestic type?"

"Well...I think you could be, given the right man to settle down with."

"See, Severus, I could be the happy little house wife."

"Before or after you duel it out with the powers of evil?" Snape sneered.

"Care to take me on?" Harry glared looking at him over her glasses.

"Now you've done it Sev, you had better hide. The Mistress of good and light is going to zap you."

"Hmm...It would be interesting to see if she can. Last time we dueled she lost."

"Humph, tell that to your old boss, since he is no longer with us."

"But you didn't beat him in a duel. As I recall your telling of the events in question he disarmed you quite easily."

"Ah...but cunning and common sense triumphed. He thought I would fight, instead I played innocent and he lost."

"You are aware, Black, that her response only reinforces my belief that she should have been in Slytherin," Snape scowled at his nemesis.

"Not necessarily, she was very brave to take on Voldemort in the first place. That is a genuine Gryffindor trait," Sirius smiled maliciously.

"Are you two going to spoil my good mood by quibbling again?"

"We're not quibbling. We just have a different idea of where the Sorting Hat should have placed you, Honey. I believe you belonged in Gryffindor and Severus feels you should not have told the hat to put you there."

"Maybe we could start a new house then. It could be called Potter and the symbol would be the phoenix."

"I think that would be an interesting idea," Dumbledore's voice came from the back door.

"Headmaster, I thought you were dining with the Weasleys tonight," Harry smiled pleased to see him.

"I am. I merely stopped by to speak with Tiberius about the meeting on Saturday. Has he arrived back yet?"

"He came in about fifteen minutes ago," Severus informed him, "he's down in the potions lab setting up for tomorrow."

"I will see him there then," Dumbledore nodded moving off towards the hall and the door to the basement.

"I thought you and Sirius set up the lab earlier?"

"We did, Potter. My uncle is planning to show you some of the more complex potions that we do not teach at Hogwarts. He is also making a small work area for Phaedra. This way she will not get into any trouble."

"Sirius, I'm doomed. Between the Snapes teaching me more advanced potions and you and Moody working with me on Auror training I will be battered and bruised even worse than when I was doing all that advanced training to face Voldemort."

"Don't worry Honey, I won't rough you up too much, and I'm sure working with Severus and Tiberius one on one will be a lot different than when you were a student at Hogwarts."

"You always told me you liked your private tutoring sessions in Potions," Snape said coolly.

"I do, just like I love to watch you work. It will be interesting to see your Uncle Tiberius in action too," Harry smiled setting the carrots on the stove to cook.

"Then you are in for a real treat. He could have been one of the most successful Potions Masters in the Wizarding world, but he chose to follow a different line of work," Snape said giving her one of his rare smiles.

"Sounds like fun," Harry remarked with interest. "Now while Dobby and Hazel

finish cooking I think we should all go and get ready for dinner. I don't suppose either of you got Remus anything for his birthday?"

"I sure did," Sirius smirked. "I am giving him a new black wool cloak and a pair of Dragon Hide boots and gloves for the winter."

"And I have made him up several potions to help him with his joint pain as his transformation nears. Unfortunately his Wolfsbane Potion cannot be made this far in advance."

"I love the way he has these potions ready. He knew I would find out it was Remus' birthday and made sure he had something ready to give him," Harry remarked to Sirius as she eyed Severus with a sly smile.

"I happen to know that he made the potions up today and did it purely on his own. He told me they were for Remus' birthday today. So this time Miss Wings, he is innocent of trying to pull off a fast one."

"May I ask what you are giving him, Potter?"

"You can ask, Severus, but I'm not going to tell. I think you will all like it though. The Headmaster helped me to pick it out, and please stop calling me Potter!"

"I call you Potter because there is something incongruous about a girl named Harry."

"Hey, I picked the name for her," Sirius grinned evilly.

"Severus, please call me Harry. I hate it when you call me Potter."

"I believe we have been through this before, and Potter is your name," Snape sneered.

"Yeah," she replied as they walked from the kitchen, "and so is Harry. Besides, you always thought of my father as Potter."

"In case you haven't noticed, we all are in the habit of using our surnames when referring to each other. I usually call Sirius by his last name as well as Remus, and they do the same."

"Well I want it stopped. How would you like it if I started acting like a Marauder and began calling you a greasy git?" Harry challenged, folding her arms over her chest in defiance.

"Now this is getting interesting," Sirius laughed, "I know James would love watching the both of you going at one another."

"I am not my father, Sirius. I am merely trying to make a point and Severus knows it."

"Do you think I am a greasy git?" Snape questioned sarcastically.

"Don't be an ass. You are not greasy in the least. You merely had oily hair, and now that I have shown you not to use the conditioner with each shampoo and to blow-dry your hair you no longer have that problem. So do not ask stupid questions."

"She has quite a temper, Black. Don't you agree?"

"She takes after Lily in that respect. Her sense of adventure and curiosity she got from James."

"If you both don't stop talking about me like I'm not in the room I am going to go and get my wand and hex you both into the next century!"

"I am sure my great-nephew would find it quite interesting. He would be fascinated with the advances made in the art of potion making. As for Black I am not certain what he would like about the next century," Tiberius Snape stated coming from the door to the cellar, Dumbledore following.

"I would want to find out if they did away with the horrors of Azkaban," Sirius remarked seriously."

"Ah, my boy, that is all behind you now," Dumbledore comforted, "horrible as I am sure the situation was it has made you a stronger person."

"That is why he's my strength," Harry said giving Sirius a quick hug as they all headed into the parlor where Remus, Phaedra, and Circe were playing the Wizard's Monopoly.

"Uncle, did your day go well?" she inquired.

"Not as well as I would have liked, but I was able to obtain some of the information Dumbledore requested."

"Now Tiberius don't be so modest, you gathered more than I could have hoped for," Dumbledore advised gratefully.

"Thank you Albus, but I feel it is not half enough. The Death Eaters are still quite active, and we need to proceed swiftly if we are to stop another insurrection."

"And so we shall, Tiberius, but we also need to be cautious in our investigations. The Ministry is still not without its spies."

"I understand, Albus, but it is so damn frustrating at times to know who the guilty parties are and not be able prove it."

"Mummy, what is a guilty party?" Phaedra asked confused.

"What? Oh Phaedra, it is not the kind of party you are thinking of. It means a person who did something wrong, and on that note I think we should wait to discuss this later."

"Definitely, but we should not be talking about Tiberius mission until Saturday," Dumbledore advised, "especially not in front of Phaedra and Harry."

"I can understand not wanting to talk in front of Phaedra, but why me? You gave me my medallion."

"You are still unofficial until your swearing in ceremony," Dumbledore informed her looking over his glasses, blue eyes twinkling.

"Humph...and you all think I should have been in Slytherin? Sometimes I wonder about the Headmaster."

"Now Harry, you know that Albus is probably as true a Gryffindor as Godric Gryffindor himself," Remus said rising from the sofa and coming over to stand beside her.

"And I'm not?"

"Of course you are, Child. You just have a number of strong Slytherin traits as well."

"Hmm...Like breaking rules?" she beamed back at Dumbledore, her green eyes reflecting her mischievousness.

"Exactly!" he agreed as they all laughed, Phaedra looking from one to the other in confusion.

"Mummy, is Miss Harry bad?"

"No dear, she is just headstrong and willful."

"She is actually very much like you Phaedra," Severus told his niece amused.

"Then you must love her as much as you do me," she smiled with pleasure.

"Ahem, I think we should get ready for dinner," Harry informed them, changing the subject, cheeks burning with embarrassment.

"What's for dinner Princess?"

"We are having your favorite dinner, Remus."

"Oh? Is there some reason we are having a roast beef on a Monday night?"

"No, I just thought you would like a treat."

"Sirius, did you tell her?"

"Tell her what?" Sirius snickered.

"You know what!"

"If you are asking Black if he told Harry it is your birthday," Snape interrupted with aplomb, "then no, he did not."

"Then who did? I can see by the big grin on her face that she is up to something."

"I am the guilty party," Dumbledore beamed placing his hand on Remus' shoulder. "Harry and I both agreed you need a little extra attention from time to time. After all, with Sirius and Severus always in the forefront she worries that you sometimes feel left out of her affections."

"I couldn't have put it more eloquently myself, Professor."

"Professor?" he questioned looking at her over his half moon spectacles.

"All right, Albus," Harry flushed with embarrassment, as they all looked on amused.

"Ah, it seems our little princess has truly been accepted into the world of adulthood. She has been given the right to call Dumbledore by his first name."

"Remus," Harry nudged him playfully, "stop teasing me!"

"I remember when Albus had me call him by his given name for the first time," Circe smiled. "It is a kind of milestone."

"Yeah, sort of like losing your..."

"Sirius, watch it Phaedra is here!" Harry interrupted.

"I want to hear what Mr. Sirius lost," Phaedra demanded innocently.

"Mr. Sirius didn't lose anything," Tiberius smiled arching his brow while the others shot knowing glances at one another.

"That's right Phaedra," Sirius agreed. "I was going to say it was like losing your homework. You get that nervous feeling in the pit of your stomach and feel uncomfortable on the inside. That is how you feel when you are grown up and call Professor Dumbledore by his given name for the first time. It is a real honor to do so."

"I think it's time we got you washed up for dinner," Circe said taking Phaedra by the hand. "I think Miss Harry has something special planned for dinner."

"Are we going to have a party for Mr. Remus' birthday?" Phaedra asked following her mother from the room as Harry looked on until they were out of earshot.

"Losing your homework? That is the worst lie I have ever heard. We all know damn well what you were really going to say!"

"And what is that, Honey?" Sirius asked innocently, his brown eyes glowing with laughter.

"Never mind, and wipe that silly grin off your face," Harry laughed growing redder by the minute. "Albus are you sure you can't stay for Remus' birthday dinner?"

"I'm sorry Harry, but I promised Arthur and Molly. I know you wouldn't want Ron to be disappointed."

"No, I suppose not," she replied unable to hide her disappointment completely. "Ron will be surprised and I know he still feels he is shadowed by the accomplishments of his brothers. Please tell him I will speak with him tomorrow."

"Of course, Child, and I will be back tomorrow to claim that piece of cake."

"Cake, what cake?" Remus' eyes lit up like a little boy.

"We got you a birthday cake. It was supposed to be a surprise. If you are a good little werewolf you may just get a few presents too," she teased, "now if you will all excuse me I am going to go and get ready for dinner."

"Do we need formal robes tonight?" Sirius chuckled.

"No, but if you don't behave I will let Severus put a leash and collar on you."

"Sorry Harry, I'm not into any of that kinky stuff," Sirius taunted.

"Yeah, but Severus might be, he is a former Death Eater," Harry joked over her shoulder as she ran from the room. "I will see you tomorrow Headmaster, have a good time tonight."

"You too, Child," Dumbledore called after her. "Remus I am sorry I won't be here, I know it means a lot to Harry, but I am giving Ron Weasley his medal to the Order tonight."

"I understand, Albus, and I will see to it that no one eats your piece of cake."

"I will hold you to that, now if you will all excuse me, I have to be going. I promised Molly that I would be there by six and it is already a quarter to."

"Good night, Albus," the men all replied walking him to the front door.

"I will see you all tomorrow night," Dumbledore nodded as he passed through the front gate. "The Burrow," he stated raising his wand and disappeared.

Harry reached her room in the attic to find Phaedra all excited that they were having a birthday party for Remus.

"Miss Harry did you get him a present?"

"Yes I did. He likes to play a card game called poker so I got him a new card table and the cards and chips used for the game."

"What could I give him? I don't have a present."

"Well, how about if you make him a nice card?"

"But that isn't a present."

"Then why don't you make it from both of us and we will give him the presents together?"

"Will you help me? I never made a card before. Will we use magic?"

"No, we don't need to use magic. All we need is some pretty paper and crayons or maybe some other decorating items. I think I may have some in my trunk," Harry said opening her trunk to where she stored such items. Pulling out some construction paper, crayons, glitter, and some old scraps of felt she had taken from Privet Drive, she sat down at the desk in the room she and Phaedra shared.

"What do we have to do now?"

"First we will fold the paper in half and then in half again so it looks like a little booklet. Now you have to draw a picture on it and write 'Happy Birthday' on the front," Harry explained passing the paper and crayons over to Phaedra.

"What should I draw?"

"What would you like to draw?"

"Can we draw Mr. Remus' wolf?"

"If you want to, I don't believe he would mind. You can glue some of this old black felt on it to make it look like fur."

"I have something better, Miss Harry," Phaedra replied dashing over to her wardrobe. "I have this old fur hat mummy was going to throw away. She let me have it for dress up," she beamed pulling an old gray faux fur hat from a bag in the back of her closet.

"We can cut some of the fur off and glue it on the wolf. We can use some of the gold glitter for his eyes."

"Whoopee, this is going to be the best birthday card ever," Phaedra declared happily, as she set to work drawing the wolf on the front of the card.

Harry was amazed to note that the little girl was quite an adept artist. In no time, at all she had drawn the outline of a running wolf under the full moon with some trees in the background. Harry then cut some of the fur from the old hat and helped Phaedra to glue it on the card. She then glued a pinch of gold glitter on the space they had left for the eye, and used silver glitter for the moon. Phaedra then wrote 'HAPPY BIRTHDAY,' in large block letters across the top.

"Next we have to write him a message on the inside."

"What should we say?" Phaedra asked curiously.

"How about, 'Have a howling good time'?"

"That's funny. Can I draw another wolf?"

"Can you draw one sitting with a birthday cake?"

"Okay, but how many candles?"

"Just put one in the middle and write thirty-eight on the cake."

"Is that how old he is?"

"I think so. Remus, Sirius, your uncle Severus and my Dad all went to school together, and my Dad was twenty when I was born. I'm going to be eighteen so they must be thirty-eight."

"I can ask my Mummy. She would know," Phaedra replied as they heard Circe calling them as she came up the stairs.

"What would I know?" she inquired looking at the two girls as she entered the attic.

"How old Mr. Remus is. Miss Harry says he is the same age as Uncle Severus."

"Your uncle is actually a few months older, but they are thirty-eight."

"You were right, Miss Harry!" Phaedra nodded happily, completing the drawing of the cake. "Should we glue some more fur on the wolf?"

"No, lets just color him to save time. We can put a little glitter in the eyes and on the candles."

"What are the two of you up to now?" Circe smiled shaking her head.

"Miss Harry and I are making a card for Mr. Remus' birthday. Miss Harry said I can give him the present with her."

"What did you get him Harry?"

"A new poker set and a game table to go with it," Harry explained pulling out the gift.

"Dumbledore reduced the table to make it easy to carry. He used the standard spell so we can just reverse it."

"I think all the men in the house will enjoy playing. I might join in from time to time myself," Circe laughed. "I used to be quite good."

"I've played a little when I was at school, but I never really got into the game. I do like to play pool though."

"Have you ever played with my brother? He is an excellent billiards player and loves to play snooker."

"So I was told by the Headmaster. I have never had the opportunity to play with him. Maybe we could get a pool table and put it downstairs."

"We won't need to. I don't know if Albus told you yet but after your birthday we will be staying in my brother's London town home because of the Death Eater trials."

"No, no one said a word to me about this. It would be nice if I was at least asked," Harry responded shaking her head in annoyance.

"Harry, I'm sure Albus was going to tell you. He probably just didn't want to get you upset so soon after your ordeal with the Dark Lord," Circe replied in an effort to diffuse Harry's rising temper. "Now come on, it's time to go down to dinner. You can talk to Albus tomorrow night about it. Let's not spoil Remus' party."

"You're right of course," Harry agreed. "I will speak with Dumbledore tomorrow when he returns."

"I'm sure he will have a reasonable explanation," Circe nodded in approval. "Phaedra have you finished the card yet?"

"Yes, Mummy, do you like it?" she questioned holding up the card for her mother's approval.

"You did a beautiful job," Circe praised her daughter.

"Yes, she has a remarkable talent. I can't draw well at all," Harry smiled ruefully. "I always wished I could."

"Neither can I," Circe acknowledged, "but Severus can, and so can our uncle."

"I didn't know Severus could draw," Harry remarked as she and Phaedra followed the older witch down the stairs.

"Yes, he used to love to draw and he has painted a few of the still life pictures in his town home. I will show them to you when we go back."

"I would like that," Harry smiled as they reached the first floor. "I see the scent of food has brought the men down before us."

"Mr. Remus, we made you a card, and Miss Harry has a present from us."

"She does?" Remus laughed his hazel eyes sparkling with mirth, "can I open it now?"

"Not until after we have dessert," Harry laughed giving him a quick kiss on the cheek, "Happy birthday."

"Thank you, Princess."

"My mouth is watering at the prospect of that roast," Sirius remarked as they took their seats in the dining room.

"Mister Remus," Dobby beamed coming into the room bobbing back and forth, "Harry Potter says you are to sit at the head of the table tonight since you are the guest of honor."

"Thank you, Dobby. I would be delighted if you and Hazel would join us for dinner."

"Dobby and Hazel eating at the same table as wizards?" the little elf questioned aghast. "Oh, no, Sir. Dobby is freed but such an honor...Dobby is not worthy of it...and Hazel...she would be shocked."

"In that case I insist you both eat in the dining room with us and use the tray tables. You are both part of our family. If Hazel gives you any problems with dining in here you tell her that I said I would be insulted if she refuses."

"Tell her that I want her here too, Dobby," Circe interjected, "that way she will be less likely to refuse."

"Yes, Miss Snape," Dobby said bowing with a flourish, "I will see that Hazel comes in for dinner. We will use the tray tables like Professor Lupin requested," Dobby replied formally before he disappeared with a pop.

"I believe Hazel will be scandalized," Severus informed them coolly, "she has never dined with the family in all her years of service to us."

"Severus is right, Remus, it is most unusual," Tiberius remarked, arching his brow.

"Apparently you have not heard about Harry's friend, Hermione Granger, and her attempts to bring the plight of the house elves enslavement to the attention of the general public as well as the Ministry. She believes all the elves should be freed, and given proper wages and benefits."

"I believe Severus has mentioned Miss Granger. He told me she is quite the adept at Potions."

"Yes, unlike Harry she is a natural. It is a shame she chose not to pursue it. She actually made the Polyjuice potion in their second year," Severus informed his Uncle Tiberius emphatically.

"I don't think now is the time to discuss Hermione's proficiency at potion making," Sirius interrupted knowing how hard Harry had worked to please Severus. "Besides which, when a person has to work for something they appreciate it all the more," he winked at Harry from across the table where he was sitting with Severus.

"I meant no insult to Harry, Black. I was merely commenting on Hermione's skill."

"Just drop it," Harry interrupted the two men before they could start arguing. "This is supposed to be a party for Remus, and I won't have the two of you spoil it by quibbling. Now pass the mashed potatoes. I'm hungry."

"Me too!" Phaedra exclaimed with a toss of her blond curls, and they all laughed.

Dinner was a pleasant affair from then on, and while Hazel was uncomfortable at first, Dobby reassured her and so did Circe. Phaedra was delighted when Hazel made sure she got a piece of the strawberry short cake that had two large fresh berries and extra whipped cream, while Remus pretended to frown.

"Hmm...It's my birthday but your piece of cake is bigger than mine."

"That's because Hazel loves me so much," Phaedra giggled opening her arms wide in exaggeration of the house elf's affection for her.

"Then maybe I should have Hazel come and work for me."

"Mr. Remus, you can't take Hazel away from us...we love her. Mummy he can't have her can he?" Phaedra asked worriedly.

"No, Phaedra, Mr. Remus is merely teasing you."

"I don't know, Phaedra. You had better hope my friend Hermione doesn't knit her a hat or something."

"Hazel, you wouldn't leave us would you?" Phaedra questioned the elf.

"Miss Phaedra, I have served the Snape family since your Uncle Tiberius was a little baby. Even if you gave me clothes I would not leave you."

"Good, because I love you," the little girl smiled, and the elf blushed.

"Moony why don't you open your presents?" Sirius prodded, noting the look of disapproval on Severus and Tiberius faces over Phaedra's display of affection for the elf.

"What should I open first?"

"I think you should open Severus' gift first," Harry replied.

"All right, I will," Remus agreed reaching for the box. Unwrapping it, he found the vials of potions Snape had made for him. "Severus, thank you. I will put these to good use. I appreciate your thoughtfulness," Remus smiled gratefully. "Now how about if I open this

one," Remus answered selecting a small package. "The card says it is from Professor Dumbledore."

"I know what it is," Harry teased.

"I suppose you were with him when he picked it out?"

"How did you ever guess?"

"Padfoot told me."

"Bad dog," Harry pretended to glower at Sirius.

"It is a book of charms. I will find this very useful for the upcoming year at Hogwarts," Remus said flipping through the pages. "Phaedra would you hand me that other small box please?" he indicated a small package at the end of the table.

"Who is it from Mr. Remus?" Phaedra asked as he read the card.

"It is from your Mum and Uncle Tiberius," he told her as he opened the package. It contained a new journal, bound with leather, and embossed with his name. "Circe, Tiberius, thank you. I have kept a journal since I was a child."

"I am glad you like it," Tiberius nodded.

"Now let me see what Padfoot has gotten for me," Remus eyed his friend who was pretending to study the ceiling. Tearing off the paper, he opened the box revealing the new cloak, gloves, and boots Sirius had bought. "Sirius you shouldn't have gone to so much trouble," Remus' hazel eyes gleamed with pleasure at his friend's gift.

"You deserve it old friend. Now open the one from Harry and Phaedra."

"I wonder what those two could have gotten for me...hmm...what an unusual card."

"I made it special for you," Phaedra beamed. "Miss Harry showed me how."

"I will treasure it always," Remus smiled. "I like the motif."

"I drew your wolf. Miss Harry said it would be okay."

"I think you did a wonderful job. Now let me see the present."

"It is in two parts," Harry commented, "open the smaller box first, since the other one will go with it."

"What could you have gotten me that is so mysterious?"

"Something Dumbledore suggested you would enjoy. I wanted to give you something that you would enjoy simply for the pleasure of it."

"Ooohhh..." Remus laughed, opening the chips and cards. "What is in the other box?"

"Open it," Harry chuckled.

"Now this will really give me hours of pleasure," Remus shook his head with approval as he revealed the poker table.

"You just need to bring it back up to normal size. Dumbledore used the standard spell to reduce it so I could wrap it."

"I love it, Princess," Remus' delight was evident on his face as he enlarged the table. "Anyone up to a game tonight?"

"How are we supposed to play with our hands bound together?" Sirius queried as Snape nodded in agreement.

"You two are not getting free that easily," Harry rebuked them. "You can hold the cards with your free hand and bet with the other."

"She is bound and determined we stay together for the week," Severus scowled.

"Think of it as my getting even for all those years of your taking house points when I didn't really do anything to deserve losing them."

"Indeed?"

"You took out your anger and humiliation at the hands of my father and Sirius on me."

"Hey, that may be fine for Severus, but what about me? I never took house points from you."

"No, but you and my Dad were the reason he did. If you both hadn't been such nasty arrogant teens..." Harry shrugged, lowering her eyes.

"Point well taken, Honey," Sirius allowed putting his free hand on hers. "We really were a couple of arrogant gits."

"Then make me a happy girl and play cards with Remus. I understand he is quite a good poker player."

"He's a demon," Severus sneered.

"Well I'm up for a good game," Tiberius said looking at Remus with interest.

"Do you men mind if I play too?" Circe inquired. "It's been awhile, but I was a fair player."

"It would be our pleasure," Remus smiled.

"Can we play too?" Phaedra asked feeling left out.

"No, Phaedra, you are too young. When you are older we will teach you," Circe replied firmly.

"Don't worry, Phaedra. You and I can go outside for a while. I saw that your Uncle put up a swing in the back yard. We also need to take care of the dogs."

"Okay Miss Harry. Will you push me on the swing?"

"Of course, we can take turns on it," she answered as they rose from the table, and the others adjourned to the parlor to set up the poker game.

Harry entertained Phaedra out back for over two hours and they had a great time playing with Snuffles and Hannibal. Harry decided that Hannibal was aptly named as he was quite protective of Phaedra, but she also felt he was a bit funny looking. His legs were too long for his body, and he had the stocky build of both his Boar Hound father and Newfoundland mother, but his head was all wrong. He had jowls like Fang, but was fluffy like Snuffles. His bark was deep and threatening, but he was so friendly that Harry joked that all any burglar would have to do was feed him and he would let them in. Phaedra immediately came to his defense, hugging the over large puppy, who planted a big slurpy kiss on her face with his large pink tongue. As the evening wore on, Harry and Phaedra took turns on the swing and watched the sun set together. They then sat on the back porch looking at the stars and listening to the adults in the other room laughing and playing their card game.

"Miss Harry, which one is Mr. Sirius' star?" Phaedra queried looking up at the sky.

"Do you see that really bright one, over there?" Harry replied pointing out the star in the constellation of Canis Major.

"You mean the one that is really big?"

"That's the one. That is Sirius. It is also known as the Dog star."

"How come?"

"Because it is supposed to be one of two hunting dogs that follow Orion into battle. Follow my finger and you will see that the constellation Sirius is in forms a sort of big dog," she explained pointing out the stars. "The constellation is actually called Canis Major. Canis is Latin for dog and major means big."

"You said there were two dogs. Does the other constellation have a name too?"

"That one is Canis Minor, or the Little Dog. Follow my finger. Do you see the group of stars that look kind of like an odd shaped W?"

"Yes, what is that?"

"It is called Monoceros, or the unicorn, since that odd small star at the point represents the horn."

"But where is the Little Dog?"

"Canis Minor is right above it. See the star I am pointing to?" Harry asked directing Phaedra's attention to the constellation Monoceros.

"The one that is the bottom of the first part of the W?"

"Yes, now follow my finger straight up and you will see another star with one above it. The first one is Procyon and the other one is Gomeisa. They are the two stars in the Little Dog. Procyon means before the dog. It comes onto the horizon just before Sirius, which is how it got the name."

"What does the other name, Gomeisa, mean?"

"Bleary eyed, but I don't know why."

"Maybe it was tired and didn't want to come out!"

"Maybe," Harry laughed, "it sounds like a good reason to me."

"What are the two of you up to sitting out here in the darkness?" Snape's silky soft voice inquired startling the two girls, who both jumped.

"Uncle Severus, you scared me," Phaedra pouted.

"Get used to it Phaedra. If you have him at Hogwarts in a few years, he will do it all the time. He likes to catch the students unawares to see if they are doing something they shouldn't be."

"Humph, if he does it to me I will just tell Mummy and she will yell at him."

"You had best be careful, Severus. Phaedra is going to give you a run for your money when she comes to Hogwarts. There is nothing worse than having one's big sister on their case," Sirius grinned wickedly, leaning on the doorframe.

"I have no doubt that Phaedra will be an excellent student and her behavior will be exemplary."

"Miss Harry, what is zemplary?"

"No Phaedra, it is pronounced egg-zem-pla-ree. It means excellent."

"Oh."

"So what were you both talking about?" Sirius smiled.

"Miss Harry was teaching me about the big dog and the little dog stars. She also showed me the unicorn and told me about the names of some of the stars."

"Did you know that Mr. Sirius is going to teach all about the stars at Hogwarts?"

"Really? Does he know all of the stars in the sky?"

"I know most of them, and all of the constellations. Would you like to learn some more?"

"Can I? Miss Harry do you know them all too?"

"Not quite as good as Sirius, but yes, I learned them in Astronomy class at Hogwarts."

"But I'm too little to go to Hogwarts."

"I can teach you some of them each night when the sky is clear like it is tonight," Sirius assured her. I will even get out my old telescope so you can see them better."

"Uncle Severus, did you hear that? I am going to learn about the stars. Miss Harry will you still teach me potions?"

"Of course. Potions by day and the stars by night. I think you will be way ahead of your schoolmates when you go back to school in September."

"I expect you to keep up on your summer reading too," Severus looked at Phaedra, pretending to sound stern, but his slight smile belied his manner.

"I will. I like to read. I have three books to read and do a report on."

"Then why don't you start reading them in bed tonight?" Circe's voice came from behind Sirius as her silhouette appeared in the kitchen behind the two wizards. "I think it's time you got ready for bed."

"Do I have to Mummy? I'm not tired."

"Yes, you have to. It is past nine. I want you to take a bath and then if you still aren't tired you can start your reading."

"What about Miss Harry?"

"Miss Harry is old enough to stay up."

"Don't worry Phaedra; I won't be up too late. I have to start teaching you potions tomorrow and also need to get ready for my Auror training this week."

"I forgot you are going to start teaching me the potions tomorrow. What are we going to make?"

"Nothing yet, you have to learn all the equipment first and I will want you to know all the safety procedures. So I will start teaching you them first, and when you can show me that you understand them we will make something special for your Mum."

"Can't I mix just one thing tomorrow?" Phaedra wheedled softly.

"No! You need to learn safety first. Maybe by the end of the week you can actually start to make a potion. Do you have the potion book I gave you for Christmas?"

"I brought it with me. Can we make something out of it?"

"I think so. I will look it over with your uncles and then we will decide what you should make first. So go on and get ready for bed," Harry hugged her.

"Come along, Phaedra. You can wear your new nightgown tonight," Circe told her as she ushered her back into the kitchen.

"The pretty blue one that makes me look like a princess?"

"Yes, so let's get you into the tub. I can see you have been playing with Hannibal. Your clothes are filthy."

"Uncle Severus I am going to wear my pretty nightgown. Will you come with Mr. Sirius and tuck me in?"

"We will be up to tuck you in," Severus nodded, gently stroking her cheek.

"See you in a little while," Sirius smiled as Phaedra followed her mother out of the kitchen towards the bath.

"I am pleased that you are being sensible and teaching Phaedra safety and equipment before attempting to show her how to mix anything," Snape remarked thoughtfully.

"No one ever said Harry wasn't sensible," Sirius stated emphatically. "She may be impulsive at times, but she is smart enough to know how to do things in the proper manner."

"I will be interested to see how you do tomorrow. Uncle Tiberius and I will be showing you some of the medicinal potions that are not taught in school. There are some which are used for diseases which would be terminal in Muggles."

"How come we don't share that kind of knowledge with them? It seems unfair that they should die when we have cures for diseases like diabetes or cancer."

"We share them when it suits our purpose, or when we feel they are able to handle the knowledge. They are usually given to the Muggle world by a witch or wizard who pretends to be a Muggle in the scientific community. Insulin was given to them a number of years ago. When they are ready, they will be given the full cure for diabetes. Their cancer drugs do not equal ours and they prefer to deal in synthetics. Our drugs for some of the worst diseases are all natural. Many of them have been handed down from ancient times or made from exotic plants only found in places like the Amazon or the African jungles," Snape intoned as if she were a first year student.

"Was he always this stiff in class?" Sirius joked.

"Only when he wanted your full attention while he was teaching the subject matter," she stated matter of factly. "Severus can get very passionate when discussing his potions. On the other hand he hated teaching Sex Ed."

"Severus taught Sex Education?"

"Only to the fifth year boys."

"Wait a minute...you were still disguised as a boy in your fifth year. You were in his class with all the boys?"

"She was... although I did not know Harry was a witch at the time," Snape grinned back at Sirius evilly.

"It was interesting, to say the least. I read Hermione's notes for the girls' class. Poppy taught that one along with Professor McGonagall."

"She let you read the notes from her Sex Ed class?" Sirius questioned amazed.

"Of course not, I used my invisibility cloak to sneak into her dorm when she was in Hogsmeade one weekend."

"I would be most interested in hearing what Hermione would say if she knew what you did."

"I think she would just laugh and shake her head, Severus."

"Why would you think that, Honey?"

"Because I told her a long time ago when she found out I was a girl. We were talking girl talk and she realized I had not been in class with her at the time."

"I'm surprised she didn't ask about the boy's class," Sirius teased.

"She did," Harry laughed, grateful that the dim light coming through the kitchen windows hid her red cheeks. "She really enjoyed hearing all the questions the guys asked, especially Ron."

"Really, and what were those questions?"

"Really, Sirius, if you have any questions in that department maybe you should ask Professor Snape," Harry teased laughing aloud.

"What is so funny Princess?" Remus inquired coming out the door to sit with them in the evening air.

"Sirius was just about to ask Severus about sex."

"What!?"

"It seems Miss Wings was in Severus' Sex Education class with the boys at Hogwarts. She was just telling us how interesting it was."

"Really...and here I thought there was something you actually didn't know about Padfoot," Remus grinned. "So Princess, you must have enjoyed Severus' sex talk immensely for you to remember it so well," Remus mocked playfully..

"I was especially interested in the sexuality of werewolves. He seemed to be quite versed in the subject," she countered evenly.

"Ahem...yes...well...you know it is the animal instinct which causes werewolves to be...ah...so..." Remus stammered unable to meet her eyes.

"Sensual?" Harry prodded, touched by Remus' apparent bashfulness.

"Now Miss Wings, you really shouldn't tease Moony. It is his birthday after all."

"I'm not teasing him. I think it's cute the way he gets all shy and reserved," Harry smiled giving Remus a hug.

"Oh how touching," Severus remarked smugly, "he gets all tongue tied around her when it comes to his other nature."

"Severus, you had bloody well knock it off. You are quite obviously jealous of the attention Remus is getting. Maybe if you were a little bit nice from time to time I would be more affectionate towards you too. I didn't remove that mark just to satisfy a whim!" Harry remarked referring to how she had been able to remove the Dark Mark tattoo from his left forearm. "I did it because I do care."

"If I were you I would watch my step, Snape. You do not want Harry to get angry with you. She does have a temper you know," Sirius warned. "If you get her angry she may just put that mark back on your arm."

"You can just stop that kind of talk too! I would never do such a thing! I am not my Dad and I am not a wild fifteen year old like the two of you were. I still get angry when I realize how you were both a couple of arrogant bullies. Some hurts can't just be forgotten, believe me I know," Harry scolded her voice cracking.

"Princess, Padfoot didn't really mean what he said, and Severus was just teasing me in his own manner."

"Honey, what is it that you are finding so hurtful? It isn't something we did in school as boys is it?"

"No...But there are times...times when I just....well...sometimes I find myself still mad at Dumbledore."

"Harry, Albus did what he thought was right. He is wise and powerful, but that does not always make him right," Severus soothed. "If he could go back and change some of his decisions he would do so, if for no other reason than to make you happy."

"I know...I am just...I don't know...feeling a little lost tonight. I can understand why Severus was so nasty to me at times. Hell, when I was younger and dressed as a boy I was almost a dead ringer for my Dad."

"Except for your eyes," Sirius said putting his hand on her shoulder.

"There is still a remarkable resemblance," Snape arched his brow giving her one of his rare smiles, "but you are much better looking."

"I'll drink to that!" Sirius chuckled bringing the bottle of Butterbeer he had been holding up to his mouth, as the sound of a window opening above interrupted their conversation.

"Uncle Severus... Mr. Sirius," Phaedra called, "you can come and tuck me in now."

"We'll be right up, Phaedra, and don't hang out of the attic window like that!" Snape called back, pulling Sirius into the yard so they could look up at her.

"Okay, Uncle Sev," she replied lowering the screen.

"Harry, I will see you later," Snape nodded. "Come on Black, we had better get up to Phaedra before she tries to sneak downstairs."

"She can be quite adventurous at times," Sirius agreed, "kind of reminds me of another young Miss I know."

"And who might that be?" Harry looked at her godfather, green eyes twinkling.

"Why Miss Potter, surely I need not have to tell you her name," Sirius quipped leaning down look into her eyes. Harry had the feeling that if they had been alone he would have kissed her.

"Let's go Black. You can say goodnight to Harry later," Snape said dragging him along, the edge to his voice unmistakable.

"Would you like to go inside, Princess?" Remus inquired when they were out of earshot.

"I'd rather sit out here on the porch and enjoy the night air."

"The rose garden smells wonderful, tonight."

"I know, and while I understand how you feel about the full moon, tonight is the first crescent. I think of all the phases of the moon the crescents are the most beautiful."

"It is one of the few that I can enjoy too." Remus replied putting his arm around her shoulders.

"Have I ever told you that you are really cute?"

"In which form?"

"Both," Harry grinned, "you are just lovable no matter whether you are human or canine."

"I'll keep that in mind," he pursed his lips giving her a slight squeeze.

"Remus did you know that there is a constellation called the Lupus?"

"It's located between Scorpius and Centaurus, if I remember correctly. I think the legend says the king of Arcadia was turned into a wolf when he fed meat to Zeus containing sheep, goats and parts of his son. Zeus struck his family down with lightning, and brought back the dead son."

"I like the legend the Watcher Elves tell better. I think Luna's lover becoming the wolf because of the sun god is a sweet story."

"They both have merit; after all, the natural prey of the werewolf is human flesh."

"Remus, please don't get maudlin on your birthday. You were so happy before," Harry remarked taking his hand in hers.

"I'm sorry, Princess. I know you care about me just like Sirius does."

"You're very special to both of us. I worry about you as much as Sirius does. Yet, there are times when I think of all of my protectors you are actually the strongest."

"What makes you think that?"

"I can sense an inner strength about you. I'm not sure if it is my empathy doing it or just something you project in your manner."

"Are you sure you are not just sensing the wolf?"

"No, he's there too, but I can tell the difference. He is powerful and wild. I think what I feel is a part of your soul. It's warm and kind, yet capable of great power and love, yet there is sadness there too.

"No happiness?"

"You are happiest when you are with those you love. I can feel it and it shows in those mysterious eyes of yours."

"I have mysterious eyes?"

"Yup, you do," she grinned. "Sirius has warm eyes, and Severus has fathomless eyes."

"Now that is interesting. I would say you have curious eyes."

"Why?"

"They get this sparkle when you are interested in something, they are always questioning. They are also very pretty."

"Why Remus Lupin, I believe you are flirting with me," Harry responded coyly.

"Am I?" Remus asked tilting her chin up with two fingers so she could look him in the eyes.

"Remus..."

"Hush," he whispered and then gently brushed his lips over hers. "Let's go for a walk," Remus said pulling her to her feet. "I may not be able to enjoy a walk in the full moon, but I can tonight."

"You're a born romantic," she smiled as he put his arm around her waist and they strolled off.

"It's not often I get to spend the evening with a pretty young woman."

"Flattery will get you everywhere," she teased, looking up at him.

"In that case..." Remus stopped walking, and looking down at her, they locked eyes, as his lips met hers again. This time his tongue sought hers, and she responded in kind. When he finally released her neither spoke. They merely walked together in silence, each deep in thought, yet content in each another's company as they wandered back towards the house. Reaching the kitchen, they separated, each one eyeing the other with a sly smile, and Harry went up to her room as Remus went into his.

Part 5 - Potions and Aurors

Harry had lain awake for a long time tossing and turning after leaving Remus. She was more confused than ever. Remus kiss had been unexpected, but she had not found it unpleasant. Indeed, she had welcomed and enjoyed his embrace. Up until that point, she had only considered her feelings towards Sirius and Severus Snape. While she had admittedly cared for Remus, she had not given serious thought to a romantic relationship with him. Now she had to try to sort out her feelings for each of them, not to mention George Weasley. At least she had made sure George knew she was not in love with him, but they were both young, and knew that could change.

She finally fell asleep sometime around one A.M. but her dreams were jumbled and confused. George was laughing and playing jokes on her while she was trying to mix a love potion. Severus stood over her shoulder glaring, demanding that she hurry up. Padfoot was snuffling and scratching at the door trying to get in while Remus howled in the background. All the while Harry kept trying to disappear beneath her invisibility cloak. When she woke, the sheets were tangled and half on the floor. Phaedra was sitting on the floor by her bed, staring up at her, wide-eyed.

"Good morning, Miss Harry. Did you know you talk in your sleep?"

"I was dreaming."

"Were they bad dreams? I heard you call out."

"Not good or bad. They were just all mixed up. What did I say?"

"You kept mumbling something about not being ready, and tried to pull the sheet over your head."

"Hmm...I was trying to get under my invisibility cloak in the dream. It seems I made a real mess of my sheets," Harry remarked disentangling herself from the bedclothes.

"Are you getting sick?"

"Why would you think that?"

"Sometimes when I'm getting sick I have bad dreams. Mummy says it's cause I have a fever. Do you have a fever?"

"No, I just have a lot on my mind. What time is it?"

"Seven thirty," Phaedra replied smugly, glancing at the clock on the bedside table. Harry had taught her to tell time the previous summer and Phaedra was still proud of her accomplishment.

"Then let's get up now. I'll take a quick shower and then we can get something to eat."

"Umm...I'm hungry," Phaedra grinned rubbing her stomach, which growled loudly in agreement.

"Come on then and get washed and dressed," Harry said climbing out of bed, "we have a busy day ahead. Are you ready for your first Potions Lesson?"

"I can hardly wait, let's go!" Phaedra exclaimed jubilantly, racing for the stairs, Harry following in her wake.

After supervising Phaedra with her morning toilet, Harry took a shower and the two girls got dressed. Although it had been a nice evening the day before, the morning was rainy and damp, so Harry elected to wear her Muggle jeans, with a long sleeve blouse, and her sneakers. Phaedra too had a selection of Muggle attire and chose to emulate Harry. Harry then put their hair up into ponytails and they went down to breakfast. Dobby and Hazel had made sure there was an array of foods prepared and laid out on the kitchen table for the members of the household to select at their convenience.

"Miss Harry, look! We have donuts this morning!"

"I see that. Would you like one with some milk?"

"Yes, please. Is there one with jelly?" she asked, brown eyes sparkling in anticipation.

"There are several. Would you prefer grape jelly or strawberry?"

"Strawberry!"

"Here you go," Harry laughed placing the donut on a small plate and pouring a glass of milk, "as for me, I want this one with the cream inside, and a cup of coffee," she stated, helping herself, as Circe came into the kitchen.

"Good morning, Harry," Circe acknowledged as she kissed her daughter. "I see you helped Phaedra this morning. Thank you so much. I'm running late," the older witch told her grabbing some coffee and a cruller. "I'm due back at the Ministry today by nine and it's already eight thirty."

"Mummy, can't you stay home with me?"

"I'm sorry, baby, but I'm needed at work. I will be taking some more vacation days the end of the month. You want me here for Harry's birthday and graduation don't you?"

"Yes, Mummy, but who is going to watch me today?"

"Uncle Severus and Miss Harry will be here with Mr. Black."

"What about Uncle Tiberius and Mr. Lupin?"

"Uncle Tiberius and Mr. Lupin will be back by lunchtime. They left early this morning on a mission for Dumbledore," Circe explained. She carefully avoided looking at Harry. "Aren't you going to start Potions today?"

"Yes, Mummy, but Miss Harry and Uncle Sev said I can't mix anything. I have to learn safety and equipment first," Phaedra pouted.

"That is how we all started. You don't want to melt down your cauldron do you?"

"I don't have a cauldron."

"Oh I wouldn't say that," Severus Snape's sardonic voice interrupted from the doorway, "what do you call this?" he asked, left brow arched, levitating a child's cauldron with the wand in his free hand while Sirius looked on.

"Uncle Sev, you bought me a cauldron!"

"Unfortunately no, it is a gift from your Uncle Tiberius. He bought us all our first cauldrons."

"You make sure to say thank you when he comes home later," her mother instructed.

"I will, Mummy," Phaedra promised as she got up and took the cauldron.

"Good morning, Mr. Sirius. You look tired. Are you okay? Miss Harry had bad dreams last night."

"I'm fine Phaedra," he assured the little girl. "You were having nightmares, again?" he asked, turning his attention to his goddaughter.

"They weren't nightmares," Harry insisted. "I simply had a lot on my mind so I had a restless night."

"Humph, she was all twisted in the covers and yelling in her sleep," Phaedra tattled.

"Indeed, Harry," Snape eyed her suspiciously, "we will need to have a little talk later."

"No, we will not! I was not having the kind of dreams you are both thinking," she tossed her head in annoyance, "and some things are none of your business. Phaedra it is not nice to tattle," Harry looked over at the little girl crossly.

"I'm sorry, Miss Harry. Please do not be mad at me. Headmaster Mr. Dumbledore asked me to tell them if you have nightmares. He said you don't like them to worry and don't always let them know when you have dreams about the bad wizards."

"I'm not mad at you, Phaedra, but now that you have told me this I will have a word with Dumbledore," Harry glared at Severus and Sirius, who were both red faced with embarrassment.

"Harry, we're only looking out for you. You have been through in seventeen years more than most people go through in a life time." Sirius stated matter of factly, as he sat down beside her, pulling Severus along with a sharp tug.

"Black you need not yank. I had every intention of sitting down too."

"Who was yanking? I was simply giving you a little nudge in the right direction."

"I'll nudge you in the right direction..."

"Enough! You two will never be separated if this keeps up. I said one-week minimum. If you cannot behave like adults, you do not deserve to be treated as such. For two men who are over thirty you both are acting more like you are Phaedra's age."

"Actually, I think my daughter is more mature than either of them," Circe sneered at her younger brother, "but you will see as you become more acquainted with the male sex that they never really grow up," Circe addressed Harry as she prepared to leave for work. "I will see you all tonight. Phaedra, you be a good girl while I'm at work and help Harry to make sure your uncle and Sirius do not kill one another," she sighed kissing Phaedra good-bye

"I will Mummy, don't worry," Phaedra smiled uncertainly as her mother started up the hall towards the front door to disappear by the front gate. "Miss Harry did Mummy really mean that Uncle Severus and Mr. Sirius would hurt one another?"

"No, she knows they won't," Harry replied glaring at the two men and challenging them to reply. Harry in fact suspected they just might try to curse one another. "Now lets go on down to the cellar and see how your uncles set up the Potions room. I need to familiarize myself with it too," she emphasized with a nod. "I can't teach you if I don't know where everything is myself, now can I?" she asked, not really expecting an answer as Phaedra followed her out of the kitchen.

The two girls made their way downstairs and Harry found that the cellar had been separated into two sections. The front portion was for storage and the potions room was in the back. The set up was similar to the one at Snape's town home and in the same manner as the classroom at Hogwarts. Harry made a mental note to ask the professors if all potions labs were set up in that manner to enable the Potions Masters to have ready access by knowing of the location of each substance.

"Here Phaedra, your uncles have set up a nice little work area for you. Put the cauldron down on the table on the stone slab."

"Why is there a stone slab on the table?"

"So the table won't burn when you light the cauldron. Larger cauldrons are put on a stone floor or in the hearth, like the ones over there on your left."

"How come there are so many kinds?"

"It depends on how much of a potion you are making, the bigger the cauldron the larger the amount. If you needed some medicine for a flu outbreak you would want to make a large enough supply to use for many persons," Harry explained, noting that Severus and Sirius had come into the room and were watching her.

She was used to Snape watching her so she just continued with Phaedra while the two men went over to where Snape had set up a work area for himself. The two wizards sat down, whispering quietly to one another. Harry knew they were talking about her, and had the suspicion they were up to something.

"Will I be using any of the big cauldrons?"

"No, those are for when you are older. Even the students in Hogwarts do not use the large ones until their sixth and seventh year. Besides you aren't making a large enough amount to warrant using one, but if your uncles or I need to use one maybe they will let you watch to see how it is done."

"You do something different?"

"Come here, and I'll show you. You will need to be aware of this for your own safety anyway," Harry told her taking her over to the stone hearth, built into the foundation of the building. "This is a swing arm," she said demonstrating how the cauldron could be swung out of the hearth and away from the fire, "you must always stay to the left of the cauldron as the arm moves to the right. You don't want to be scalded or burned. You must also wear a dragon hide apron and gloves to protect yourself."

"But I don't have those things."

"I have a feeling your uncles got them for you," Harry winked at Severus having seen him put them on his table, and directing Phaedra's attention towards the two men.

"Uncle Sev, did you buy these for me?"

"He sure did, Phaedra. He ordered them the other day and they only just arrived by owl post yesterday," Sirius smiled at the little girl, "and I got you this, he said handing her a box.

"What is it?" she questioned opening the small wooden chest.

"It's a potions kit," Harry remarked pleased that Sirius had thought of the little girl. "It contains all the basic ingredients you will need."

"What is in all the bottles?"

"Different things used in the potions. I'm sure when you run out your uncle will give you more. He has them all in large quantities stored in the jars on that wall," she pointed over at the wall opposite from where they stood. "Now you only will need one more thing, and that is this," Harry smiled taking a small leather case from the pocket of her jeans. Opening it, Phaedra saw that it was a small steel knife.

"Why do you use a knife?"

"How else will you cut the plants you will be using?" Snape asked with a slight twitch of his lip. "Harry bought you the knife, but I will expect you to use it properly and not consider it a toy."

"I will Uncle Sev, I promise. Thank you, Miss Harry and Mr. Sirius for buying me these things so I can mix the potions. Thank you too, uncle," Phaedra beamed hugging him.

"Now put the knife away in the leather case. You won't be using it for awhile," Harry instructed, "and what ever you do, don't forget that promise you just made to your Uncle Severus. If he catches you misusing that knife he will hex me from here to Hogwarts. He didn't want me to give it to you."

"Why?"

"I merely wanted to make sure you knew the proper rules for all the equipment and could demonstrate how to use it without hurting yourself or someone else."

"I will be careful, Uncle Severus."

"I know you will, Phaedra. Now let Harry finish showing you the equipment and then she can start to teach you all the safety rules," Severus nodded to the two girls.

Harry kept her face straight, but both men could see her eyes were sparkling with laughter. They knew she knew Severus safety rules inside out. No student in his classes was allowed to touch anything until they had scored at least a B on his safety test and wrote an essay on the dangers of Potion making. Harry and Phaedra placed her new Dragon hide gloves and apron along with her Potions kit and knife back on her worktable. While Harry took her around the Potions room and showed her the various articles, the two men continued to talk quietly among themselves.

"She will be an excellent teacher," Sirius remarked as he pretended to read a magazine so that Harry would not realize he was watching her.

"Teaching one seven year old is not the same thing as standing in front of a classroom," Severus commented.

"No...However, she will do fine. She has a way with people. I think it is because she is an empath. Even when she shields their emotions I think she can inwardly sense what they are feeling and instinctively reacts to it."

"Perhaps, I have found that when she is interested in something she is a quick learner. Should she dislike something she will ultimately do her best to try and avoid the situation or topic."

"Did she try to avoid your class? You did work with her one on one."

"She took my class because it was required. The one on one was at Albus insistence for her safety and to advance in the Dark Arts training."

"Yes, but you also had to teach her Occlumency."

"She resisted at first, you know that. If she had not been so stubborn, maybe things would have been different that night at the Ministry."

"She would have gone anyway. Harry's greatest asset is that she will always protect the people she loves. You know that. Look what happened last Christmas with Phaedra. She went out of her way to protect her from Voldemort."

"For which I will be eternally grateful. If anything had happened to my niece..." Snape's voice trailed off. He was uncomfortable being so open with Sirius, and directed his attention towards Harry. "Potter, why don't you show Phaedra the various entrails she will have to get used to using. She does not like 'squishy things,' as she so often puts it."

"Professor Snape, I will show her what I think she needs to know in my own way. I am teaching her, so let me do so."

"She told you, Severus," Black chuckled softly. "You just don't want to talk about how you feel towards her. It can't be easy for you. Every time you look at her, you have to be reminded of how we got our jollies off by harassing you when we were kids. Your soul mate is a dead ringer for her father, and my best friend. Don't believe for one minute she was not truly upset when she found out what we were really like. She had this image of James as being a saint."

"And how do you feel about her, Black?" Severus inquired coolly.

"I care for her very deeply, but it will be up to her to choose who she will spend the rest of her life with. What will you do if she chooses someone other than you?"

"The question is what will you do?" Severus asked, as Harry stopped and turned to look over at the two of them, her features arched into a frown. "She can sense our feelings, Black. Perhaps we should continue this conversation later?"

"I think that would be an excellent idea, and Remus should also be a part of it too." Sirius smiled at Harry as she started to come back across the room towards them.

"Is everything all right? I feel the two of you are worried about something?"

"We're fine, Honey. Severus and I were just discussing the upcoming term at Hogwarts," he lied.

"Yes, I will be interested to see how you handle a group of eleven year olds. It will be quite different from doing tutoring with Phaedra," Snape agreed smoothly.

Harry cocked her head, and continued to frown. "What could be so troublesome between you two that you would lie to me?"

"We aren't lying, Honey."

"No, Sirius, you are, so don't compound it with another. I wish you would both just tell me. It doesn't have anything to do with the Deathaters, does it?"

"No, Potter, we were just talking about you."

"DO NOT CALL ME POTTER!" Harry clenched her teeth enunciating each word. "MY NAME IS HARRY."

"I apologize, Harry," Snape sneered, arching his brow amused. He found he rather enjoyed teasing her about her name. It would really get her to respond to him, and he liked the attention.

"Miss Harry...come on. You said you were going to show me some animal guts and nasty stuff I have to use in some of the potions," Phaedra called from where she was waiting by the storage containers.

"Harry, we'll talk with you later. Please don't be angry with us," Sirius begged using his puppy dog eyes, "we just want you to be happy. You have nothing to worry about right now. Now go and finish up with Phaedra."

"You know, I could learn to hate those big brown eyes of yours. Talk about using them to your advantage. I'm glad I didn't go to Hogwarts when you did. I would have been doomed to become one of your conquests."

"How about now?" he wondered, pleased with her admission.

"Now you have competition. I love Severus air of mystery, and Moony always seems so sad, you just want to make him smile," she grinned dreamy eyed. "Wait a minute, that's what you were discussing...how you both feel about me."

"And if we were?" Snape queried. "Would that disturb you?"

"Only if you were coming to blows over me, then again...it might be rather romantic to let you both duel it out."

"Then would the winner would get the fair maiden's hand in marriage?" Sirius asked using all his charm.

"No."

"No?" they both questioned simultaneously.

"No, the winner would have to take on Remus first," she said throwing back her head and laughing, calling over her shoulder as she walked back to work with Phaedra, "It's nice to know you both really care...my heart and my soul mate."

"You know Black, no matter which of us she chooses, we will all be in her life. She has been bound to us by blood with the Protectorship, and will love each of us in her own special way."

"Sometimes you actually say something worth listening to, Severus. I will tell you this, I know she will always make us happy, and as for me I intend to see that she never wants for anything or anyone ever again."

"Than for once you and I are actually in agreement, and I believe Lupin will feel the same way," Snape acknowledged, turning his attention back to the book he was studying, pretending to concentrate on something other than Harry.

Harry spent over two hours working with Phaedra, and by the time she finished it was mid morning. Phaedra was delighted but protested loudly when Harry gave her some homework to do.

"Miss Harry, it's summer time. I don't like to do homework and I still have all my summer reading to do."

"Phaedra, it is very important for you to memorize these rules and the equipment. I will also give you a test on them before we begin mixing your first potion."

"Uncle Severus, Miss Harry is going to give me homework and quizzes! Tell her that she doesn't have to do that!"

"On the contrary, Phaedra, I intend to commend Harry on her desire to teach you properly. Uncle Tiberius will be impressed."

"Actually, I am," the elder Snape remarked coming into the room. He moved as swiftly and silently as his nephew, and Harry had not heard him come in. "Has Remus returned yet? We had to separate in order to fulfill our respective assignments."

"No, he hasn't come down here anyway," Sirius frowned, "when did you see him last?"

"We parted company about an hour ago, and agreed to meet back here when we had finished gathering the information Albus requested."

"I'm sure he will be along soon then. In the meantime, why don't we set Harry up with a potion to mix? She has completed her work with Phaedra for the day," Snape informed his uncle.

"Wait a minute; I really have to do this homework?" Phaedra pouted.

"Yes, Phaedra, you have to do the homework," Tiberius replied examining the parchment Phaedra had in front of her. "I would not allow you to do any potion making until you can memorize these rules. Harry is wise to have you write each one five times, although I used to have your mother and uncle write them ten."

"Really? Mummy and Uncle Severus had to do this for homework when you taught them Potions?"

"They did," he tussled his great niece's hair, "and I would quiz them daily too. Harry is being very easy with you."

"Then I will do it," she relented. "What can I do while Miss Harry mixes her potion for you?"

"If you will be very good and not move you may come and sit with me and Mr. Black and watch," Severus quietly replied.

"Can I do my homework while Miss Harry works on her potion?"

"Very well, you may do so. I have some extra writing materials in my desk."

"Thank you Uncle Sev," Phaedra responded pleased that she could stay. "Uncle Tiberius, Mummy said not to forget to say thank you for the cauldron. I promise to take very good care of it."

"I know you will," Tiberius nodded at his young niece with the trace of a smile. "Now Harry, I want you to mix a love potion. I know they were not permitted at Hogwarts, and in fact I always disagreed with Albus over that, but he was concerned about the misuse of the potion."

"Is there any one in particular you want me to try? I have never done any of them," she responded, thinking of her dream.

"I want you to do the '*Cupid's Arrow*,' it is not the most difficult one, but it can be tricky," Tiberius explained opening a large tome containing the recipe for her to study.

"I'll drink to that," Harry replied looking up from the book. "How will I know if I did it right?"

"I'll know because I have mixed it and so has Severus, but you will also be testing it out."

"And who will I be testing it on?" she asked suspiciously.

"Yourself," Tiberius answered arching his brow, while Severus dark eyes were laughing at her and Sirius chuckled softly.

"I have to drink this stuff? It says I will go head over heels in love for one hour over the first person I see."

"Then I would suggest you look at someone you can trust," Tiberius snickered.

"Just how potent is this potion?"

"There is a very old Rock and Roll song called, '*Love Potion Number Nine*,' that is the basis for this potion. Have you ever heard the song?"

"You mean the one where the person starts kissing everything in sight?"

"The same," Tiberius nodded.

"And I thought Severus could be vicious," Harry laughed, and started gathering her ingredients from the stores on the shelves and setting the water to boil in one of the smaller cauldrons.

It was a complex and tricky potion and needed to be mixed slowly. It contained powdered bicorn horn, daisy roots, fluxweed, ginger roots, unicorn tail hair, and ground honeycombs. The animal ingredients were stewed first and then the daisy roots and ginger added. The honeycomb had to be ground into a fine powder the texture of talc, and sprinkled in a thimbleful at a time and then stirred three times clockwise and three times counter every fifteen minutes over the course of an hour. Harry finally completed the potion and removed the cauldron from the fire. She then set it to cool and began pouring it into the bottles she had secured from the storage area.

"Miss Harry that was terrific," Phaedra marveled.

"Thank you, but we still don't know if it will work."

"Then I would suggest you wait a few minutes and test it," Severus remarked looking up from his book.

"I say she did a good job! Look what a pretty shade of purple it is," Phaedra told her uncle Severus pertly.

"At least I know the color is right. The book said it should turn purple during the final stages of brewing."

"That is quite correct. The question is, did you mix it at the right dosage?"

"I followed the directions, so I hope I didn't make any mistakes."

"Well, we shall find out shortly," Tiberius smiled evilly.

"That smile does not bode well," Harry nervously licked her lower lip, looking at the three men.

"Well then, you can just make sure I am the first one you see," Sirius grinned. "I could use some extra cuddling and if it is too strong I promise to be polite."

"Hah!" Harry exclaimed, "you just want the added attention so you can get me to let you loose from Severus. You would tell me how much you cared and beg me to set you free so we could be alone."

"Harry, do you really think I would consider such a thing?"

"If you didn't I'm sure Severus did!" she laughed eyeing the two men suspiciously.

"I must confess it had not occurred to me to do so, but it would be a good idea," Snape remarked looking at Sirius slyly.

"We'll just have to be the first ones she sees after she drinks it."

"Not a prayer, I will look in the mirror when I drink it," Harry sneered smugly.

"You are aware that if you look at yourself you will spend the hour acting like that peacock, Gilderoy Lockhart?" Snape inquired thoughtfully.

"Then maybe you will have a fast antidote handy for me," she grinned back at him.

"Alas, I have none made at the moment," Snape jibed back.

"What kind of antidote?" Lupin's familiar voice came from the door. They had been so preoccupied that only Tiberius had been aware of his return.

"Remus, you're back!" Sirius beamed, unable to disguise the relief in his voice. "I was beginning to get concerned. Tiberius got back well over an hour ago."

"I got on the trail of some new information and was almost able to capture one of the younger Death eaters. I believe Harry may have known her at Hogwarts, a young woman by the name of Alicia Spinnet."

"She was in Gryffindor, but ahead of me. She was a reserve player on the Quidditch team," Harry responded shocked. "I just can't believe Alicia became a Death eater. She didn't seem the type to go over to the dark side."

"What is the type then?" Severus questioned menacingly. "Death eaters are not just Slytherins, as you have pointed out on several occasions."

"No, they aren't. I meant that she always seemed happy with her life. I would not have thought she was a purist, even though she is a pureblood."

"Perhaps she had other motives, we may never know," Remus interrupted calmly, "whatever the case, she escaped me when I was crossing the street and she was able to disappear in an alley."

"So long as you're back safe and sound," Harry commented, "I could care less. She will be apprehended another time."

"Harry's right," Sirius agreed, "and at least we have been able to identify another of the Death eaters."

"Has Albus arrived yet?" Remus inquired. "I'd like to give him my report and then have a bite to eat."

"Albus said he will be here by twelve for lunch and we could report our findings then," Tiberius stated soberly. "I think he will be more than interested in what I have discovered. Were you able to find out where the new headquarters were located?"

"No," Remus admitted ruefully, "but I did find out they were somewhere just outside of London."

"I think we should actually discuss this later, and give a full report to Albus first," Tiberius said with authority, nodding towards Harry who had been listening intently along with Phaedra.

"I think we should all go up and have lunch. Harry is quite good in the kitchen and I know I am not the greatest cook," Sirius admitted with a grin, "unless someone else wants to do the honors and prepare lunch?"

"I think Miss Harry should. I've eaten the food both of my Uncles have made and it's yucky," Phaedra told the group of men screwing up her face to show her dislike.

"Then you can help me get the lunch ready so we can eat!"

"What about Dobby and Hazel? Why can't they help?"

"If I know the two of them they are probably way ahead of us. Let's hope they made the lunch so all we have to do is clean up. Helping in the kitchen is on both of our list of chores."

"How come they don't have any chores?" Phaedra asked pointing her thumb at the group of wizards as they all made their way out of the Potions room and up the stairs?"

"They do. I happen to know Sirius and Remus are responsible for the upkeep of the shrubs and flower gardens. Your Uncles take care of the vegetable and herb gardens and your Mum makes sure the house stays clean! We all live here so we need to make sure we all help to

maintain the household. The elves help with the cleaning and cooking but can't do everything."

"Who does the laundry?"

"We all are taking turns, Phaedra," Sirius smiled, "why?"

"I was wondering why my new shirt turned pink!"

"That was my fault," Sirius admitted, "I accidentally got a red sock in with the whites. I am afraid all of the underwear are now pink too," he laughed, eyeing Severus for his reaction.

"Obviously you didn't separate our things from the ladies."

"Afraid not, Sev, but no one will know you have on pink beneath your usual black robes unless you want them to," Sirius remarked playfully.

"Black if you so much as tell a soul outside of this room I'll..."

"Laugh it off with everyone else and find a formula to turn the whites back to normal," Harry finished for him, while Sirius had all he could do to restrain himself from laughing with glee at Severus scowl.

"Miss Harry, why is Uncle Severus so upset about his underwear?" Phaedra asked innocently. "I like pink panties."

"Phaedra, men do not wear pink underwear," Harry explained choking on her laughter, while Sirius looked at the ceiling and began to whistle.

"I think we should just drop this subject!" Severus snarled, glaring at Sirius.

"Come now, Severus," Tiberius chided, "there really is no reason to be angry. No one will see your underwear and the undergarments can be replaced. It was an honest mistake."

"You are correct, of course, uncle. I am acting childish. I'm sure Black did not do it deliberately," Severus replied aloud, but his mind was reeling as the thought crept through his brain, 'Like hell he didn't. The nasty bastard knew he would have to explain how our whites were ruined and made sure to embarrass me in front of Harry.'

"Severus, please don't be upset. I'm sure Sirius will be happy to replace our ruined undergarments," Harry nudged her godfather.

"Er...yes, of course I will," Sirius agreed, knowing Harry suspected he really did do it on purpose.

"Good, now can we eat lunch? I am famished and Phaedra has already admitted to being hungry. I see Harry was right, the elves did make us some lunch," Remus stated firmly, reaching for the tray of sandwiches the elves had left.

"What kinds of sandwiches did Hazel make for us, Miss Harry?"

"I see tuna and egg salad, roast beef, ham, and turkey with cheese. There is also a jug of grape juice, some fresh fruit, and some of the cookies and cake we didn't finish last night at Remus' party."

"What about Mr. Headmaster Dumbledore? Is there a piece of cake left for him?"

"Yes, Phaedra," Remus assured her, "I had Dobby set aside a nice big piece for him last night. Now let's eat!"

"Miss Harry can I have some cake and cookies, please?" Phaedra begged cocking her head coquettishly.

"Not until you have at least one sandwich," Harry countered with a smile.

"Oh...all right. I guess I'll have some...egg salad," she decided.

"Here you go," Harry said placing the sandwich on a plate and pouring her a glass of juice.

"I don't like the brown part of the bread," Phaedra pouted.

"It is called the crust, Phaedra," Snape told her quietly.

"Will you cut it off for me, Miss Harry?" she pleaded ignoring her uncle.

"I think you should eat it," Severus remarked sternly. "It is merely the portion of the bread which was baked on the outside."

"But Uncle Sev, it doesn't taste good. Mummy always cuts it off for me."

"Phaedra why don't you taste it, and if you still say you don't like it, I will cut it off for you," Harry commented giving Severus a dirty look.

"I don't see why she should not eat it. It is a waste of bread," Tiberius Snape added in defense of his nephew.

"I can see you were both raised to eat everything that was put in front of you," Harry responded caustically, trying not to lose her temper.

"And you weren't?" Tiberius queried looking down his long aquiline nose at her.

"I either had to eat it or starve, when I got anything at all. I promised myself that if I didn't like the food when I grew up I wouldn't eat it. I think forcing Phaedra to eat something she finds unappetizing is wrong. Most little kids don't eat the bread crusts, anyway. I know Dudley and his friends didn't."

"It's okay, Miss Harry. Please don't fight with my uncles."

"Phaedra, if your Mum cuts off the crust for you then I will too, and your uncles be damned! If they want to make an issue over a piece of bread they can take it up with your mother. As for me, I think they are acting like a pair of cheapskates over something trivial," Harry glared,

removing the crusts from the sandwich, while the memory of her Aunt Petunia giving her Dudley's discarded bread crusts for lunch crept through her mind.

"Potter as Phaedra's uncle you have no business overstepping my authority," Severus threatened coldly.

"Oh, and are you going to hex me for it?"

"I don't need to," Snape sneered eyeing his Uncle Tiberius.

"What's the matter, you need your uncle to protect you from the nasty little witch?" she taunted.

"Harry, sit down and eat your lunch. You know better than to taunt Severus like that," Remus interceded trying to maintain a semblance of calm.

"Yes, Honey, you have had a tiring morning and the two of you are just taking out your frustrations on one another," Sirius soothed, inwardly delighted at their bickering, "have something to eat and a glass of juice and you will both feel better."

"Perhaps you are right, Black. I apologize, Harry. I am usually much more forthcoming with Phaedra."

"Apology accepted," she responded suspiciously, biting into a tuna sandwich as a knock came at the back door. "I'll get it," she said taking a big gulp of the grape juice and pulling open the door.

"Harry wait!" Sirius yelled, but it was too late, she was facing the gnarled and scarred figure of Mad Eye Moody.

"Alastor Moody! I have really missed you. I love you!" she shouted throwing herself into his arms, trying to kiss him.

"I see you have had your first lesson in vigilance and failed," the Auror laughed. "I presume you snuck her some of the love potion she mixed?"

"Alastor please, I love your roving blue eye. Please say you care?" Harry moaned as she continued to try and plant kisses on his stubbly face.

"I'm sorry Alastor, we had intended she look at one of her protectors, but she opened the door as the potion took effect," Tiberius grinned.

"Miss Harry you look silly," Phaedra giggled, watching Harry as she held onto Moody."

"It's not silly to be in love. Alastor please don't listen to them. I love you and want you to be mine forever."

"My dear, I'm afraid they are right. You have drunk the love potion Tiberius had you mix. It was a little Auror lesson in vigilance. You did not suspect they would spike your drink because they are your friends. You need to learn not to trust just anyone. Look what happened

with Hermione when she betrayed you to Voldemort. She was someone close to you, and it could happen again."

"Alastor, please don't lie to me. I love you. I need you and will do anything for you," Harry pleaded tearfully.

"Harry, honey, please don't cry. Alastor isn't lying. We thought you would look at one of us. We purposely had Severus get you mad to distract you," Sirius remarked in an attempt to pacify her, as he assisted Moody to disentangle himself from her embrace.

"Princess, it will be all right. Try and concentrate and fight the effects of the potion."

"Lupin is right, Harry, you need to keep your wits about you," Severus smooth voice chided. "You are capable of fighting off the effects of the potion. You have an inner strength that is beyond most witches and wizards."

"How could you all do this to me? You're all lying. I love Mad Eye. It isn't fair, you're all just jealous!" Harry hissed, tears streaming down her cheeks.

"Miss Harry, Mr. Sirius and Mr. Remus both love you and so does my Uncle Severus. You have to listen to what they are saying. They told me you would laugh about this, but you're crying," Phaedra anxiously looked at the adults, eyes filled with tears. "I didn't mean to trick you with the bread," she sobbed.

Harry looked at the little girl and gritted her teeth angrily; "they made you a part of their stupid little game?" she asked trying to focus her mind on something other than Mad Eye Moody.

"They said it would be fun and you would laugh about it. I'm sorry; please don't be mad at me."

"Mad...Eye...I love...NO!" Harry exclaimed trying to focus again. "I am...under...a love...potion. I am...not...in ...love with...Professor...Moody."

"Good Potter," Tiberius Snape praised looking at his watch, "keep trying to focus on reality."

"Severus...whose idea...was...this?"

"Whom do you think?" he replied grinning evilly at Sirius. "Who do you know that likes to play jokes?" Severus gloated, pleased to be able to get back at his rival for the business involving the underwear.

"Sirius Black...you will...rue...the day," she began, catching sight of Moody out of the corner of her eye. "Professor...please say you...love me too!"

"Constant vigilance, Miss Potter!" his gravelly voice bellowed.

"Professor?" Harry scowled up at him in confusion, a look of intense concentration on her face. "I am...Harry Potter. I am under...a...love potion. I am...going to...kill...my...godfather...when this...wears...off!" she commented furiously, whirling around to look at Sirius, who was trying hard not to laugh. "You are all...in...big...trouble...Mad

Eye...Please say you...love ...me," Harry gasped as Moody moved to sit down, blue eye roving about as his brown one studied her in amusement.

"Ah...Harry, my dear girl, you are doing quite well fighting the love potion. Tiberius, how long has it been since the potion took effect?"

"Fifteen minutes, Alastor. The usual time before wearing off is one hour, but she is amazing in her ability to control the negative effects of the mixture," Tiberius stated emphatically. "By the way Harry, you mixed the potion correctly. I am both pleased and surprised since it is so tricky. According to my nephew Potions is not your greatest talent, but I believe you have great potential."

"Thank...you...Mr. Snape. Your...nephew...should emulate you...more...often. Professor Moody, please say....NO! I AM NOT IN LOVE WITH ALASTOR MOODY," Harry fumed fighting the love potion with renewed effort. "Remus...were you aware...of...what...they were...up to?" she asked trying to redirect her attention.

"Princess I didn't realize they were going to make you drink the potion. I just knew Sirius and Alastor were going to do some Auror training to teach you to be on your guard with the people around you," he replied, trying not to smile at her discomfiture every time Moody crept into her field of vision.

"Miss Harry, why do they want to make you afraid of your friends?"

"They...don't. They are trying...to...teach...me...how to be...more...careful about...what I eat...or drink...even in the...company of...friends...and how to...control the...effects of...certain drugs."

"Why? Is someone going to give you a bad potion?"

"You never know, Phaedra," Moody nodded, "Harry will need to be careful when she is around someone suspected of going dark. We only sneaked a love potion into her drink, but it could easily have been a truth drug or even poison."

"Miss Harry is someone going to poison you?" the child asked in alarm.

"No Phaedra, no one is going to poison Harry," Severus calmed his niece. "We merely want her to be aware of possible dangers she may encounter working with Mr. Moody as an Auror."

"But Miss Harry is going to be a teacher at Hogwarts! You all said so. Why would she want to be an Auror too?"

"She wants to help keep us all safe from the dark wizards," Remus responded kindly, putting his hand on her shoulder. "This will help her to learn to be more alert to her surroundings."

"Professor Moody...I apologize for...embarrassing you...but..." Harry started, stopping to close her eyes. I am not...in love...with him. I must control...my...desire to...hug and...kiss him," she spoke aloud to herself. Opening her eyes she looked at her protectors. "I am going...to get...even with...you guys for...this."

"Honey we really didn't mean to embarrass you like this with Alastor," Sirius chuckled, trying to give her a hug but she brushed him aside. "We just thought it would be a good idea to test your potion making ability at the same time as doing some unsuspected Auror training. Alastor felt it would be good to test you unawares, as a lesson in alertness."

"Well...you will all have...plenty of...time to...consider doing such a...mean and stupid trick...on me...again. I hope you...and Severus will...enjoy...staying tied together for...the...rest of...the...summer," she intoned spitefully. "Professor Moody...I apologize for...any embarrassment I may...have caused. Now I am...going to go and...lie down for a while...as the potion...has given me...a...headache. Please feel free...to join...everyone for lunch. I will...see...you all...later," Harry excused herself rising from the table.

"How long has it been now, Tiberius?" Moody asked as she left the room.

"It took her a total of twenty-six minutes to regain control," Tiberius answered studying his watch. "I find that quite remarkable in view of the fact she had no idea we spiked the juice."

Harry merely smiled at them as she left the kitchen, still struggling with the effects of the love potion. She made her way upstairs, and penned a brief note to Hermione and Ron, telling them what happened, and after securing them to Hedwig's leg, she lay down on her bed and closed her eyes. The potion was wearing off rapidly, but she was exhausted from the mental struggle, and rolled over and fell asleep until Phaedra came and woke her up about three hours later. They spent the rest of the afternoon playing with the Monopoly game.

Harry was hoping Dumbledore would come since he did not come for lunch. She wanted talk to him about his continued insistence to know if she was having nightmares, as well as what had happened with the love potion. She suspected he had known what they were planning, and she was disturbed that he would agree to it. However, the Headmaster did not come, and sent a message with Fawkes that he would be there in the morning due to continued problems at Hogwarts, and asked Remus and Tiberius to send their reports back with him. He also reminded them to please save his piece of cake. His affinity for sweets helped to temper her mood somewhat, and they rest of the day was spent peacefully despite the ongoing glares she sent to her protectors for what they had done.

Part 6 - Relationships

Harry had given Severus and Sirius the cold shoulder all week, and only spoke to them when she was either working on a potion with either of the Snapes, or doing some more Auror training with Sirius. The two men were still bound at the wrists and were going out of their way to calm Harry's ruffled feathers, as Dumbledore had so aptly put it.

The Headmaster had come the day following the incident with the love potion, and Harry had a long talk with him. He had explained that he knew they were going to do something of the sort, but that he did not interfere as the Auror training was entirely up to Moody. He also wanted her to know that he understood her anger over his asking Phaedra to tell them if Harry was having any nightmares, and apologized after extracting her promise that she would tell them immediately should any occur. Harry wanted to know why he was so worried, since Voldemort was dead, but he said he was merely concerned, as the battle had taken such a toll on her. Harry decided not to ask any questions, and took him at his word, but she had a nagging feeling that he did not want her to know something just yet.

As the week wore on, Harry found she was becoming more and more the focus of Sirius and Severus attention in an effort to be freed from one another. She could tell they were concerned that she would keep them that way for the entire summer. Secretly, Harry had decided to free them on Saturday morning in time for the meeting of the Order and her swearing in ceremony, but in the meantime, she was enjoying watching them fall all over one another in an effort to win her favor. They had sent her candy, flowers, and small gifts. Severus had even written her a short poem, hinting at his affections, while Sirius had brought her a picture he had found in some of his belongings at Grimmauld Place. It showed her parents the day after she had been born, holding up their new infant. Harry noted she already had on a blue blanket.

Remus was giving Harry some extra attention himself, enjoying the fact he could get her alone once in awhile. They had taken to walking in the garden at night and watching the moon, as it waxed bigger each night. Remus said he really didn't mind the moonlit walks, and laughed when she asked him what he thought the two men were thinking. Sirius was giving Phaedra her nightly astronomy lesson, while Severus sat by faking boredom, watching Harry and Remus out of the corner of his eye.

"Well, Princess, I think if he had the chance he would turn his telescope on us instead of the constellations, and Severus has been scowling for the past hour. I know he would like to spend some quiet time alone with you, and so would Sirius. I just hope they don't try and hex me!" he laughed playfully.

"You know Padfoot won't, but Severus is another matter, although he is more likely to slip you some poison," Harry grinned, reaching up to push a stray lock of hair off his forehead.

"I think you are enjoying making them sweat this out."

"Who, me?" she asked innocently, green eyes glittering with laughter as they reflected off the moonlight.

"Are you going to let them go? It is Friday after all."

"Now Moony, you know I can't tell you that. Padfoot is your best friend and I'm sure he has probably asked you to find out whatever you can," she replied saucily, winking at him.

"Severus actually tried to use his telepathy and get into my mind, but all he got was an Occlumency lesson."

"I'll wager he was actually probably pleased with that, even though he didn't find anything out."

"He did give me one of his rare smiles," she answered glancing over at the two men on the far side of the garden. Phaedra seemed to be enjoying herself, and Sirius was being extremely patient with her as she asked all kinds of questions.

"Well, Padfoot didn't ask me to find out for him. He wants you to feel that you can trust him, Princess, especially since he will be your partner should Moody ever need either of your assistance," Remus informed her seriously. 'If you only knew how much he really loves you,' Remus thought, 'I hate to see him look at me so jealously when we're together.'

"Remus," she nudged him, "you're not listening to me. I asked you about Severus."

"Sorry," he flushed, "what did you want to know?"

"I was wondering how he was taking being bound to Sirius for the past few days. Has there been any improvement in his attitude?" I know Sirius is trying hard, but Sev is such a complicated and quiet individual..."

"I understand your point," Remus nodded, "he is much better. They are actually talking to one another about things they never would have discussed otherwise, but Severus is a very private man, Harry. He doesn't like to show his feelings, especially to Sirius."

"My Dad and Sirius really did a number on him in school, didn't they?"

"Partly, but Severus wasn't always the innocent victim either," Remus defended his friends, "and it goes way beyond what happened at Hogwarts when we were kids."

"How so?" she queried intrigued.

"His family was all dark wizards, and his mother was a real witch, literally. She only had Severus to provide an heir to the line, and after that, she could have cared less. Circe is actually his half sister. Severus' father was widowed, and wanted a male heir, so he married again purely for convenience. If it weren't for his Uncle Tiberius, who walked away from the family like Sirius did to his, those two would have been made to follow in the family traditions."

"But Severus joined the Death eaters," Harry stated confused.

"Only to please his father, who died in the service of the Dark Lord. I do not think Severus really wanted any part of what was going on. He has a gentle nature when he allows it to show, and then his wife and son were killed...well, add that to the equation, and you have an angry, lonely, and bitter man," Remus answered softly. 'What am I doing? I should be pushing her towards Padfoot, not Severus...yet he is her soul mate...I wonder what inner pain they both share...I can see the sensitivity...'

"It just seems so tragic, almost like a romance novel."

"What about Sirius? You said his life was like a novel too?" Remus reflected, taking the opening she had provided to boost his friend's image.

"So could yours. You suffered so much, but in a far different manner. You lost your best friends, all in one night, plus you have been shunned most of your life simply because of your...shall we say...chronic condition?"

"You can say it you know. I'm not ashamed of the fact that I am a werewolf, and I did get one of my friends returned to me...twice in fact."

"Yeah," Harry smiled warmly up at him, "and I happen to think you are a wonderful werewolf. You really are nice and fluffy, and I can't believe that without your potion you would hurt anyone deliberately. I think it is just from the pain and confusion caused by the transformation that werewolves get such a bad rap. Real wolves are also totally misunderstood too."

"Well, I wouldn't want to find out what I would do without my potion. I can remember what it was like before it was invented, Princess, and believe me it was no picnic. It still isn't."

"I'm sorry you have to hurt so much. I know how uncomfortable you are with it. I can see it in your eyes, even though you do a good job of trying to hide the pain you're in."

"One of those marvelous back rubs with your healing energy might help," he grinned, as Sirius looked up and scowled. He had apparently overheard the remark.

"Remus, will you answer a question for me about you and Sirius?"

"That depends on what it is."

"How close are the two of you? I have heard stories..." Harry's voice trailed off uncertainly.

"I see...well...we're both of the canine persuasion, if that helps to answer your question."

"Not really, but I don't suppose you will tell me anything else?"

"Harry, if you're trying to ask if we are lovers, I can tell you that we are not!" he stated emphatically. "Not in the way you're thinking anyway. We are close in a way that is hard to describe in words..."

"Soulmates?"

"After a fashion, yes, but that doesn't mean we can't love someone or marry them. It is sort of like you and Ron, but on a more intimate level because of our canine feelings too."

"I think I understand...dogs and wolves are pack animals, each having a place in the pack...it creates a bond among the members."

"Very good," Remus smiled down at her, "I'm impressed that you are able to understand."

"Would it cause a problem if one of you had a relationship with someone you both cared for?"

"No, it wouldn't, especially if that someone was bound to both of us by blood, since they would also be a part of our pack."

"What if the pack member went outside of the pack?" she asked, glancing over at Severus, who was watching intently.

"Then we would just welcome a new member into it," he reassured her. 'She's torn between the three of us, and doesn't know what to do about it. Oh, Merlin, if only we could decide for her, but the choice has to come from her heart, otherwise she will only end up hating us,' Remus considered as they walked back towards the two men. Phaedra's lesson had ended, and Circe had taken her up to bed.

"Still in the mood for that back rub?"

"Hmm...I would actually love it."

"Then you shall have it," she smiled, watching Severus and Sirius squirm uncomfortably. "Severus, do you have any of that muscle relaxant on hand that you make for Professor Moody?" Harry asked coming up to the two men. "The one made from Monkshood and Abyssinian Shrivelfig."

"I gave some to Lupin along with the pain relievers I mixed for his birthday gift," Snape replied coolly, "it is in the aluminum tin."

"I will go and get it, Princess. I have the box of potions Severus gave me in my room."

"Don't bother, we can just go into your room and you can take off your shirt," Harry said, noting Sirius was growling softly in his throat.

"Sirius, behave! I am giving your best friend and my protector a back rub to ease his suffering. If you continue to act like a jealous schoolchild, I may just give you some reverse aging potion and turn you into one!"

"Then maybe I will be able to free myself from Severus," he grinned.

"No, then you would be young enough to have to go back to Hogwarts and have Severus for your teacher!"

"The reverse aging potion is on the third shelf from the left in my private stores," Snape sneered, looking at Sirius wickedly.

"Better yet, I will give it to both of you and you can have me and Remus for your teachers. Maybe then we will knock some sense into Sirius' head and manners into Severus'!"

"Harry are you suggesting that my manners are less than adequate?" Snape asked condescendingly

"Severus," Harry stated as they walked into the kitchen, "you are intelligent, mysterious, and have the potential to excel in whatever you do. However, you are one arrogant son of a bitch!" she nodded emphatically.

"Honey, I'm surprised it took you this long to find that out," Sirius laughed, enjoying watching Harry's interaction with Snape.

"Sirius, Sev may be arrogant, but you can be one down right vicious dog!"

"Hah, she has you pegged after all, Black. I'm glad to see she is not a fool for a handsome face."

"If I was, I would have been gushing over Lockhart like everyone else was, even if I would have had to keep it a secret," Harry reminded him bluntly, entering the bedroom Remus normally shared with Sirius at the rear of the house. "Besides, Sirius is better looking than Lockhart was any day, and he is not conceited about his good looks."

"Thank you, Honey," Sirius smiled warmly.

"Now, as for the two of you being separated, I want some honest answers from the both of you, while I give Remus his back rub," Harry remarked as Remus took the muscle rub from his top drawer and she motioned for him to remove his shirt. "Remus lay down here on the bed, so I can reach you better."

"Of course, Princess, you just make sure my two counterparts don't hex me," he teased.

"If they so much as try I will transform the two of them into a couple of chocolate cream pies and feed them to Dumbledore!"

"At least she picked something sweet for us," Sirius laughed, nudging Snape in the ribs.

"Indeed," Snape nodded, "why chocolate cream pies though?" he asked puzzled.

"Because," she replied kneading Remus back, "I love chocolate."

"See, Sev, she still loves us."

"You know, you two really ought to give Harry a little more credit. She really worries about you both...Ow! My spine is really hurting tonight, Princess, go a little lighter."

"Sorry, but it is from the healing energy. I had to let it penetrate deeper than usual. Your muscles are all tied in knots with your transformation coming in a few days."

"I know," Remus smiled sadly, "don't worry about it. You really are helping me to feel better."

"Severus, do you know of any potion he can use in his bath that will also help. It seems a nice hot bath combined with some kind of muscle relaxant could really help Remus."

"That's a wonderful idea, Honey. How about it Sev? Do you know of anything that Remus could use?"

"Hmm...Not off hand, but let me check my books. I may be able to make something up, or better yet, maybe Harry would like to try?"

"I'll do the research and you and your uncle can follow me and tell me if I am on the right track," Harry replied accepting the challenge of creating a new potion. "We can name it *Moony's Miracle Muscle Relaxant*," she grinned.

"I like that, Honey, what do you think, Moony?"

"I'm flattered."

"Hmm...Let's see if you can get it made, first, Harry. You are merely a novice potion maker. It is not easy to create something new. Have you any idea how to go about starting?"

"Oh goody," she sneered, "we get to play Snapes' testing game."

"Snapes' testing game, what is that, Princess?" Remus queried lowering his neck as she kneaded the aching muscles of his cervical spine.

"He loves to give me these little verbal questions, almost like a quiz, to see how much I know. You both do the same thing, but are more direct."

"In other words, we would ask you directly how you might mix the potion, where as Severus is letting you tell him how to do it?" Sirius mused shrewdly.

"So tell us, how would you do it?" Remus asked, amused.

"I'll have to pull out his books and see what is already available and how it is made, first. If there is something, then maybe I can improve on it, otherwise I will have to research how water will affect the various plants and other items I might require to make the compound and how they will interact with one another too," she considered the matter, noting Snape had arched his eyebrow. "Then I think the next step would be to decide exactly how strong I would need to make the mixture to be sure it is safe yet effective. I guess then I could start trying various combinations to see the effects. I'm not sure how I would test them though," Harry said eyeing Snape warily.

"There are a number of ways to test the mixture, assuming you come up with something," he replied, lips twitching with amusement, "haven't I always had my students try the potions on themselves to see if they worked?"

"Yeah, but you always knew if they were right and had an antidote handy if they weren't."

"So now you are faced with a situation of what to do should the potion come out wrong, since it will be a new mixture. How will you handle that?"

"I don't know," she confessed, worriedly. "I don't want to test it on an animal since it may work differently, but it has to work on a human and a werewolf to boot!"

"Have you considered you may have to test the mixture on Professor Lupin?" Tiberius Snape's quiet voice asked from the door. Harry looked up sharply, as she hadn't heard him come in. He was leaning casually against the frame, eyebrow arched in the familiar Snape manner, studying her closely.

"Don't worry, Princess. It may actually be to your benefit to be able to test the potion on an actual werewolf."

"Remus!" she exclaimed hotly, "What if it is too strong and you collapse, or it causes your heart to beat irregularly, or it creates a toxic reaction on your skin, or..."

"I see you are considering all the possibilities, that is an excellent way to start," Tiberius remarked, pleased that she understood the dangers in creating a new potion. "Severus, she really does have possibilities. Harry may not be a natural at potions, but she will do quite well in her own right."

"If I didn't think she could do it, Uncle, I would never allow her in the lab, let alone teaching Phaedra."

"Princess, could you get my lower spine a bit more? It is really bothering me tonight." Remus interrupted apologetically.

"Sure, you're stiffer than usual, how come?"

"It happens that way sometimes," Remus reassured her, "some months are worse than others."

"So when do you plan on starting your research for Moony's new muscle relaxant," Sirius asked seating himself on the bed opposite her, pulling Snape down with him.

"I'll work on the research in the evenings when you give Phaedra her astronomy lesson," she replied, "so long as I can have access to some of Severus, books."

"You may," Snape nodded, "and perhaps my uncle will find some of his which you may find useful."

"I think I have a few that Harry will be able to understand," Tiberius responded thoughtfully.

"Understand?" she questioned puzzled.

"Many are quite old, and unless you are well versed in Latin, as my nephew is, then I suspect you will have a difficult time, as they are written in that language," Tiberius explained with a smirk.

"The only Latin I can understand is used in most of the spells I know, or are roots for common English," she confessed.

"Then maybe we should all teach you, Honey. Would you like to learn?"

"Sirius, I never knew you could read Latin."

"Umm...I can, and so can Remus. All the pureblood wizarding families make certain their children are tutored in Latin. Remus is better at it than I am, and much as I hate to admit it, Severus is better than either of us."

"Years ago, it was taught at Hogwarts, but since most books have been translated into English and Latin is considered obsolete, it was dropped a long time ago. I believe it was still taught in Albus' time though," Tiberius remarked.

"Oww..." Remus groaned again, as Harry started to knead his shoulders again.

"Hang on Remus," Harry said straddling his back in an effort to massage his sore muscles more comfortably while directing her healing energy more effectively.

"Uncle Severus..." Phaedra began coming into the room in her pajamas.

"Phaedra, why are you out of bed?" Tiberius asked sternly.

"I'm looking for Uncle Severus. He said he would read with me tonight," Phaedra answered contritely. "Miss Harry are you and Mr. Remus shagging?"

"What?!" Harry choked red faced, while Remus suppressed a laugh, Sirius snickered, and Severus and Tiberius arched their left brows simultaneously.

"Phaedra, where did you hear about shagging?" Circe asked in shock, coming in from the kitchen.

"My friend, Althea. She said that one day she saw her mummy sitting on her daddy, and her older sister told her they were shagging," Phaedra answered innocently, confused by the attitude of the adults.

"Phaedra," Harry began patiently, climbing off Remus, "Mr. Remus and I were not shagging. I was giving him a back rub. He is going to transform into his wolf in a few days, and he becomes stiff and sore as the time draws closer."

"Oh, I hope you feel better, Mr. Remus. Will you read to me now uncle?" Phaedra asked turning her attention to Severus.

"Yes, Phaedra, Sirius and I will be up in a few minutes. I think your mother wants to talk with you first," Severus eyed his sister with amusement. He was aware of her discomfiture with Phaedra's question.

"I will come with you, Circe," Tiberius smiled at his niece. "Harry, I will give you some of the books tomorrow and you can start your research," he said following Circe out as she took Phaedra back to bed.

As soon as they were out of the room, Sirius could no longer contain himself, and burst out with his barking laugh.

"Sirius, it's not funny!" Harry flushed, avoiding his gaze, but she couldn't hide her grin as she rolled her eyes. "Phaedra merely asked an innocent question. I'm sure Circe will explain things in a way she will understand for now."

"I'm not sure who is redder," Sirius laughed, tears running down his cheeks, "you or Remus."

"Padfoot, Harry is right, Phaedra really has no idea what shagging is all about," Remus replied, pulling his shirt back on.

"My niece is quite inquisitive when it comes to relationships," Snape remarked casually, "since she doesn't have a father at home, and Circe rarely dates. Phaedra finds it confusing. She is learning there are all kinds of ways people can feel affection for one another," he said studying Harry carefully. 'I think I'm falling in love with her. I never thought this would happen to me again, let alone with Potter's daughter,' he considered looking into her green eyes. 'I need to be strong, since I know she has deep feelings for Black, but I swear to Merlin if he ever breaks her heart he will know what it is to be tortured by a Deatheater.'

"Severus, what's wrong?" Harry asked confused. She had sensed his feelings for a brief instant.

"Nothing, I was just considering what you should say if Phaedra questions you about shagging," Snape lied smoothly.

"I'll just tell her the truth so long as Circe agrees with me."

"How much will you tell her exactly, Honey? You know she's only going to be seven."

"I'll just tell her shagging is a slang word for when two adults who love each other are close in a special way. That should satisfy her curiosity."

"And if she asks more questions?" Severus demanded.

"I will be as honest and open as her age allows."

"I think that is the prudent thing to do, Princess," Remus nodded pleased with her sensibility. "Now, how about if you and I have a nice cup of tea and a snack while Severus and Sirius go up and read her that story Severus promised."

"Wait a minute, it's Friday night. Are you going to separate us?" Sirius asked, brown eyes begging.

"Not tonight, Padfoot. You will just have to deal with one another until I feel you are ready to be two separate people again."

"Harry, Sirius and I are getting along and even finding out you were right. We do have some things in common. I see no reason to leave us bound at the wrist."

"I am well aware of all your similarities. You are both stubborn, smart, have strong family backgrounds in the dark arts, are both purebloods, and share a relationship with me. Is that enough for starters?"

"Are you as versed in our differences?" Snape queried looking at her down his long nose.

"He's handsome, your average looking, Sirius is an animagus, you're into potions, he's a prankster, you're serious, he's outgoing and you're shy. How am I doing so far?"

"You are one smart little witch, and I can see why you are so concerned that we get along," Sirius smiled. "I'm proud to be your godfather."

"Well then, my handsome godfather, flattery will not get you separated. I care about you both, and I want you to be friends. I think after all I have been through I deserve a miracle," Harry grinned giving Sirius a quick peck on the lips as she departed for the kitchen.

"Nice try, Black, but she isn't going for it."

"Have you got any better ideas?"

"Not at the moment, but I will think on it."

"You really have them fit to be tied," Remus laughed as he poured the tea, aware of his play on words.

"I know," Harry chuckled evilly, as the two men headed upstairs to read to Phaedra.

Remus sat studying Harry as she sipped her tea. She was growing more beautiful by the day. She still preferred to wear her glasses though, and he wondered why. She had such beautiful eyes. 'I need to let her know I care, but that it would be unwise to become too emotionally involved with me. I can't give her the kind of life Padfoot or Severus can. The Ministry would never leave us alone. Between her powers and my being a werewolf, well...'

"Remus, what is it? I can sense you're troubled about something."

"Princess," he began, "you know I care about you."

"I care about you too, so why the long face?"

"I don't feel you and I should become more involved than we already are," he answered carefully, taking her hand in his.

"I'm not sure I understand."

"What I'm trying to say is that I'm not good husband material for you."

"Why on earth would you think that?"

"Harry, to begin with, I'm a werewolf, and the Ministry can be...well...intrusive at times."

"Remus, I'm not afraid of the Ministry."

"Listen to me, you're a very powerful witch, and should you marry a werewolf..." he shrugged looking sad.

"The Ministry can go to Hell. If I think you and I belong together then I will never rest until people realize that we love one another and there is no dark magic involved, because that is what they'll be thinking, isn't it?" Harry demanded, gritting her teeth.

"Yes, Princess, they will. You have powers that are unusual and potent. I am considered a dark creature. The Ministry will worry that you are starting to practice what the Muggles would call Black Magic."

"Remus, if you and I should marry, and it is a possibility, then we will have many people who will support and understand that there is no dark magic involved. If need be we will go and live in a different country to be rid of the prejudice here."

"It will only follow us."

"Then we will just ignore it, and show them they are wrong!" Harry emphasized tossing her head angrily, knocking her glasses off.

"I hope you're right, Princess, but there is also another problem," he said picking her glasses up off the floor and slipping them back on for her.

"What is that?"

"I can't support you in the same manner that Sirius or Severus can. I am not a rich man."

"So you can stay home with the kids, and I'll go to work!" she grinned. "Besides, I have quite a sum of money in the bank, and I also don't think my other two protectors would want to see us starve."

"I should know better than to try and argue with a woman, especially when she inherited her mother's righteous attitude," Remus chuckled.

"That's right, but in any event we are a long way from any such involvement just yet. I am getting to know the three of you more every day, and time will tell how we all end up. It's nice to see my endurance is still working for me," she smiled, referring to his role in the Protectorship to help her face the difficulties before her.

"Can I offer you a suggestion?"

"What is that?"

"Listen to what your heart tells you. When you finally decide we will all stand beside you, whether it is one of us or someone else. Your happiness comes first. Take your time, go slowly, and just enjoy being happy."

"Remus, you are one special werewolf."

"I think so too," Sirius said from the door to the kitchen."

"I see it's puppy love time," Severus rolled his eyes.

"Severus, you just behave. It's not your fault you're not in the canine club," Harry teased, "but I think you're kind of cute anyway. Now if you will all excuse me I am going up, take a hot bath, and go to bed. Tomorrow will be an interesting day and I am looking forward to seeing Ron and Hermione."

"Has Miss Granger started her new job at the Ministry yet?" Severus asked as Remus rinsed out the teacups.

"No, she starts the Monday after our graduation. Our exam scores have to be finalized first."

"What has she been doing?" Sirius inquired with interest.

"She was on vacation with her parents in Greece. I got an owl from her two days ago and she is all excited about starting in the Order, but doesn't think there will be too much to do now that Voldemort is dead."

"How did you respond to that?" Snape queried.

"I sent her a letter by return owl telling her she should have been at the Burrow the night we were all attacked by the Deathaters. Their leader may be gone again, but they are still out there causing trouble. I also reminded her it is good to be prepared in the event another dark wizard decides to try and wreak havoc."

"That's our girl!" Remus praised giving her a quick hug.

Harry just shook her head grinning as she left the kitchen and headed upstairs to relax in the tub. She had no idea that while she was dozing in a sea of warm bubbles her three protectors were having a serious discussion about both Harry and the upcoming meeting of the Order...

"Has anyone spoken with Albus since he was here on Wednesday?" Sirius asked.

"No, Padfoot, how about you Severus?"

"I have not heard from him, but I know he is worried about the information he has been receiving. The Deathaters are up to something sinister and he has grave concerns about the security of Azkaban. The Dementors who have not been destroyed are still aligned with the dark faction, and Moody feels another escape from Azkaban may be planned.

"But the Dementors are no longer guarding the prison," Sirius argued.

"No, but they know the island better than the present guards. If taken by surprise the guards will be easily overpowered."

"Hmm...What about your uncle, has he heard anything from his sources in the export business?"

"I do not presume to question my uncle, Black, but if he has heard anything it has not been good. He is more on edge these days, and he is constantly changing and updating the wards around the house."

"We will be shifting to London in a few weeks to start the trials, so if anything is going to happen at Azkaban it will be before then," Remus interjected thoughtfully.

"I agree, but we should not let Harry know what is going on. She will find out soon enough after her swearing in celebration tomorrow. It is good to see her so relaxed and happy," Sirius smiled warmly.

"Listen you two, we need to have a little talk about Harry," Remus informed them seriously, as they sat relaxing around the kitchen table.

"I have noticed the two of you have been enjoying each others company quite a bit lately," Snape sneered.

"Yeah, and what was that little bit about marriage we overheard just before we came in?" Sirius questioned. "Are the two of you becoming that intimate in such a short time, Moony?"

"No, Padfoot, we are not! We were merely discussing the possibilities and I warned her that if she chose me as a husband I could not take care of her in the same manner as you or Severus. I wanted her to know that marriage to a werewolf would be difficult politically too."

"How did she respond?" Snape questioned with interest.

"She argued with me. She has Lily's sense of right and wrong, and simply said that we would deal with it," Remus smiled. "What really concerns me is that she is so torn between the three of us."

"Is it that bad, Moony?"

"I think so. I told her to take her time and enjoy being happy for a while. She's young and needs time to make up her mind. I think she is secretly worried about hurting us."

"I think so too," Sirius agreed. "I know she worries about how she feels towards me, and is confused since Severus is her soul mate."

"The decision must come from her. To press her too soon would be disastrous for all of us," Snape scowled. "She has to understand that no matter whether she chooses one of us or George Weasley, we will always be bound together and care about what happens to her."

"I think she is also worried about one of us falling in love with some one else. Albus told me the day she was at the Ministry with him she became jealous of one of the registrars when she asked about me?" Sirius remarked thoughtfully.

"Another new admirer, Padfoot?" Remus teased

"She was just a witch who was responsible for recording some of my markings, not that I have many."

"Obviously, since you are simply a large black dog," Snape remarked dryly.

"At least I don't smell like formaldehyde," Sirius countered.

"Both of you knock it off," Remus retorted, "you know it upsets Harry when you snap at one another. That is why she has you tied together. I have been spending some time with her all week, and we have both enjoyed one another's company. I think we should all spend some time alone with her. It will help her to decide how she really feels about each of us."

"You're practical as ever, Moony," Sirius chuckled, "and I agree."

"As usual, Lupin, you have hit the proverbial nail on the head," Snape agreed. "Should we all organize our schedules to be with her, or do you believe we should just do so as the opportunity arises?"

"If we plan our schedules she may become suspicious. I think we should all play this by ear," Sirius stated thoughtfully. "She is an empath, and can sense when we are hiding something. I want Harry to be happy above all else, no matter whom she marries. I will always be her godfather and her protector if she decides her life mate should be someone else."

"In effect, her happiness will be our happiness," Snape agreed, nodding.

"It is nice to see we all feel the same way," Lupin grinned, "now if you two will excuse me, I am going to go and do some research Albus requested and then go to bed."

"I guess you and I are still stuck with one another, Snivellus," Sirius leered evilly at Snape, "togetherness can be such sweet retribution."

"Knock it off, Black, or you will find out the true meaning of retribution," Severus glared dragging him to his feet and pulling him out of the kitchen, Sirius barking laugh taunting him all the way down the hall...

Harry dried herself off following her bath and donning a nightgown crawled into bed. Phaedra was breathing quietly in the opposite bed, but Harry sensed she was still very much awake. She knew Phaedra wanted to talk to her, so she decided to let the little girl know it was okay to do so.

"I know you're awake, Phaedra, so stop pretending to be asleep."

"How did you know?"

"I am an empath, and could feel your need to talk to me. I could also feel your anxiety over trying to hide the fact you were not asleep. If I couldn't feel your emotions you would have had me fooled."

"Really? That's great. I need to perfect my pretend skills since no one ever tells me anything."

"You are just a little minx," Harry laughed, "but with your family of telepaths it won't be easy to fool them."

"I didn't think of that, Miss Harry."

"Keep practicing, if nothing else you will be able to keep them out of your head and can learn Occlumency."

"What's that?"

"The art of keeping your mind clear so no one can read your thoughts or control them, like Voldemort tried to do with me."

"Ooo... that must have been scary."

"It was," Harry stated firmly to let Phaedra know she did not want to talk about it any more.
"Now what do you want to talk to me about?"

"Do you love Mr. Remus?"

"Why would you ask that?"

"I don't know...I just thought...well....,"she stammered.

"Phaedra, what is wrong?"

"I want you to marry my Uncle Severus so you can be my aunt," Phaedra blurted out nervously.

"Phaedra," Harry replied going over to sit with her, placing an arm around her shoulders, "I will always be your friend no matter whether I marry your uncle or not. You are the little sister I never had."

"Oh...but do you love...Mr. Remus?"

"I love all three of my protectors, but that does not mean I am in love with them."

"I don't understand."

You can love someone, like I love you, or Dumbledore, or you love your uncles and not be in love with them. When you are in love it means you want to be with that person forever because they make your life complete."

"Mummy says Uncle Severus is your soul mate. Do you want to be with him forever?"

"I don't know yet. He can be my soul mate but that does not mean we are in love with one another. It means we have similar desires and goals and kind of think the same way. I know it's kind of hard to understand. I am not even sure I understand it myself, but that is just how things are. Many soul mates do fall in love with one another, but some of them don't. Mr.Remus and Sirius are soul mates, but they are not in love with one another."

"Hmm...But they both love you. Do they want to marry you?"

"They want me to be happy. I want them to be happy too. The Protectorship and the blood that was mixed in the goblet, bind them all to me. We will always be together, and when they do marry, their wives will understand that they must come if I am in trouble unless I dissolve the Protectorship."

"So you aren't ever going to go away from us?"

"No, baby, I will be with you whenever you need me," Harry hugged her comfortingly,
"because I love you too."

"Me too," Phaedra replied hugging her back. "If you don't marry my uncle I won't feel bad, I promise."

"I'll tell you what; even if I don't marry him you can be in my wedding. How's that?"

"Really? Can I be the flower girl?"

"Depends on how old you are. You may just get to be a junior bridesmaid. We'll see. In any event I am not getting married just yet."

Miss Harry, I'm sorry I asked if you and Mr. Remus were shagging. Mummy said it wasn't nice."

"You meant no harm, Phaedra, so don't worry about it."

"Mummy sat with me and gave me a book she bought in a Muggle store that tells kids about making love. She said shagging is just the word the kids use."

"Did you look at the book?"

"She read it with me after Uncle Severus and Mr. Sirius read my bedtime story and Uncle Tiberius went to bed."

"What did you think of the book?"

"I thought it was gross. Do big people really do that?"

"Yes, and when you are grown up you will think it is okay."

"Yech...I don't think so."

"Trust me on this one, Phaedra, you will."

"That's what Mummy said too," she yawned, "but I still think you're daft," Phaedra said lying back down and curling up with her stuffed rabbit."

"Well, we can talk about it some other time," Harry responded giving her a kiss goodnight, "now go to sleep."

"Goodnight, Miss Harry."

"Goodnight, Phaedra," she replied climbing into her bed with a slight smile.

Harry was tired, but still took the time to examine her feelings about the men in her life. She loved Sirius very much, but was she truly in love with him? What about her relationship with Severus? How did he really feel about her? He had started out hating her, and for a while, they seemed to be getting quite close, but lately he seemed distant again. Was he afraid of being hurt or did he not want to hurt her? Then there was Remus. He did not want to subject her to the scrutiny of the Ministry. She had already had to deal with their ignorance and prejudices, and knew if she fell in love with him, she would have to do so again. It was all just so confusing. Maybe she should see more of George, but she did not want to be the butt of his jokes all her life. He was funny, yes, but she wanted someone who understood her feelings and challenged her intellect. Resolving to spend more time with each of them, she turned over

and fell asleep. Harry had no way of knowing it would be one of the last nights she would rest without fear for a long while.

Part 7 - Order of the Phoenix

Harry awoke to a gray overcast day. The air was thick and humid, without even a breeze to stir the leaves that were hanging limply from their branches on the trees. There was no movement and not even the birds were singing. It was as if a pall of gloom hung over Ottery St. Catchpole and everything was holding its breath waiting for whatever dire consequences were to come. As if to confirm this feeling, a church bell tolled in the distance, calling the mourners to a funeral.

Trying to shake off her feelings of foreboding, Harry got out of bed, noting that Phaedra had already gone downstairs. Glancing at the clock on her night table, she saw that it was past nine, and she had slept well into the morning. Grabbing a set of robes to wear, she went and took a fast shower and headed downstairs.

Reaching the first floor, Harry heard voices coming from the parlor, and popped her head inside to see who was there. She was surprised to see Professor McGonagall sitting with Sirius and Severus, watching Phaedra and Remus as they played a game of Wizard Monopoly. Harry knew Circe had long since left for work at the Ministry, and assumed Tiberius Snape was probably busy elsewhere in the house, or doing some work for either the Order or his import export business.

"Good morning sleepy head," Sirius greeted her warmly.

"Good morning," she replied glancing around the room. "I can't believe I slept so late."

"Mummy said not to wake you up. She said you needed your beauty sleep since you are having a special day today at the Order. Can I come to the Order too? Mummy said they were going to have a party before the meeting."

"I'm afraid not, Phaedra," Snape answered his niece, "you will have to stay home tonight with the house elves. The meetings are only for members and you are far too young to attend."

"Oh...I never get to have any fun," she pouted.

"Phaedra, you would be bored. It is just a group of adults talking about different things going on in the wizarding world," Professor McGonagall smiled at the little girl.

"What about the party?"

"It is just a small celebration to make the new members welcome. I am sure Harry will smuggle you out a piece of cake," McGonagall smiled. She was apparently aware of Phaedra's penchant for sweets.

"Will you Miss Harry?"

"Yes, I will bring you home a piece," Harry chuckled. "It is good to see you again Professor," she said turning her attention to the older witch, taking her hands in greeting.

"I'm glad to see you looking so well," McGonagall smiled, "and there is no need to stand on formality. You have finished school and we are going to be colleagues, so please call me Minerva."

"I'll be happy to." Harry flushed as the three men snickered at her obvious discomfiture at using her instructor's first name.

"Harry is still getting used to addressing Dumbledore by his first name, Minerva," Lupin remarked. "Ah, you owe me 10 Knuts rent, Phaedra," he turned his attention to the little girl, "you landed on my floo network in the Three Broomsticks."

"I'm sure she will adjust quite well, Remus." McGonagall responded, watching as Phaedra counted out the Knuts carefully. "Harry, Professor Dumbledore asked me to deliver these robes to you," she said, indicating a large box. "They are your formal robes for the Order. I have already dropped off Mr. Weasley's and Miss Granger's at the Burrow."

"Thank you, Pro...Uh...Minerva. Can I offer you a cup of tea?"

"No thank you dear. I have to be getting on my way. I will be sending you the outlines for your lesson plans by the end of the month for the upcoming school year. We have all your medical records and vital information on file, so there is no need for me to have you send that. From what I understand you are going to be one of our best teachers," the old witch replied smiling, rising from the sofa, "and Albus also said to remind you to wear your medallion. He has not yet activated them."

"Don't worry, I won't forget," Harry said, pretending to understand what she had meant. Obviously, there was more to these medallions than being a pretty trinket to identify the members.

"I'll be going then," she nodded. "I still have two more sets of robes to deliver," McGonagall stated as Harry followed her to the door. "I will see you this evening, Harry." Hugging Harry goodbye she walked to the gate and apparated.

Turning to go back inside, Harry was met by Sirius and Severus in the hallway.

"Are you hungry, Honey?"

"Starving, but it is rather late. Maybe I will just have some brunch," she answered moving into the kitchen.

"I believe Dobby kept some of the breakfast dishes ready for you," Snape informed her checking the covered dishes on the counter. "It seems there are some eggs, bacon, and fried potatoes."

"Umm...Smells good." Harry wrinkled her nose as he made her a plate.

"Would you like some tea, Honey?"

"No. I think I'll have some juice if there is any."

"We have apple, orange, and pumpkin juice," Sirius replied as Severus put the plate of food on the table.

"Orange juice will be fine," Harry smiled. "I just love watching the two of you try to butter me up. I take it you would like to be separated?"

"Harry, we are not doing this to butter you up. We merely want to make sure you eat something. You really will have a busy day today."

"Sirius did you know that those gorgeous brown eyes of yours laugh when you are up to something?"

"Honey, I am not up to anything. I am only happy to see you looking so well and happy today," he said, cupping her chin.

"Ahem..." Severus cleared his throat. "Harry, Sirius and I have been doing our best to get along and get to know one another better as individuals. We were hoping you would trust us enough by now to release us from one another, and let us continue on, without having to feel like we are being forced to do so."

"Do you both believe that you will be able to form some kind of bond in friendship, aside from your being my protectors?"

"Yes, Harry, we do. I hate to admit it but you were right. Severus and I do have quite a few things in common, including how we feel about you."

"How do you feel, Severus? Do you think you and Sirius can actually become friends, in view of how badly he used to treat you?"

"We were children then, Harry, and both of us were angry arrogant young men. It has taken its toll on us both, but yes, I believe Sirius and I will eventually become friends."

"Then face each other and shake hands, as you apologize to one another."

"You won't be satisfied until you see us apologize for yourself," Sirius rolled his eyes tussling her hair playfully.

"No, I won't, and if you want to be separated you will have to do so."

"Very well," Snape agreed, "Sirius Black I apologize for any problems I may have caused you in the past and for the way I treated you."

"Me too," Sirius said looking at Harry.

"Sirius, you know that is not good enough." Harry folded her arms over her chest trying to look stern. She knew how hard it was for her godfather to apologize to Severus.

"All right, Honey," he sighed taking Severus hand, "Severus Snape, I was a real bastard to you when we were in school, and continued to treat you with contempt when we became adults. I never really took the trouble to get to know you as a person, and I'm sorry."

As soon as Sirius apologized the rope binding their wrists began to glow and suddenly vanished. They were both free once again.

"You both had the power to free yourselves the entire time. All you had to do was apologize and mean what you said to one another and it would have dissolved the binding charm," Harry smiled at the two men, who looked at her astonished.

"I have the feeling we've been had," Sirius grinned looking at Snape.

"Indeed and how did you come up with the idea for this little charm?" Snape asked looking at her down his nose.

"Professor Dumbledore suggested it. He said it reminded him of when Dorothy clicked her ruby slippers together at the end of the *Wizard of Oz*. She had the ability to go home all along so we wanted to give you the chance to free yourselves," Harry giggled.

"What wizard are you talking about and where is this place called *Oz*?" Sirius queried confused.

"I believe it is a Muggle fairy tale," Snape replied shaking his head. "It sounds like something Albus would devise."

"I thought it was kind of clever myself," Harry laughed hugging the two of them before she sat down at the table to eat. "Would either of you mind if I went over to the Burrow today? I would like to see Ron and Hermione before the meeting tonight."

"I don't see why not. Maybe Phaedra would like to go with you too. She loves to see the twins," Sirius reflected.

"I believe the twins are in London at the joke shop today. They perfected the beard colors for Albus, and are going to bring him some samples tonight. It looks like we will be sporting house colored beards on Halloween," Snape frowned with distaste.

"What are you complaining about? You already have a beard, or are you going to shave it off?" Harry asked curiously.

"Harry, I know you like me in a short beard and mustache, but I have decided to shave it off. I prefer to be clean shaven."

"I think you look nice in it, but if you are more comfortable the other way, then go ahead."

"They can be a nuisance at times, Honey, and require a good deal of work to keep them nice. I don't blame Severus for preferring to shave. I had a beard in Azkaban and was more than happy when I escaped and was able to shave."

"You probably had lice too, which would have made it even worse," Harry grimaced, which elicited a chuckle from Sirius.

"In any event, I want you both to be happy, so I won't dictate about your facial hair, or lack of it."

"Does this mean I can grow my goatee back?" Remus asked coming into the kitchen with Phaedra. "Ah...I see you two are separate entities again," he mocked playfully.

"No thanks to you," Sirius smirked.

"Why would you want to grow a goat, Mr. Remus? Can't you just conjure one?" Phaedra interrupted their playful banter.

"No, Phaedra," Remus laughed, "not a goat, a goatee. It is a short beard on the bottom of your chin."

"Oh, I thought you were going to get a pet goat," Phaedra replied growing red.

"It's okay, Phaedra, you needn't feel embarrassed. He is not going to grow it back anyway," Harry replied firmly.

"You didn't complain about Severus shaving his beard and mustache off. Why can't I grow my goatee?"

"I never really liked it, Moony. I think you are adorable just the way you are. Don't you agree Sirius?" Harry asked, swallowing the last mouthful of eggs.

"I think you're right, Honey," he looked covertly at Remus, "but don't you think Remus should be given the same options as Severus?"

"No."

"No!" Remus and Sirius exclaimed together.

"Why not, Princess?"

"Because I don't like goatees. I would let you grow a mustache though. You would look nice with one, I think."

"Hmm...A mustache huh? I think I will grow one then and see how it looks. I can always shave it off if I don't like it."

"Fair enough," Harry agreed. "Now that I have finished my brunch I'll go and check to see if Hermione and Ron are at the Burrow. I don't know if Ron has Auror training today, but I'm sure Hermione should be arriving there before the meeting later. I really am looking forward to a nice visit with them. Phaedra would you like to come with me?"

"Aren't we going to do some potions today? You said if I passed the quiz you gave me I could mix one."

"I will help you with your potions today, Phaedra," Severus smiled at his niece, "assuming you passed Harry's quiz about safety with a good grade."

"He just wants to know how you did because I wouldn't tell him before I told you." Harry winked at her.

"Then we should show him my paper," Phaedra replied contritely. Running from the kitchen, she dashed upstairs, to get the test from their room.

"How did she do, Harry?" Sirius questioned with interest.

"Oh, about as good as any member of the Snape family does when it comes to potions," she said as Phaedra came back into the kitchen, almost knocking the glass of juice from Harry's hand.

"Whoa, slow down!" Remus exclaimed, putting a hand on her shoulder.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Remus. I just wanted to show everybody my test. I got only one wrong. I said it was all right to sharpen my own knife if one of the adults was there."

"Do you understand why you can't use the sharpener by yourself?" Snape asked studying his niece.

"Yes, Uncle Severus. I am too little to nipulate the sharpener properly."

"That is manipulate, Phaedra, and you are quite correct. I never even let the students use it at Hogwarts until their seventh year," Snape replied.

"Can I mix a potion today?"

"I will teach you a simple potion today, and we can surprise Miss Harry and your mother."

"Yea," Phaedra beamed hugging Severus. "What will we make?"

"If I tell you now, Miss Harry will know and it won't be a surprise."

"Can we go and do it now?"

"We will start as soon as Harry leaves."

"Then let me go and see if Hermione or Ron is available so I can be on my way."

"One minute, Harry. You are still in danger and can't go alone," Sirius reminded her.

"Will you come with me?"

"I was hoping you would ask."

"He just wants some of Molly's cookies," Remus teased, "she always bakes some for the meetings."

"I do not," Sirius said attempting not to smile.

"You have guilt written all over your face, and you can't hide that grin, Sirius Black," Harry taunted him, "but I can't blame you. Molly's cookies are yummy," she agreed, placing her plate in the sink and washing it off by hand. She still had to wait to do even the simplest magic until after graduation in two weeks. The only exception was a life-threatening situation, or when she was training with Sirius and Moody.

Leaving the kitchen, she went into the parlor, and using the fireplace, contacted Mrs. Weasley. Ron had the day off and Hermione had arrived a few minutes earlier. They were both looking forward to seeing her, but Harry said she would walk over with Sirius rather than floo, so Ron and Hermione could have some time alone. She also wanted to spend some quiet time with Sirius now that he and Severus were separated.

Before leaving for the Burrow with Sirius, Harry put her new robes for the Order in the attic room she shared with Phaedra. She then put the gold Phoenix medallion around her neck. Sirius met her at the bottom of the stairs. Phaedra and Severus had adjourned to the basement potions lab and Remus had gone into his room to prepare his report for the meeting.

"Are you sure you want to walk over to the Burrow, Harry? You know Molly will be happy to open her floo for us."

"I need the exercise, besides you and I haven't had any time together since we got here."

"Now whose fault was that?" he teased.

"Not mine," she quipped, "you were both being naughty little boys so Papa Albus stepped in so I would be happy."

"I think you're going daft," Sirius snickered, as they headed out the front door. "I hope it doesn't start to rain before we get there."

"I think the rain will hold off for a while yet. Everything seems like it's just waiting."

"I know what you mean," Sirius replied putting his arm around her waist, "it's almost as if nature is holding its breath."

"I had this awful feeling when I woke up today," Harry remarked carefully, trying to sound casual.

"What kind of feeling?"

"Just anxiety, I can't pinpoint anything specific."

"You didn't have any nightmares last night did you?"

"No, nothing like that. Maybe it is just from this gloomy weather coupled with the meeting tonight."

"Probably," Sirius smiled down at her, but Harry noted that his eyes were troubled.

They continued walking on in silence for a few minutes when Harry looked up at him questioningly, "Sirius, is there something going on that you aren't telling me about?"

"Umm...What makes you think that?"

"I can tell you're worried. I feel it, and Professor McGonagall said it was good to see me looking so well. I could sense her concern, plus there is the fact that I am still not able to go anywhere alone."

"Harry there has already been one attack by the Deathaters on all of us. The only other thing I can tell you is that their activities continue. We will know more after tonight's meeting. Dumbledore makes sure not to let us in on anything until the meetings. He feels it could compromise the Order members if one of us is captured."

"Is that why everyone does different things?"

"Yes. Dumbledore will assign you to what ever he feels you will be able to do without creating suspicion."

"I see. It just seems odd that the remaining Deathaters aren't trying to melt back into the woodwork and blend back into society to escape capture. I mean, Voldemort is dead and most of the original members of the inner circle have either been killed or are in Azkaban."

"I know, but until the meeting tonight we will just have to be patient, and wait for answers."

"So you really don't know what is going on? You all seem concerned that I might be having nightmares again."

"Honey, I don't know any more than you do about what may be happening. As for you having nightmares, we are all just concerned about the after effects of that final encounter you had with Voldemort," he said turning her to face him, placing his hands on her shoulders. "You were almost raped by that evil bastard and we know what you went through. Your safety comes first. I would never forgive myself if anything happened to you."

"Sirius, promise me something?"

"What, Harry?"

"Promise me that you won't go off half cocked and get yourself killed. I almost lost you once and it bloody near killed me," she told him quietly. 'Damn, he's so handsome, even more so when he's worried,' Harry thought losing herself in his warm brown eyes. 'A part of me wants to tell him how much I love him, and yet, I'm afraid to. What if we aren't meant to be together? Sirius is my heart, yet he is Remus' soul mate.'

"How about if I promise to be careful?" he pleaded interrupting her thoughts. "I will do whatever it takes to protect you, even if it means putting myself in harms way."

"Sirius, please..."

"Sh..." Sirius put two fingers on her lips, stifling her protests. "Harry, you're special. I intend to see that you have a long and happy life," he whispered, eyes locked with hers. 'James, if I'm not the one she chooses I promise to make sure she's well taken care of and happy,' Sirius mentally vowed to his former friend as he slowly bent his head seeking Harry's lips.

Harry's arms circled his neck, heart hammering against her ribs, with the sound of the blood rushing in her ears, as their lips met. Her tongue sought his as she was swept into his embrace.

Slowly releasing Harry, Sirius took a deep breath, stroking her thick black hair as she rested her head on his chest. Neither one spoke right away, continuing to drink in the other's presence. Sirius finally broke the silence.

"They'll be expecting us at the Burrow. If we don't get moving and show up over there soon Remus and Severus will come looking for us."

"I know." She looked up at him, feeling suddenly shy. "You know Ron and Hermione will make sure they both know if we don't arrive within a reasonable amount of time."

"I guess we had better get going then," Sirius replied, gently steering her back into the direction of the Weasley residence.

"Sirius, I didn't mean to be so forward," Harry remarked uncomfortably.

"Harry, you weren't being overly forward, I was. I shouldn't push you right now. Your birthday is still a little more than a fortnight away and I know how you feel about all of us. I don't want you to feel pressured when it comes to our relationship. If we are meant to be together it will happen."

"And if we aren't? I don't want to see you hurt."

"If we aren't then I want you to understand that your happiness is my happiness, too. I will always be your godfather and protector. We are bound to one another, and always will be. No matter what happens I will always be a part of your life," he hugged her reassuringly.

"I'm glad," she said, hugging him back. "I just love big shaggy black dogs."

"Do you now?" he grinned wickedly. Transforming, he began running around her in circles, trying to get her to chase him.

"Naughty, Padfoot," Harry laughed, "bad doggy! You come back here!"

"Woof!" he barked, and Harry could tell he was smiling as she transformed and flew after him the rest of the way to the Burrow. She knew she shouldn't be doing the magic, but transformation was not something the Ministry could track. Since she was with Sirius, she could say that they were practicing, should she need to do rapid transformations for security reasons, when working for Moody or the Order.

Ron and Hermione came running out of the house as they approached the front gate, and transformed back into their human selves.

"It still amazes me to watch you do that, Harry," Ron grinned.

"He's just jealous," Hermione remarked poking Ron in the ribs, "Professor McGonagall tested him on transformation since he wanted to see if he had the ability to become an animagus, but he doesn't."

"It's not fair," Ron pouted; "she tested you too, and said you showed promise."

"Don't fret, Ron. You're a very good wizard. You don't excel in one thing in particular, but are capable in all phases of magic. That in itself is a rare thing," Sirius explained.

"What do you mean?"

"Most wizards can do all kinds of magic, but have areas that they are especially good at," Hermione explained. "Take Harry and me for instance. She can transform, and is exceptional

in Defense Against the Dark Arts and is a natural flyer. I specialize in Charms, Spells, and am a natural with Potions."

"So I'm not really good at anything," Ron sighed.

"Wrong! You are good at them all, but are not exceptional in any one of them," Sirius responded. "It is one of the things Alastor Moody likes about you. He will be able to use you in almost any situation since you are skilled in all the disciplines."

"I still wish I could transform. Hermione is going to try and learn with McGonagall's help."

"We could always ask Remus to give you a little nip," Harry joked wickedly, "and then you could transform and run with the other canines during the full moon."

"I don't think so," Ron laughed, "besides which, Professor Lupin is too nice of a werewolf to infect anyone willingly."

"This is true, and if he knew I was making jokes about his doing so, he would be quite angry with me," Harry agreed as they walked into the house.

"Ah..." Sirius inhaled deeply, "it smells like your Mum is baking something."

"I hear you Sirius Black," Molly Weasley said wiping her hands on her apron, coming to greet them. "I had a feeling you would come with Harry, since there is a meeting tonight, and you know I always bake on meeting nights."

"Now Molly, I would never presume to come to see you just for your delicious cookies," Sirius flirted unabashedly, "you are a very special woman, and I really admire you and your lovely family."

"Mum, he is definitely hungry," Ron smirked, "unless he has gone daft."

"Ronald Weasley, are you inferring that your mother is not a woman to be respected and admired?" Hermione demanded.

"She's my Mum," Ron muttered confused, "what are you talking about?"

"Honestly, Ron, sometimes you are so dense."

"It's all right, Hermione. Ron loves his Mum. He just never really thought about her abilities as a witch. To him she's just Mum," Harry grinned, "and that is how it should be."

"Harry, you never cease to amaze me," Molly hugged her, "and as for you, Sirius Black, I made us all a nice lunch and then there may be some extra cookies."

"See Ron, didn't I say your mother was a woman to be admired?" Sirius winked, following Molly as she led them all to the kitchen.

"Mrs. Weasley, where's Ginny?" Harry asked.

"She is visiting Luna Lovegood, but will be home before we have to leave for the meeting. She has agreed to stay with Phaedra tonight to keep her company. I believe Albus wants them to come to the meeting site, but they will have to stay upstairs," Molly informed her, setting a plate of sandwiches on the table.

"I see, and where is this meeting going to happen?"

"Have a sandwich, dear, you are far too thin," Molly Weasley said ignoring her question, placing a tuna sandwich in front of her. Harry took it dutifully even though she had just finished eating a short time before.

"Forget it, Harry. I have been trying to find out where it is we are going all week, but Mum is more tightly lipped than a sphinx."

"Sirius, my lovable, handsome, sweet..."

"Not a prayer, Harry," Sirius chuckled taking a bite of his sandwich, "new members are not privy to the meeting site in advance."

"You would think the two of you would just be patient. It will only be a few more hours," Hermione shook her head.

"Actually it never occurred to me to ask before this. After our memories were altered I forgot about Grimmauld Place, and since it was compromised..." Harry shrugged.

"Harry dear, you know that Albus did that memory charm for your own good," Molly expressed with concern. "You were all having such a dark time," she clucked over the three friends like a mother hen, "it just seemed like the right thing to do."

"If it makes you feel better Mrs. Weasley, I am not angry about it at all. At the time, it was the best thing that could have happened. I still don't like to talk about that awful year. If it weren't for my friends...well..." Harry flushed, smiling at Ron and Hermione affectionately.

"There, there, dear, all that is behind you now and the Prophecies have been fulfilled. Once the rest of the Deathaters are apprehended you will be able to look forward to a happy healthy life."

"Harry, did you know that Mum voted in the poll to guess who will be the love of your life?" Ron asked to brighten the subject.

"No!" Harry laughed. "Who did you vote for?"

"That is none of your business!" Molly Weasley blushed.

"She voted for George, of course," Ron replied, ducking as his mother went to cuff his ears.

"I kind of thought she would."

"Well I think the whole thing is silly," Hermione said, crossing her arms over her chest, "imagine everyone trying to fix Harry up with someone. It is down right ridiculous. Harry will decide for herself."

"You're right, I will, but I think it is kind of cute, everyone trying to guess who the love of my life will be. By the way, Hermione, Fred said you voted in the poll too," Harry remarked brazenly, "who did you pick?"

"I...ah..."

"I think this is one of the few times she's at a loss for words Harry," Ron smiled, hugging Hermione.

"Oh you two are positively impossible!"

"So Ron, are you and Hermione going to get married?" Harry questioned, ignoring Hermione.

"Well, I haven't asked her yet. I figure we're not quite up to that stage, and I want to get some money in the bank first," Ron replied, as Hermione flushed almost purple with embarrassment, unable to find the words to silence them.

"I hope when you do I will be in the wedding."

"Harry, you're my best mate, of course you will stand up with me."

"Ronald Weasley," Hermione finally burst out, "Harry is my best friend too, so if and when I do marry you she should be my Maid of Honor. You have brothers who could be your Best Man!"

"I had hoped to do both," Harry giggled, enjoying the situation.

"Honey, how will you accomplish that?" Sirius asked merrily.

"Easy, I will get Ron to the wedding on time and see that he is all squared away, and then meet Hermione and do the Maid of Honor thing up the aisle. I can stand by them both while they take their vows, and make sure they have their rings," Harry laughed, curling her lip thoughtfully. "We can create a new title, maybe Person of Honor?"

"Mr. Black, I must be going as daft as they are," Hermione groaned, "since Harry's idea actually makes sense to me."

"Well it should, she loves you both and would never want to disappoint either one of you on your wedding day."

"Since the two of you haven't even gotten engaged yet, you will all have plenty of time to think about it," Molly Weasley informed them, hands on her hips. "Of course George could always be your best man with Harry as Maid of Honor," she suggested, trying to play matchmaker.

"Mrs. Weasley may I have one of your yummy cookies?" Harry asked changing the subject. She didn't have the heart to tell her George was not the love of her life.

"Certainly, dear. Take two, I know how much you love them," she smiled, pouring her a glass of milk to go with them. "Sirius, I know I don't have to ask you if you want any. I can see the hungry look in those gorgeous brown eyes of yours."

"Mum! You're a married woman!"

"Oh Ron, really!" Hermione laughed. "Your Mum may be married, but she isn't blind. A woman would have to be not to notice Mr. Black's good looks."

"I think we should all go upstairs and have a good visit," Harry interceded, noting Ron's scowl, "besides I am dying to hear about Hermione's trip to Greece. I never get to go anywhere, let alone out of the country."

"Don't feel bad, Harry," Ron comforted. "I'm sure once everything is settled you will be able to do some real traveling."

"Sure you will," Hermione agreed. "You really don't think your protectors would keep you locked up do you?"

"It really wouldn't surprise me if they did," Harry muttered, following them out of the kitchen and up the stairs, unaware Sirius had overheard her...

"Molly, did Harry ever say anything to you about feeling trapped or wanting to travel?"

"No, Sirius, but she is a young woman now, and her friends are all going places and doing the things she has never gotten to do. She probably feels like she is being treated like a child."

"We only want to keep her safe. All she has to do is ask. Any one of us would be happy to take her on a trip somewhere."

"Have any of you ever suggested a trip to her?"

"No," Sirius confessed, "but maybe we should take her on a trip for her birthday. It would be a nice surprise. I don't think Albus would mind, so long as the three of us went with her."

"It might actually be good for her to get away. All these Death eater problems and the trials coming up, not to mention the pressure of having to start her job at Hogwarts in September. I'm sure a vacation would help her to relax and ease her transition into the adult world."

"You know, Molly, I think you may be right. She has always had to deal with so much darkness that she needs to see the brighter side of our world. I will talk to Albus tonight and let the others know. If we leave right after graduation we could be back in time for the trials and she might feel less anxious about testifying."

"Have you any idea about where to take her?"

"None what so ever. Has she ever expressed any kind of desire to see anything in particular?"

"I know that when Hermione and her family went to America she devoured every word about it."

"Hmm...I don't think Albus would want us to go there right now, in view of the situation, but I could ask."

"Well if not America, you could take her to the French Riviera," Molly Weasley remarked thoughtfully, "Arthur and I went there on our honeymoon, and Bill and Charlie sent us back for our anniversary the year after Charlie graduated from Hogwarts. I think Harry would like relaxing on the beach."

"I will talk to the others when we get back. It would be a wonderful graduation present for her, and we could celebrate her birthday away from all the distractions. I don't believe the moon will be full then, so it won't be a problem for Remus either."

"Then I suggest you get started planning, as it may be a problem booking a place on short notice."

"I will look into it, and find out. If we go to France, there shouldn't be a problem since my family has a small chateau there. I haven't been there in years, but I know my grandmother still uses it. She sent me an owl from there after Harry healed her following the Ceremony of Protection."

"I think that would be ideal. Harry could get to see a different country, and you could all get away and enjoy yourselves. She will also be less uncomfortable since her face is not as well known in France. If she conceals her scar she should be able to go about quite naturally without the commotion which usually accompanies her."

"You know Molly," Sirius grinned, "if you weren't a married woman I would kiss you for suggesting this. Harry will be delighted...."

Harry flopped down on Ron's bed as he and Hermione curled up on the floor together facing her. Ron had decided to keep his room in the attic after his brothers moved out, and every part was crammed with objects from pictures of friends and family to memorabilia from the Quidditch World Cup. Posters of his favorite team, The Chudley Cannons, decorated the walls. He had also taken an old poster of Viktor Krum, and transformed it into a dartboard, much to Hermione's chagrin. There were also old school books, and an open box of chocolate frogs stood on his night table, beside a picture of Hermione. Another picture of the three of them taken just after Voldemort's defeat and their last days at Hogwarts stood on his dresser. Harry had always loved Ron's room and felt it reflected his personality; friendly, outgoing, loyal, and a bit sloppy. She was glad he was her best friend and knew he would be happy married to Hermione. She guessed she would be godmother to at least one of their children, and it pleased her to know they really would live happily ever after.

"Okay, so what do you think about becoming members of the Order?" Ron asked her with enthusiasm.

"I think it was inevitable, but I am glad Dumbledore is letting us in now rather than waiting till we are all eighteen. Who else besides the three of us and Draco are being inducted?"

"Wait a minute...who said Draco was being admitted into the Order and how do you know that there is someone else?" Ron questioned, stunned, as Hermione looked up sharply.

"You two didn't know?" Harry demanded. "Dumbledore told me about Draco, and McGonagall had two sets of robes to deliver after mine. She had already been here with yours, so I knew one set was for Draco, but I don't know who the other one was for. Have you any idea?"

"No," Hermione replied, "but I have been away. Ron you're Draco's partner at Auror training, didn't he say anything to you?"

"No, but Dumbledore told me not to say anything about it to anyone."

"Me too," Hermione remarked thoughtfully, "how about you Harry?"

"Not really, but then I don't really go anywhere unless one of the Protectors is with me. He may not have felt it was necessary. It could be Draco was told not to say anything either."

"It would make sense. Dumbledore wouldn't want it known that we were becoming members of the Order. It would jeopardize our safety and the safety of the other members that we do know about," Hermione agreed.

"I can't believe that Dumbledore would let that bloody pain in the ass, Malfoy, into the Order! He has always gone out of his way to cause trouble between us. I still don't trust him, even though he cleaned up his act after his dad murdered his mum, then tried to kill him," Ron responded heatedly, curling his lower lip in exasperation.

"Ron, you had better work on your relationship with him, especially since he is going to be your partner when you become an Auror," Harry stated matter of factly. "I mean, I'm not crazy about him either, but I think he has the makings of an exceptional wizard. It isn't his fault his family was so screwed up."

"I know it, but he can be a nasty bastard, and he's one arrogant son of a bitch."

"I think you have a tendency to say the same thing about Professor Snape," Harry sniggered playfully.

"Snape was a spy! I know he's your protector Harry, but he will always have the stigma of having been a Death eater!"

"Ron, you really shouldn't criticize Professor Snape. Dumbledore always trusted him, and I heard how bravely he fought in that battle against Voldemort. It is common knowledge how he defeated Lucius Malfoy when they dueled," Hermione reminded him. She had not been at Hogwarts for the battle, but had been given the task of getting the younger students to safety, escaping through the Chamber of Secrets, accompanied by Ginny Weasley.

"I know, and before you say anything else, Harry, I am fully aware you have grown quite fond of the man. It's just that he made us all believe he was heartless and cold, not to mention how he always favored the Slytherins."

"Ron, his attitude was the best way to get us all to toughen up and be able to face what was coming. He really does favor his own house, but you can't blame him. They do get a bad rap; most of them are good honest wizards. Look at Blaize Zabini, and Millicent Bulstrode, they both turned out okay."

"Harry's right, Ron, you need to be more considerate. If you start acting like you are better than they are, you will just prove you are in their league."

"Hermione, I would never pass judgment or discriminate against someone just because they are Muggle born. You of all people know that. You are more talented than most Pure Bloods, and I would love you even if you weren't," Ron replied planting a kiss on Hermione's lips."

"Ah...true love..."Harry teased them, as they both blushed.

"Does this mean I have to like Malfoy?" Ron looked from one to the other of them.

"It means you need to try and get him to see your point of view," Hermione tweaked his chin.

"I think that is an excellent suggestion," Harry concurred.

"Merlin help me, the way the two of you are acting it's as if he's going to be one of the family," Ron sighed, noting the look between the two girls. "Wait a minute, what aren't you two telling me?"

"Nothing," Harry feigned innocence. She knew that Ginny had been secretly dating the handsome blond Slytherin for several weeks, and so did Hermione. They had no desire to break a confidence.

"I know you well enough to know when you are keeping secrets, Harry Potter, and you, Hermione...you're my girlfriend for Merlin's sake. What is going on?"

"Ron," Harry patiently chided, "Hermione and I are not keeping anything from you. We are merely keeping the confidence of another friend. I would do the same for you and Hermione, and she would do the same for us."

"Yes, Ron, it wouldn't be right if we said anything."

"You don't have to...it's Ginny, isn't it?" he scowled. "I should have guessed from the way she has been acting when I talk about him after class. It's as if he can do no wrong! Wait till Mum hears, she'll set Ginny straight about the likes of that bloke. Traipsing around with the Malfoys, the whole family was nothing but dark wizards."

"Ron, I might remind you that Draco is Sirius second cousin, and is now living with the Tonks family, and that Mr. Tonks is a Muggle born who is married to Sirius cousin Andromeda."

"I know, but the thought of Ginny with Malfoy...Mum will..."

"Ron, your mother knows," Harry said quietly.

"What? That's not possible."

"She figured it out Ron," Hermione gently put her hand on his arm, "and confronted Ginny. She is willing to give Draco a chance, and you should too."

"How do you know?"

"She wrote and told me. She figured it out the night the Deathaters attacked after you came home from school. Ginny knew Harry sensed what was going on and told her too."

"But she's my sister, for Merlin's sake. Why wouldn't she tell me?"

"Because she knew you would react just like this," Harry explained. "Ron, give them a chance. You wouldn't like it if Hermione's family didn't want her to go out with you simply because your family is able to do magic."

"But that's different!"

"No, Ron it isn't!" Hermione protested hotly. "How do they know you aren't doing dark magic? The wizarding world is alien to them, and while they accept it exists, they are still uncomfortable with it."

"Your family...they don't want us to be together?" he asked incredulous.

"Ron, my family likes you very much, but they are not comfortable with all the magic. They need time to accept the fact that I will marry a wizard and their grandchildren will also be magical."

"I guess so. I suppose this means you both think Draco has really changed. What about his feelings towards Muggles? I will never forgive him for calling Hermione a Mudblood!"

"Ron, let it go. Severus called my mother a Mudblood when they went to Hogwarts too. He learned the hard way, just like Draco," Harry counseled him. "Don't come down on Ginny. If she and Draco are meant to be together, it will happen despite how you feel. Besides, she may just be the best thing that ever happened to him. If anyone can help him change, your family can."

"All right, I'll do as you both ask, but if I find out he is using her, or if they are shagging I can't guarantee I won't hex him!"

"Oh, Ron, that's all we're asking. If they love one another as much as we do then there will be nothing for you to worry about," Hermione beamed hugging him.

"Good, now that we have settled this, I would love to hear about Hermione's trip to Greece," Harry looked from one to the other.

"I had a great time, and I have a present for you," Hermione laughed getting up and going into the room she shared with Ginny. Returning a minute later, she gave Harry a small box, tied with a yellow ribbon.

"Oh, Hermione, it's beautiful," Harry thanked her happily, holding up the blue coral necklace her friend had bought for her. "Here, help me to put it on."

"Sure," Hermione smiled putting the necklace around her neck and hooking the clasp. "Harry what is this chain you have on?"

"Oh, it is my medallion for the Order. I put it on so I don't forget later. McGonagall said Dumbledore hadn't activated them yet," she remarked pulling the gold phoenix from beneath her robes.

"Harry, your medallion...it's gold," Hermione said exchanging glances with Ron.

"So...is there a problem?"

"It's just that only Dumbledore has a gold medallion. The older wizards all have silver and as inductees we all have bronze," Hermione explained.

"How do you know this?"

"Mum told me the night I got mine," Ron explained.

"Then why is mine gold?"

"Because Harry, Dumbledore has chosen you as his successor," Hermione answered softly, "he has picked you to lead the Order when he is either no longer able to do so, or passes on."

"But...I don't want this...it's almost like asking for trouble. I don't want Dumbledore to die. He still has at least another hundred years to live if not more."

"Of course he does, Harry," Ron agreed, "but he wants to make sure the rest of us know he has made his decision."

"Dumbledore loves you, Harry. He knows your powers are as strong as his; you just haven't perfected them yet. You're special, Harry, and he is placing the safety of the Wizarding world with the one person he knows will be able to carry out his wishes when the time comes," Hermione praised her friend, comforting her with a hug. "I'm sure Dumbledore will be around for a long time yet. Now let me tell you all about Greece. I had a wonderful time, except for the fact that I missed you and Ron terribly..."

Harry visited with her friends for the better part of the afternoon, and enjoyed their company, but could not shake her feelings of anxiety, made even more acute by the news regarding her medallion. What if Dumbledore were ill and keeping it from her? She knew he also had some healing powers, but why hide an illness. She could use her skills to cure him if he was ill. Maybe Hermione and Ron were right, and he was just thinking about the future. She hoped so, but deep inside she knew something was going on. She could sense it with all the Deatheater activity that was still happening through out the countryside since the death of Lord Voldemort. This was not a good thing.

Her thoughts were interrupted when Sirius called her from the bottom of the stairs. It was past four and they still had to get ready for the meeting. There would be food served following the initiation ceremony, and once everyone had dined, the actual meeting would begin. Bidding her friends farewell, she went downstairs, and kissed Molly Weasley goodbye. Molly had opened her floo system, and Remus had opened the one on the other side, so she and Sirius were able to get home quickly. Sirius did not wish to apparate as the rain had started, and he preferred not to risk disappearing during a thunderstorm.

"Welcome home, Princess," Remus greeted her as she came out from the hearth, "did you have a good time?"

"Uh huh," she nodded moving into the parlor as Sirius stepped from the hearth behind her, "it was good to visit with Ron and Hermione. She had a good time in Greece and brought me back this necklace," Harry informed them taking the coral necklace from beneath her robes.

"It was nice of her to think of you," Sirius smiled.

"It would be nice if other people would think of me occasionally. I have to spend time with my friends to find out you were all keeping secrets from me again," Harry remarked, through gritted her teeth. Flouncing out of the room, she raced upstairs to her room.

"Sirius, what happened? Did we do something?"

"I have no idea. She seemed fine a little while ago. Something must have happened with Ron and Hermione."

"I think we should get Severus and go and talk with her. He and Phaedra finished up about half an hour ago. Circe is back from the Ministry and is giving her a bath before we have to get ready for the meeting."

"Where is Severus now?"

"I am right here," Snape's oily voice remarked as he entered the parlor, "what is the matter with Harry? She didn't even say hello when I passed her on the stairs."

"We aren't sure," Sirius confessed. "Something had to have happened at the Weasley's."

"Did she get into an argument with her friends?"

"I don't think so, she seemed happy enough when she said goodbye," Sirius mused, "something else must be going on."

"Then I suggest we all go upstairs and ask her," Remus replied sensibly. "She has an important night tonight, and we need to get to the bottom of what ever is upsetting her," he stated, moving off in the direction of the stairs, the others following.

"Harry, may we come in?" Remus asked, knocking gently on the door to the attic.

"Go away; I want to be alone right now. I need to think."

"Honey, talk to us. What is troubling you? Maybe we can help."

"I said, go away. I don't want to talk about it."

"Harry Potter," Snape sneered using his most acid tone, "you are acting like a child. As a young woman and a soon to be faculty member at Hogwarts I expect you to act accordingly. Now open this door and tell us what the problem is."

"Why don't you go and ask the Headmaster? I'm sure he could figure it out!"

"Very well..."

"That will not be necessary, Severus, I am already here," Dumbledore's patient voice came from behind them. "Harry's friends spoke with me as soon as she left. It seems Miss Granger saw Harry's medallion and was concerned that she was upset by its significance."

"Oh for Merlin's sake, the girl should be proud, not holed up like a hermit sulking," Snape scowled.

"Albus I knew we should have told her from the beginning, now she probably feels she can't trust us again," Sirius sighed with concern.

"Sirius is right, she is still very sensitive about not being privy to what is going on," Remus nodded.

"Relax, gentlemen," Dumbledore waved his hand for silence, "I will deal with Harry. I did not mean for her to become upset, now go and get ready for the meeting. Harry and I will be down in a little while." The three younger men all filed down the stairs, and then Dumbledore knocked on her door. "Harry, I know you are upset with me, but I would like the opportunity to explain."

"The door is not locked."

"I am glad you are at least willing to hear what I have to say," Dumbledore's features appeared weary as he entered the attic room, but his blue eyes were happy and alert. "You should be getting ready for the meeting."

"I'm not feeling well."

"Harry," he began, seating himself on the bed beside her, "we both know you are not ill. I gave you the gold medallion because I care for you and respect your abilities. You are very powerful, and I consider you my protégé."

"Why didn't you tell me you wanted me to take over the Order? Are you ill?"

"No, Child, and you won't be taking over for a long time yet. At least I hope not. I merely want you to be prepared for the day when you do have to take my place. I also need you to act in my stead if the need arises. Due to the nature of my other duties with the Wizengamot, and the International Confederation of Wizards, not to mention my responsibility to Hogwarts and the Ministry there may come a time when it will be necessary to hold emergency meetings which I may be unable to attend. True, Voldemort is dead," he held up his hand to stop her from interrupting, "but there are still dark times in front of us and I do not feel it would be wise to disband the Order."

"Why couldn't you just ask me? This is a lot of responsibility and I don't know if I'm ready for it."

"Ah...my Little Phoenix," he contemplated choosing his words carefully, "I was merely keeping to the necessary secrecy which comes with being a member of the Order. I know you are worried about the Death Eater attacks. There are those who would like nothing better than to infiltrate the Order, so I did not wish anyone other than your three Protectors to know. I felt your safety came first."

"But Arthur Weasley and Mad Eye Moody also know. They were there when you gave me the Medallion," she reminded him hotly.

"I see you have passed my little test," he laughed, eyes twinkling.

"I don't understand."

"I wanted to see if you would connect the two of them with my giving you this honor and not telling you. Your memory skills are a credit to you. You have always been observant, and yes, I did tell them ahead of time. Moody will be pleased that you equated our meeting with their knowledge of the significance of the medallion. He says he still wants you for a full time Auror, but I told him your heart lies in Hogwarts."

"It does too," she managed to smile up at him, "but you promised you would not keep things from me any more."

"I promised to tell you what I felt you need to know," he winked, "and right now I need you to know that you will be amongst the finest group of witches and wizards I have ever had the pleasure to work with. Your parents were included in that group, along with the others who lost their lives in the fight for what is good and right."

"I don't deserve to be your successor. I will never have the skills you have with people or be able to project an aura of greatness like you can, so why would anyone ever want to follow me?"

"You're wrong. You do it now, without even realizing it. People will follow you because you are strong and good. Your friends followed you to the Ministry when you thought Sirius was in trouble and look how you led the other students when the school was attacked. You are the Phoenix," he beamed at her. Fawkes appeared out of nowhere, and landed on Dumbledore's shoulder, trilled happily at her. "Now do me the honor of accepting the privilege I am granting to you, and come to the meeting."

"I will if you will answer me one question."

"Very well, what is the question?"

"Where will the Order be meeting tonight?"

"Why would you wish to know?"

"If you really want me as your successor I want you to prove to me that you trust me with the knowledge of the meeting site."

"I see..."he studied her shrewdly, "did anyone ever tell you that you would have done well in Slytherin?"

"That sorting hat is never going to let me live down the fact that I overrode his desire to put me into the viper's nest," Harry quipped as Dumbledore laughed.

"Come here," he motioned her to lean over, whispering the answer in her ear.

"Are you kidding me?"

"No, now go and get ready. I happen to know of three young men who are most anxious about your feelings on the matter, and they are waiting to escort you to the meeting."

"I will be ready in a little while. I just need a fast shower and to fix my hair."

"Then I shall see you shortly," he smiled happily. "By the way, I saw Phaedra with her mother before I came up. She wanted me to give you this," he remarked, pulling a small bottle from his robes. "I believe it is a bottle of perfume."

"I think you're right," Harry said opening the bottle, sniffing the contents. "It is lovely. I think I will wear some."

"She will like that. In the meantime my Little Phoenix, I will see you later," Dumbledore said rising, and left her alone to get ready.

Harry ran down to the second floor and showered, then returned to her room. Her robes were white, as were Dumbledore's and a Phoenix was emblazoned on the back, wings outstretched. Harry knew from the meetings at Grimmauld Place that the other members' robes were scarlet and the Phoenix was monogrammed on the right front. Pulling the medallion out of her robes, she displayed it proudly, albeit with some trepidation. Putting her hair up in a chignon, and sweeping it off her face so that her scar was visible, she donned her contact lenses and applied some makeup to highlight her eyes. Spraying on some of the perfume Phaedra had made, she went downstairs. She did not have far to go for the meeting, since the site Dumbledore had selected for this evening's meeting was her own home.

Severus nodded with approval when she came down, and Sirius and Remus both came over and kissed her on the cheeks. She could sense their pleasure at her acquiescence to her new status, and looked around curiously. Ginny had just come in with the rest of the Weasley's and Molly was shoos her upstairs with Phaedra in tow. They were told to go to Harry and Phaedra's room. The house elves would see that they got dinner.

Ron and Hermione whisked Harry away into the designated chairs in the parlor, and found that Draco was already there. The other new initiate was Neville Longbottom, and Harry was pleased to see him. She noted that his parents were sitting in the rear of the parlor talking with Mundungus Fletcher. His grandmother was also there. Harry recognized many of the other witches and wizards present from when she attended the meeting to convince them about her protectors, and was glad to see Professor McGonagall, accompanied by Dr. McBride. Apparently, he had decided to formalize his alliance with the Order, since he was wearing a silver medallion along with his scarlet robes. Professor Sprout was there too, talking with Arabella Figg. Harry was glad to see that her status as a squib was no reason to keep her out of the Order. However, what really surprised her was to see the centaur, Firenze. He had positioned himself in a corner by the front of the room, a silver medallion around his neck, and a scarlet blanket on his back in lieu of a robe. He was talking with Hagrid, who smiled and waved at Harry and her friends.

Everyone was waiting for Dumbledore to appear so the initiation could begin and all were looking forward to enjoying the food prior to the meeting. Harry knew Dumbledore was in the house and just wanted to make an entrance, so she waited quietly, talking with her friends. She had no idea how important this meeting was to become to both her future, and the security of the wizarding world.

Part 8 - Ancient Legends

As Harry waited for her first meeting to begin, she noticed that some of the members were missing, most of whom were Aurors, Mad Eye Moody, Shackbolt, and Tonks among them. She also realized that Circe was there, sitting with her brother, but Tiberius Snape had not yet appeared. Harry had a gnawing feeling of worry. Her empathic senses were on full alert, and even though she was controlling them, she could still feel the emotions of those around her. The room was charged with static electricity, and she was engulfed with dread. Scanning the room, Harry was suddenly startled out of her reverie by someone blowing into her ear. Spinning around in her chair, she was facing the mischievous features of George Weasley.

"Hello, beautiful," he greeted her with a big smile, "welcome to the Order of the Phoenix."

"George, behave yourself," she flushed, "you will get us both into trouble with your wicked ideas."

"Oh, my love, if you only knew how wicked they really are," he laughed going down on one knee. "I have a very important question to ask you."

"George, get up, people are starting to stare. I can practically hear Sirius and Remus growling, and Snape is dripping icicles."

"But, Harry, my dear, I may never ask this of you again," he pleaded loudly, as more and more of the room stopped to watch. Harry was horrified that he was going to propose. How could she turn him down in front of all these people?

"Well then, hurry up and ask her for Merlin's sake," Fred gleefully egged him on, giving him a shove in the back, "we all want to hear her answer."

"These things take time, big brother," he replied over his shoulder, "the fair maiden should be treated with dignity and respect."

"George get up, please! This is not the time or place..."

"Oh, but it is. I shall be forever grateful if you would do me the honor of..."

"George, you can't do this, not now," she begged, interrupting him, looking at Ron and Hermione for support, but they were both watching George with rapt attention, as he ignored Harry and continued his speech.

"Please Harry, let me finish. I only ask that you do me the honor of attending the Grand Reopening of *Weasley's Wizard Wheezes Joke Shoppe* in Diagon Alley on Tuesday," he grinned wickedly. "Have a chocolate frog?" George asked innocently, holding out the package of candy, as the whole room erupted in laughter.

Harry was humiliated and embarrassed. George could not have played his prank at a worse time.

Dumbledore had quietly come into the room and she could sense him watching her. She knew her reactions would be crucial. He had bestowed a serious and awesome responsibility upon

her, and she knew she had to live up to his expectations. For one brief instant, she considered transforming George into a jackass.

"What's the matter, Potter, can't take a joke? What did you think, he was going to propose?" Draco's harsh laughter rang in her ears.

Harry glared at Draco, but kept her voice even and level as she mastered her anger and humiliation.

"Thanks, George, I'd love a chocolate frog, but I'm not sure if I can make it on Tuesday," she pursed her lips accepting the candy, before turning her attention to Malfoy. "Draco, remind me to tell you about a joke my father and godfather once played on Professor Snape. I think you will find it quite interesting," she answered sweetly, green eyes flashing, picturing him upside down and stripped naked. The rest of the room looked on in admiration, pleased with her control, unaware of her true feelings, as she glanced over at Snape. 'Severus, you didn't deserve what my father did to you, but Draco does. I shall quite enjoy taking him down a peg or so,' she gloated mentally, sending a message to her Slytherin Protector. 'Please don't be too angry with me for doing so, since I can feel you enjoyed my humiliation too. I thought we were passed that,' she seethed inside, allowing him to feel her pain from his reaction.

"Good evening, and welcome everyone," Dumbledore's voice addressed the room, calling the meeting to Order, blue eyes on Harry. "Please be seated and we shall begin," he said coming to the front of the parlor, which had been magically made bigger to accommodate the crowd, motioning Professor McGonagall to accompany him. "Fred if you will put a silencing spell on the room so that Ginny will not be able to hear with the extendable ears, I would greatly appreciate it," the old man's blue eye twinkled.

"Of course, Professor," Fred answered, red faced, as he cast the charm.

"Tonight we will bring some of our finest young people into our ranks. They have already proven their merit and I am pleased to see that they have all grown into members of the wizarding community to be proud of. Each has showed their bravery and dedication during these times of strife, and each has made sacrifices that should not have been necessary in their young lives. As Minerva McGonagall calls your names, you will come up to the front of the room and I shall activate the medallions you wear about your neck. They will enable you to communicate with the more senior members and one another, should you ever need to ask for aide, or need to check on the whereabouts of each other. All you will need to do is touch the Phoenix and call the name of the person you wish to speak with. Their image will appear in the center. There is only one exception and that is for Harry Potter. Her medallion will enable her to speak with all members and summon them at a moment's notice. She will also be able to contact me, and summon Fawkes for assistance should you need it. In time, she will become my successor and lead the Order in times of trouble," Dumbledore smiled down at Harry as the members of the Order looked on in approval. "Minerva, if you are ready?"

"Of course, Albus," she nodded, and Harry was reminded of the sorting ceremony each year at Hogwarts. "Draco Malfoy," she called, and he came to the front of the room. "Do you understand that as a member of the Order of the Phoenix you are responsible for the safety and security of its members and will protect them without thought for your own life?"

"I do," Draco replied nervously.

"Then place your right hand on your medallion and repeat after me, swearing your fealty in front of this company," McGonagall instructed him. Malfoy did as she requested, and she continued, with Draco repeating the sworn oath after her. "I hereby swear to this company in the presence of its members, and the leader and protector of the light, Albus Dumbledore, that I will follow and obey all of our laws and principals protecting our members without a thought for my own safety or well being. I shall not divulge the names of its members or their whereabouts if captured by the dark side, even if it means my own death will result from such action."

Dumbledore then raised his wand and pointed it at Draco's medallion. The Phoenix began to glow, and the wings on the bird, which had previously been folded, spread open.

Hermione was summoned next, followed by Neville Longbottom, whose parents looked on with pride as he took the oath. Harry could tell how much they cared, and knew that Neville's powers had improved considerably since their return. She also noted his grandmother blotting a tear from her eyes, trying to pretend it was merely an eyelash. Following Neville, Ron was summoned. He too, took the oath, but Dumbledore also reiterated his role as Guardian of the Goblet, reminding him that he had the Right of Vision.

"Ronald Weasley, you have been granted these powers as per our ancient laws. Are you prepared not only to act as a member of this Order but to sanction these special duties along with it. Should the holder of the gold phoenix need you in times of strife, only you will have the ability to see through her eyes; you are the one who will know where to send those that would keep her safe, yet must guard against those who would use your vision to their own ends. Do you accept this responsibility?" Dumbledore questioned.

"Yes, I will protect the Order, and Harry, through my Right of Vision, should the goblet flame. She is my friend and ally and will continue to remain so for the rest of our lives," Ron answered proudly.

"Harry please come up here," Dumbledore summoned her, and remove the copper medallion from around Ron's neck, replacing it with this one," he smiled conjuring a silver medallion as she came up to them. Now take your wand and point it at the phoenix, and activate the medallion.

Harry had no clue how to get the phoenix to spread its wings, and surmised this was some kind of test. She surmised that Dumbledore had also cleared her to use her wand tonight, so there would be no interference from the Ministry. Pointing the wand at the medallion, she concentrated on Fawkes, thinking to herself at the same time. 'Oh mighty bird of light, grant Ronald Weasley the power to protect those he loves, the members of the Order, and all those who would be harmed by dark magic, so that hope and love may rise from the ashes of pain and loss as you rise from the ashes of the fire.' The wings on the silver medallion spread, and Fawkes mysteriously appeared, trilling his approval, as he settled himself on her shoulder.

Ron then went to stand with the others who were waiting off to the left, following their swearing in. Dumbledore then turned his attention to Harry.

"Harry Potter you are as the Phoenix who now sits on your right shoulder. Your loyalty has been proven, and your sense of justice and righteousness remains pure. Swear now before this audience your allegiance, and promise to see that the purpose for which this Order was founded shall remain untainted from the darkness that would seek to destroy and corrupt it."

"I Harry Potter shall protect the Order and all its members without fail maintaining my silence in the event of capture, even if it will result in my own death at the hands of those who would try to destroy that for which it stands. When called upon to do so I shall act in your stead without fail, and seek the counsel of those who will continue to protect me; my strength, my courage, and my endurance, in my efforts to guard and maintain all that is good and right."

Fawkes then dropped a tear on Harry's Medallion, and the wings of the Phoenix outstretched, the eyes turning to emeralds. It was then that Harry noticed Dumbledore's medallion had sapphires for its eyes.

"The initiation is now completed, so let us honor our new members with a feast, while we await word from our comrades in the field; then we will start our meeting," Dumbledore beamed.

The older members clapped and cheered in honor of the new recruits, but Harry could sense an underlying tone of concern amongst them for the members who had yet to arrive.

Ron's family had gathered around him, and was hugging both Ron and Hermione. Severus had gone to Draco, and Harry watched amid feelings of jealousy, the pain she had felt at his enjoyment of her embarrassment growing deeper. 'What ever is the matter with me? I know Severus still has moments where he sees my dad in me, but why do I let it annoy me so much?' she considered while watching from a far corner of the room. 'I seem to be the only one standing alone, too. Sirius and Remus are talking with the Longbottoms and Dumbledore. Why haven't they at least come over to give me a hug? I have not felt so alone in a long time...' Harry thought, slipping out of the door and into the hall. Climbing up the stairs, she sat alone on the landing, hot tears stinging her eyes...

"Sirius...Sirius! Where's Harry?" Remus asked, hazel eyes searching the room for her.

"Isn't she over there in the corner by the book case?" Sirius asked turning to look around the room.

"No, I haven't seen her since the initiation was finished. I thought she would have come over to us right away."

"Severus, have you seen Harry?" Sirius asked going over to where he was chatting with Draco.

"No, not since she took her oath. I believe she was standing over by the book case."

"Well she's not now. She's gone," Sirius replied, looking over at the occupants of the room again.

"Perhaps she needed to use the lavatory," Snape remarked, but a knot was starting to form in his stomach. He knew Harry had been humiliated by Draco, and that she had sensed his enjoyment of it, yet he didn't think she would pull one of her disappearing acts. 'Blast, the girl is far too sensitive at times. I hope I didn't drive her to do something stupid,' he sighed to himself. 'If she only knew I am doing it so that I won't feel so hurt when she marries Black...'

"Let's go and look for her," Remus suggested, breaking into his thoughts. "We are probably just jumping to conclusions. You know how Harry gets embarrassed by too much attention."

"I think it is more than that," Sirius remarked over his shoulder. "She was really embarrassed by the joke George Weasley played on her, and Draco should have known better than to rub it in."

"The boy was just having some harmless fun," Severus defended him. "Draco actually admires her, but is too proud to admit it."

"Yeah, well instead of defending him you should be concerned about how she feels. If I hadn't had to speak with Albus about the surprise for Harry I would have gone directly over to her."

"I'm sorry I was so engaged in conversation with Frank Longbottom," Remus added, "but I thought it would be rude not to ask how he has been doing, or I would have done the same. I realized she was missing when Neville asked how she had been. He wanted to let her know he was selected to do an advanced fellowship with Professor Sprout in Herbology, and will be apprenticing at Hogwarts this year. He didn't get a chance to speak with her before the ceremony."

"Longbottom is coming back to Hogwarts to work with Pomona Sprout?" Snape sneered with contempt.

"Severus, you have no call to be so harsh with the young man," Remus chided, "he may not have been a terrific student, but his skills have improved immensely, and he fought bravely during the battle to save Hogwarts."

"You are, as usual correct in your observations, Lupin," Snape answered contritely. "I am merely surprised that young Longbottom is so good at Herbology and was absolutely dismal in Potions. After all, the plants he grows are almost all used in various potions and remedies," Severus said as they entered the hallway.

"And maybe it was because you took such pleasure in intimidating him," Harry's soft voice responded from where she was sitting on the landing."

"Harry, you had us worried. What are you doing out here? You should be enjoying the party before the meeting," Sirius beamed racing up the stairs, stopping short at the sight of her tear stained face. "Honey what's wrong? You've been crying."

"Well let's see...first George Weasley embarrasses the shit out of me, then Draco rubs it in humiliating me in front of a room full of people, then my supposed protector relished every minute of it, and finally, not one of you came up and offered me your congratulations following the whole initiation thing. I was just left standing there all by myself."

"Potter, you sound worse than Moaning Myrtle," Severus replied with disgust.

"It seems to me, Severus, she just said something about your enjoying her discomfiture at your godson's and my cousin's cruel remarks. I personally think he needs to be given a good kick in the ass."

"I wouldn't be too worried about it, Black, since she has other plans for the boy," Snape glared.

"He deserves it. You didn't."

"What do you mean, Princess?"

"Remus when I picked up on Severus' feelings I sent him a mental message. Remember what my Dad and Sirius did to him in front of the school one fine spring day following the O.W.L.'s?"

"Honey you aren't insinuating that you are planning to flip and strip Draco, are you?" Sirius asked, eyes glittering with mirth.

"So that is what that remark about a joke was all about," Remus shook his head. "Princess, you shouldn't let it bother you so much. Draco has had it pretty rough..."

"Oh, and I haven't?" Harry asked her voice cracking, shocked that Remus would take Draco's side.

"Princess, we all know you have. It is just that Draco doesn't have the support you do."

"Sure he does. In fact, Severus has been looking out for him since his first day at Hogwarts. He just loved letting him goad me so he could take house points from Gryffindor at my expense. Now he just enjoys seeing the humiliation," Harry looked up at him, voice shaking with rage.

"Harry, I will continue to do so until you learn to deal with ridicule. It is a weakness in you, and I merely want to make sure that you can hold your head up when people are hurtful." Severus explained calmly.

"Severus, take me as I am, or not at all. I have never tried to change you..."

"Harry," he smiled giving one of his rare laughs, "did I not just endure a week tied by the wrist to my worst rival, Sirius Black?"

"Severus is right, Honey, although I disagree with his methods of trying to toughen you up."

"Don't any of you understand? Every time one of you says or does something that is painful to me, it is worse than for an ordinary person. It will not get better, all I can hope for is self-control and I think I have exhibited it quite well. What really hurt is seeing everyone else with their families, and I was just left standing...all...alone," Harry sobbed, burying her head in Sirius shoulder.

"Princess, we didn't mean to leave you alone. The Longbottoms cornered me, and Sirius needed a private word with Albus. Severus just automatically went to Draco since his aunt and uncle are not members of the Order and Tonks has not arrived yet. He knew you had the two of us, so as Draco's godfather he wanted him to feel welcome."

"So, he couldn't have taken both of us under his wing?"

"Had I done so, you may have cursed the boy," Severus sneered.

"I have no intention of cursing him!"

"No, you merely want to do to him what your father and godfather did to me."

"Actually, that was an afterthought. Originally I was going to transfigure him into a jackass," she admitted slyly, as the three men tried not to laugh.

"Harry, Draco actually does admire and even like you. He just does not want to show his feelings. He was brought up in a dark family and fears to show any sign of weakness. His father was a cruel man, and tormented Narcissa unmercifully. Draco's biggest fear is that he will be just like him."

"I am not worried about that. I happen to know his girl friend is quite talented, and not the type to take any kind of abuse. She is also a very kind and loving person."

"And just who is this young woman?" Severus asked with interest.

"She is a seventh year at Hogwarts," Harry raised her eyes to the second floor so they would understand without her uttering Ginny's name, "and I think she will be quite good for him."

"What do her brothers think of this relationship?" Severus asked with interest.

"I don't know if they all know. I know Ron does, and will give him a chance because Hermione and I both asked him to. Mrs. Weasley knows too, but I don't know about her father. I think Molly would have told him though."

"I think Harry may be right, Severus," Remus remarked mulling the idea of Malfoy and Ginny over in his mind. They will offset one another quite well. If anyone can change his mind on muggle borns it is the Weasley's."

"Perhaps, but it will take time."

"I like the idea, myself, Sev. Ginny is a good girl and it could be a good match. It will be interesting to watch," Sirius added, considering the possibilities. "Now as for you Miss Wings, I want you to know that I love you very much, as do Remus and Severus, for all his moody eccentricities. We are very proud of you and while I don't know about them, I was holding my breath when Albus asked you to activate Ron's medallion."

"I was more than a little proud," Severus agreed, "since Albus is the only one of us who has ever been able to do so."

"I don't know how you did it, Princess, but whatever you and Albus share, it is a wonderful thing."

"I don't suppose you will let us in on the secret?" Sirius grinned giving her a hug.

"Even if I could, I don't think it would work for you. Dumbledore would say it comes from your very soul."

"Child, you are absolutely correct. Now come on down and have something to eat. Everyone is asking for you," Dumbledore beamed up at her from the bottom of the stairs, blue eyes twinkling over his half moon spectacles.

"How long have you been in the hall?"

"I just got here," he replied amused. "Don't you know I am notorious for knowing everything that goes on?"

"Do I get to learn that trick too?" Harry questioned, as Sirius helped her to her feet.

"When I think you're ready, but not for some time yet," he teased, as she reached the bottom of the stairs. Now go and wash that pretty face. It will do you no good to be looking sad. I need you to be alert and pay attention when the meeting begins. The others should be here soon."

"You're worried...they're very late...Albus what is going on?" Harry asked as she moved up the hall to the bathroom to wash her face.

"I am not certain yet, Child, and I don't want you to worry needlessly. You do not have to jump into your duties that quickly. I want you to take your time and listen and watch. We will all be there to help you," Dumbledore assured her.

"Then you can all go back in with me. Just give me a second," Harry told them as she quickly rinsed her tear stained cheeks. "I'm glad Hermione showed me all about waterproof makeup."

"I can't believe you ever passed as a boy," Remus smiled warmly.

"You should have seen the close calls in the boys' dorm!"

"What close calls were those?" Sirius questioned protectively.

"Let's just say I was considered one of the more modest boys. It wasn't easy when I had to use the bathroom. I either snuck into the girls bathrooms, or let the guys think I didn't just have to pee so I could use the stall. Then there was the nightmare of bathing. I used to have to shower either very early in the morning or late at night."

"Albus, were you aware of this?" Remus asked, as Sirius looked down at his goddaughter and noted she was grinning up at him.

"I kept my eye on the situation quite closely. Her hidden identify was almost a problem during the water portion of the Triwizard tournament, especially during the underwater event."

"Hmm...Miss Wings," Sirius teased, "and what kinds of things did you see in the boys' dorm?"

"Just a lot of half naked guys, nothing special," Harry laughed looking up at the ceiling, cheeks burning. "I was moved before things got too out of hand," she laughed as they returned to the parlor.

"Thank Merlin for that," Snape muttered, dark eyes glittering with amusement.

"We may just discuss this some more later," Sirius remarked pretending to set his jaw gravely.

"You're just jealous," Harry whispered, and he winked playfully.

"Come on, Miss Wings, lets eat. I'm starved."

"Sirius, you're always starved," Severus sighed with a smirk.

"I could use a good bite to eat myself," Remus added heaping his plate with food, as Harry just looked on lovingly at the three of them....

Harry enjoyed herself just watching the interactions of the members, and realized they were like one huge family. It was good to see Hagrid again, and she spent a good deal of time talking with Neville. She was glad they would both be returning to Hogwarts, and liked speaking with Frank and Alice Longbottom. Alice remembered Harry's parents fondly, and was still getting over the shock that Harry had actually been a girl. Frank merely laughed, stating it was just the kind of thing James would do. They were both glad that Harry had befriended Neville, and that she had helped to bolster his confidence. His magic continued to improve and his parents both felt that his earlier ineptness was directly related to his having seen them tortured. Harry was looking for a way move through the crowd and over to Ron, when Molly Weasley wandered over.

"Alice, I am so glad to see you. I understand you and Frank are going to help with the Auror training for Alastor," Molly beamed. Hugging her old friend, she steered her towards Frank and Arthur. "I also brought my new recipe for Forbidden Forest Surprise Cake," her voice trailed off as they moved through the crowd.

Harry was glad to make her escape, she wanted to spend some time with Ron, and weaving her way through the crowd, she managed to find him towards the back of the room. He had been talking quietly with Draco, and judging by the scowl on Draco's face, she got the distinct impression they had been discussing Ginny.

"All right you two, call a truce, or you will find out the hard way how Severus and Sirius felt for the past week while they were bound at the wrists."

"We were just having a friendly conversation about Weasley's sister," Draco sneered.

"Draco, I am going to warn you now. Ginny is my friend, so you had better treat her right, or you will answer to me. I don't want to see her hurt, and I personally think you are good for one another," Harry informed him. Folding her arms across her chest, in a posture that told him she meant every word, Ron scowled back at her. "As for you, Ronald Weasley, I expect you to mind your own business. Draco is dating Ginny, and I am sure he will conduct himself as a gentleman."

"He had better, or he won't know which hex hit him," Ron glared. "Don't forget, she still has four other brothers besides me."

"I'm sure Draco will act with the utmost dignity and thoughtfulness where Miss Weasley is concerned," Snape's oily voice interrupted the exchange from behind them.

"Of course I will Severus," Draco nodded. "Now if you have a moment, you promised to explain that laughing potion to me."

"I will be happy to," Snape replied, leading Draco away from them.

"Harry, I wish the stupid git was not going with my sister. If he so much as..."

"Ron, he won't, at least not unless Ginny agrees," Harry snickered.

"Harry, that's my baby sister we're talking about!"

"Ron, in case nobody has told you Ginny is a young woman now, and what she and Draco do with one another is their business. I'm sure they will be discreet, as well as careful."

"Just the same, I will kill him if I find out he is shagging with her," Ron answered smugly.

"Does that mean I can kill you if I find out you and Hermione..."

"Harry! I would never do anything with Hermione if she didn't want me to."

"Shh...She's coming this way," Harry warned him, green eyes alight with mirth.

"Harry, I thought you would never get back to us," Hermione said joining the two of them. "Here, Ron, I got you a strawberry tart. There is no more chocolate mousse," she explained, handing him the dessert.

"Waiting on him already, Hermione?" Harry teased.

"No, I simply wanted to say hello to Professor McGonagall. I knew Ron wanted some more dessert, so I stopped to bring him back one." Hermione defended herself.

"Then why are you blushing?"

"I am not blushing! It is just quite warm in here this evening."

"You and Ron could always go for a walk in the garden," Harry grinned, watching Hermione's face grow even redder.

"That is not a bad idea," Ron agreed, swallowing the last piece of his tart.

"You could get in a bit of snogging and Hermione would have the added bonus of the strawberry jam stuck on your upper lip," she snickered, giving Ron a pat on the back.

"Harry!" he laughed, quickly licking the jam from his mouth.

"Oh Ron, you might have used a napkin!" Hermione scolded rolling her eyes, unable to hide her smile. She knew Ron's penchant for sweets.

"So, Hermione, how about we go for that walk in the garden?"

"I don't think we really have the time," she frowned looking around the room, "I'm sure the meeting will be starting soon."

"I suppose you're right, love, but maybe if there is time afterwards? If not here, we might get a bit of time in back at the Burrow."

"It would be kind of nice," she agreed, just so long as your Mum doesn't say anything.

"I think Ginny will cover for us."

"I just love seeing my two best friends so happy," Harry smiled. "As for Ginny, just tell her you will hex Draco if she opens her mouth."

"I rather like that idea!" Ron said with approval. "By the way, Harry, why didn't you tell me I was going to be given a silver medallion?"

"I didn't know."

"You mean you did that activation spell on your own?" Hermione questioned with awe.

"Yeah, I just thought about what to do and it came to me. It was weird."

"What did you say?" Ron asked astonished.

"You might say I spoke from my soul, and asked for help from a higher authority. As for the actual words, it all happened so fast, I can't really remember," Harry lied, knowing that for Ron to try such a spell would be dangerous. 'Dumbledore had spoken the truth,' she thought, 'the power does come from my very soul. I truly have been granted a wonderful gift. I will have to be very careful, for now I understand why Tom Riddle was corrupted. This much power can be dangerous. He used it to satisfy his own desires, and that is the path into darkness.' Harry was mulling this over in her mind when she was startled by a commotion at the door.

"Albus help," Tonks gasped, entering the room with Tiberius Snape.

They were supporting Shaklebolt in between them. He was unconscious, and Tonks was bleeding from a large gash on her left arm. Moody followed behind them, forever vigilant, but Harry noticed he too had been injured. His face was all bruised, and his nose had been broken again. The only one who appeared unharmed was Tiberius, but she knew otherwise. There had been other Aurors with them, and she could see them all scrambling about, as Moody barked orders to secure the premises.

"Dr. McBride, your services are needed," Dumbledore called, levitating the unconscious man over to a sofa.

Harry immediately ran over to help. Looking down at McBride, she saw that Shaklebolt had a dark bruise on his forehead, and was bleeding from his ears and nose.

"I will need to get him to St. Mungo's as soon as possible," McBride said quietly, running his hands over the unconscious man's body, "he is critically injured. Harry, I know you are a natural healer. If Albus agrees I would appreciate it if you would treat the others while we apparate to the hospital."

"Harry is more than competent, and since this is an emergency situation she is allowed to use her magic," Dumbledore said as he and McBride prepared to apparate.

"I will go and see to Tonks and Professor Moody immediately," Harry replied, as they levitated Shaklebolt and headed towards the door.

"You, Weasley, and you too, Malfoy, go with Burns and Sotheby to St. Mungo's with them," Moody ordered, "and then I want the two of you to write up a report about his condition for me."

"Yes, Sir," they chorused in unison following the group outside.

"Professor Moody, sit down and let me see to your injuries before I have to put a spell on you to keep you quiet," Harry warned, pushing him down into a chair beside Tonks, preventing him from following the others outside.

"Aye, Lass, you sure you know how to fix me up? There is really nothing a good swig from my flask won't cure." Moody grinned, taking a swig of whiskey from the flask he usually kept in his pocket.

"You let me be the judge of that!" Harry exclaimed as she ran her hands over his injuries. She had been correct in her assumptions that his nose had been broken, and he had obviously been in a fight with someone. Quickly healing his bruises, she went to work on his nose, and smiled in satisfaction when she was done. "There, now you have a nose of distinction."

"I thought I already had one lass? How many men do ya know that have a crooked nose with a bite out of it too?"

"Only one," she winked, turning her attention to Tonks. "What the hell happened to you guys tonight?" Harry inquired, cleaning the blood from her arm.

"We had a run in with the Deathaters," Tonks grinned cheerfully, "it's all in a night's work."

"Aye, that we did, lass, and you will hear all about it as soon as Dumbledore gets back. We will give our reports then."

"I see." Harry arched her brow, knowing Moody would not divulge anything further. "Then you and the rest of the Aurors should get some food into your stomachs, as it may be awhile until Dumbledore gets back."

"I can help with that, Harry," Hermione said, coming up to them.

"Thanks, Hermione, and make sure the Aurors surrounding the house come in to get some food too. They can come in two at a time. I think I saw at least eight of them."

"You are very observant lass. We were originally twelve with Shaklebolt, but he's gone to hospital, and I'm afraid his partner didn't make it," Moody responded soberly. "Tiberius came along in time to help us during the attack, or it would have been worse."

"Speaking of Tiberius, I need to see to his injuries, too. You two get something to eat."

"Don't worry, Honey, Remus and I will make sure they eat while Hermione sees to the group surrounding the house," Sirius informed her, coming over to make certain his cousin was all right.

"Princess, you did a very nice job on the two of them," Remus smiled.

"Thanks, but I really have to see to Mr. Snape. He is hiding the fact that he has been hit with a number of *Cruciatus* curses, and I can feel his pain."

"Just like a Snape." Sirius shook his head disdainfully. "Go on, and take care of him, Honey."

"I'll see you all in a few minutes," Harry told them, moving off across the room to where the Snapes were all sitting.

Tiberius was sitting quietly with his nephew, while Circe poured him a glass of firewhisky. He drank the shot down swiftly, before looking up at Harry.

"Ah...Miss Potter, I see you have been inducted into the Order, congratulations," he sneered.

"Thank you, Mr. Snape. Did you know that if it weren't for the fact that your eyes are blue and you are graying, you could pass for Severus?"

"I am aware of the resemblance between my nephew and myself."

"Did you know that you both tend to behave in exactly the same manner?"

"Indeed?"

"Yes, now open your shirt so that I can see how much damage was done by those *Cruciatus* curses you were hit with."

"I did not mention anything about being injured by any curses, *Cruciatus* or otherwise," Snape remarked, arching his brow.

"You didn't have to. Your lips are set in a thin line and you are holding your body even more erect than usual. Your nephew does the same thing when he is in pain. You also have your left hand resting on your stomach, which is always a good place to hit one with that particular curse. The pain from the soft tissue damage can be excruciating. Now, will you open your shirt, or will I have to do it for you?" Harry asked staring him in the eyes and holding her arms over her chest, an action that any Snape could be proud of.

Snape casually poured himself another shot of whiskey as he maintained eye contact with Harry. Harry never moved an inch.

"Do you honestly believe you could get my shirt off?" he asked amused.

"Do you honestly believe I can't?"

"It would be interesting to find out," he remarked, eyes boring into hers.

"In any other instance, I would accept your challenge to do so, but I really don't wish to make a spectacle of either one of us. Not tonight, anyway," she smiled, breaking eye contact.

"You are quite right," Tiberius said, moving slowly to open his shirt, while Severus poured him another shot of whisky.

"Uncle, I'm going to go and check up on Phaedra and Ginny Weasley. I know they are both concerned and wondering what it happening. Phaedra is a bit frightened, and is calling me in her mind."

"By all means, Circe, Phaedra will feel better if you go up to her. Why not take Molly with you too. I am sure Ginny will be asking all kinds of questions."

That thought crossed my mind too," she smiled at her uncle.

"I know," he smiled, "I heard it."

"Circe, give Phaedra a kiss goodnight for me?"

"Of course, she will be happy to know you are wearing her perfume too," Circe said, moving off towards the hall.

"Severus, your uncle is as stubborn as you are," Harry remarked. Running her hands over the elder Snape's mid section, a soft blue energy field emanated from her fingertips. "You are very lucky, Mr. Snape, if you had been hit again you would have sustained some severe liver damage."

"I will see that he rests after the meeting," Severus remarked, knowing his uncle was in pain.

"Severus, I am more than capable of seeing to my own needs," Tiberius glared at his nephew. "I have been doing so for nigh on seventy-five years."

"Uncle," Severus began slowly, "I am aware that you are more than able to care for yourself. I merely wish to make certain you are comfortable, and get a good night's rest. We both know the after affects of the *Cruciatus* curse can take several days to wear off. I have some of the *Lionfish Pain Potion* mixed for just such emergencies. It will help you to relax tonight so that you may resume your work with the Order in the morning."

"I prefer the *Essence of Snake Venom Potion*, mixed with the *Belladonna Sleep Potion*. It is far more effective when dealing with multiple *Cruciatus* curses in those over fifty years of age."

"Uncle, this is no time for games. I am fully aware that you are allergic to the *Belladonna Potion*. I do have some of the *Porcupine Sleeping Syrup*, which goes quite nicely with the *Lionfish Potion*."

"Ah, Severus, you are as astute as ever. It pleases me to see your abilities are being put to such good use by the Order. Your skill with Potions is among the best in the wizarding world. I hope Albus realizes what a prize he has on his side," Tiberius complemented his nephew.

Harry sensed that Tiberius did not often voice his approval, and knew that Severus was pleased, despite the neutral expressions on both their faces.

"We are more than appreciative of Severus skills," Dumbledore's quiet voice came from behind her.

"Headmaster," she said looking up as she completed her task, "I was unaware you had returned."

"I have only just gotten here, Child," he smiled, but his eyes were serious.

"How is Shacklebolt? I know his injuries were critical."

"Dr. McBride was able to stabilize him at the hospital, but he is still in serious condition. He is expected to make a full recovery, however, and we have Tiberius to thank for saving his life."

"It was nothing, Albus. I merely did what anyone else would have done under the same circumstances."

"That is not what Alastor and Nymphadora Tonks have told me. They both said you ran out into the middle of the foray so they could pull him to safety. I understand you were hit with a number of curses yourself. We are lucky you managed to dodge the Avadra Kedavra."

"I would prefer not to discuss it, Albus," Tiberius said, uncomfortable at all the attention.

"I think it was a very brave thing to do," Harry smiled, "are you sure you weren't in Gryffindor?"

"Positive," Tiberius chuckled. "I am as Slytherin as they come, my dear."

"In any event I am sure Shacklebolt's family will be forever grateful," Dumbledore remarked. "Now we should bring the meeting to order. It is time we discussed what I fear may be happening," he explained, raising his hands to signal the members to take their seats.

Ron and Draco had returned with Dumbledore and had given their report to Moody before taking seats with Harry, Hermione, and Neville. Dumbledore conjured a chair in the front of the room. Harry noted that Tonks and Moody had seated themselves with her three protectors, and the other Hogwarts teachers were all sitting together. The room had grown quiet while everyone waited for Dumbledore to begin.

"Something big is going down with the Death eaters," Ron whispered. "Moody is worried, and the attack tonight has made him more paranoid than usual."

"Draco, have you got any notion about what the Death eaters are up to?" Harry whispered.

"No, but I did overhear Voldemort talking with my father and Nott while I was still at the Riddle mansion. I couldn't catch all of it, but it had something to do with Nagini and some very old magic. I told Moody and Dumbledore about it when they questioned me, after Harry saved my life."

"Whatever it is, it can't be good..." Hermione started, when Dumbledore looked down at the four young persons in the front row.

"Sh...The Headmaster is about to begin and you'll get us into trouble," Neville whispered forcefully.

"Good evening, and welcome to our newest members," Dumbledore addressed the crowded room, nodding to the four young people. "I will be brief, and ask Remus Lupin and Tiberius Snape to give their reports, then I shall ask Alastor Moody to fill you all in on what happened this evening. Remus, if you and Tiberius will come forward?"

Remus and Tiberius Snape moved to the front of the room. Remus began his report first.

"I have been shadowing a number of known Death eaters in an effort to find out where their new headquarters are located. They are no longer using Grimmauld Place, since Voldemort's death. They are aware that the Order and the Ministry know they had taken over the premises after the Order stopped using it. They also continue to recruit new members, and their activities are increasing. I have yet to find the exact location, but it is definitely on the outskirts of London. Harry continues to be a prime target as is the Weasley family, and Severus Snape. The Death eaters know he was a spy in their ranks, and are seeking revenge. That is all I have been able to discover at this time."

"Thank you, Remus," Dumbledore nodded. "Tiberius, you may begin as soon as you are ready."

Tiberius Snape rose and stood silently, his very aura commanding the attention of the assembled Order. His demeanor was even more formidable than that of his nephew, Severus, when he would face the students in class. He waited until the room was totally quiet, and then began his report.

"I have been talking with some of my contacts in the export business and the Death eaters have been sending out emissaries to various countries. They seem to be very interested in ancient artifacts dealing with serpent gods and priests. They have sent people to Egypt, the Middle East, and through out Europe. They have also gone to Central and South America. We believe that they are acting on instructions left by Voldemort in the event of his death. One of the Dark Lord's ambitions was to become immortal. I got a lead tonight that Voldemort's people were going to attempt to steal his pet snake from the London Zoo. She has been housed there since the raid on the Riddle Mansion. I believed they wanted to use her in some kind of ritual. When I arrived at the zoo, the snake was gone. The Muggle authorities were searching the grounds, and the zoo's guard was unconscious. I immediately did a memory spell so they would not remember seeing me, and apparated to where Moody's team was guarding the crypt where Voldemort's remains had been interred. The location was known only to members of the Ministry and those of us in the Order who were on a need to know basis in an effort to guard the site from either desecration or attempts by Voldemort's followers to steal the body. I arrived in the middle of a battle with the Death eaters, and realized that someone in the Ministry must have leaked the location to them. I could see the crypt had been opened and Madison was dead. Shacklebolt was lying unconscious nearby but Alastor's team was pinned down, unable to get to him. I joined the battle, and helped to create a diversion, while Moody and Tonks got Shacklebolt to safety," Tiberius concluded, silently resuming his seat.

"Alastor, do you have anything you wish to add?" Dumbledore queried gravely.

"Aye, there be more, Albus," Moody answered, taking a long draught from his flask as he stood to address the Order. "The Death eaters were able to retrieve Voldemort's remains before we could stop them. Shacklebolt and Madison surprised 'em opening the crypt, but were outnumbered. Madison was hit with the killing curse, but Shacklebolt was stunned and tortured with the *Cruciatius*. His condition is serious, but he is expected to survive, thanks to Tiberius

quick actions, and Dr. McBride's healing skills. Madison's family was killed in the war, so I will be handling his funeral arrangements should anyone here wish to attend."

"Thank you, Alastor. If you will send me the dates and time for the viewing and funeral I will see that our members are notified."

"Aye, I will owl you tomorrow with the information."

Dumbledore nodded his assent, and leaning back in his chair, closed his eyes. To the uninitiated, it would appear as if he had fallen asleep, but the members of the Order knew better. Albus Dumbledore was deep in thought.

Harry studied him intently, attempting to use her empathic abilities to sense his emotions. Nevertheless, he had anticipated her. Opening his eyes, he met her intent gaze with one of his own. She knew he was troubled, and for the first time since she had met the old man, she sensed he was afraid. She knew something dreadful was forming in his mind, and wished she were a telepath. Breaking her eye contact, she shifted uncomfortably in her chair, a knot forming in her stomach.

"What I am about to tell you, is merely legend. But like all legends, it is based on fact, and is such old magic that it is no longer believed," Dumbledore said quietly, choosing his words carefully. "It is an ancient legend, common through out the world. The first known record of it appears in Egypt. It was then found in Babylon, and in ancient Greece. In Europe, the Celtic peoples spoke of it in hushed tones. We believe it is the real reason you will find no snakes in Ireland. This legend was also known in the Americas and surfaces among the native tribes of both Central and South America. This is the reason Bill Weasley is on assignment there for us. He has already given us his reports from Egypt and his brother Charlie was able to use his time in Romania to unearth more of the information using his study of Dragons as a cover. It is among the darkest forms of Necromancy, and is such a sacrilege that our ancient ancestors feared to use it. Even now, we tell ourselves that it is magic so dark, that it would be impossible to work. Hence, it has been placed into the category of myth. Yet it is my belief that Lord Voldemort may have left instructions on how it may be accomplished," Dumbledore paused looking directly at Harry. "The spell can only be performed by a selected few, and only those persons with the ability to do it, are able to reverse it. It is called the spell of the Serpent's Tongue."

Harry stared at Dumbledore, and a shiver passed through her, making her feel as if someone had just walked over her grave. Hermione shifted in the seat next to her while Ron held tightly to her hand. Draco Malfoy was staring at Harry, while Neville looked nervous.

"Why is it called the Serpent's Tongue?" Harry asked softly, but the room was so quiet she felt as if she had shouted.

"Because it can only be performed or reversed by a Parsel Mouth. It is one of the reasons Parsel Tongue is associated with dark magic," Dumbledore replied, blue eyes locked with her green ones.

"Professor, just what is this spell? You said it was so sacrilegious that the ancient wizards feared to use it," Hermione inquired logically.

"It is the spell to raise the dead," Dumbledore said, looking over the witches and wizards in the room.

"That's not possible. No one can raise the dead...can they?" Draco asked in confusion.

"No one has ever tried," Dumbledore confirmed, "not since ancient times, anyway. The spell was lost in antiquity, but it is my belief that Lord Voldemort found it, and has set his Death-eaters the task to bring him back."

"How could such a thing happen, Albus? You said yourself that it would have to be performed by a Parsel Mouth, and we know Harry won't do it," Professor McGonagall's crisp brogue came from the back of the room.

"Nagini," Severus answered from where he was seated with his uncle. "The Dark Lord's snake understands human speech. All the Death-eaters need to do it recite the spell in English and have the snake repeat what they are saying."

"But they would have to know the spell first. It isn't written in English," Tonks remarked.

"Are there any Archeologists among the Death-eaters, or at least someone who can read hieroglyphics?" Frank Longbottom asked from the back of the room.

"Yes, one of my contacts believes that Justin Blackdrake is one of the Dark Lord's followers. He is a rather mediocre archeologist, but is more than capable of reading ancient languages, including Egyptian and Babylonian. He also knows something of Mayan and Aztec," Tiberius Snape informed the members of the Order. "He also did some recent work in both Egypt and South America."

"Professor, if someone could be brought back from the dead, would they be mortal again? You said something about reversing the spell too," Neville Longbottom questioned.

"According to the information that has been given to me by Bill and Charlie Weasley, they can only be stopped by the reversal spell. Ordinary means of destruction will be ineffective," Dumbledore responded, watching Harry closely.

"Can they be injured? Would they feel pain?" Ron demanded amazed.

"I do not know," Dumbledore sighed. "What we need to do is to study the information we are receiving and keep our eyes open."

"Professor Dumbledore, if this spell works, what is to prevent Voldemort from resurrecting someone else? He could bring back his whole army," Harry said, voicing everyone's worst fear.

"That is why we are taking steps to make sure all the deceased Death-eaters bodies are being cremated. Unfortunately, one of them is unaccounted for."

"Which one?" Draco asked sharply.

"Your father," Dumbledore replied studying the young wizard.

"But he was placed into the family vault. I know. I was there when the vault was opened. So was Tonks! She thought I should go since he was my father, even if he did try to kill me!" Draco shouted frantically.

"No one is accusing you, Son," Moody's gravelly voice reassured him. "We only just found out about an hour before we were attacked. It's obvious that Voldemort wanted his lost followers back too."

"Draco, calm down," Harry said forcefully. "There is no proof such a spell will work even if they try it, and you are in a safe place. If anything, we would all be in danger should Voldemort be able to accomplish his task, and I personally think it is all nonsense."

"Then why is my cousin Sirius sitting here?"

"He was never dead to begin with. He merely fell through the veil, and whatever really happened he just apparated back to Grimmauld Place. He was confused from his injuries," Harry told him, but inside she knew it was only a partial truth. Sirius should not be there with her, except that her father had been able to stop his fall before he passed completely into the afterlife.

"Harry is right, Draco," Sirius voice rang through the room, "there is no need to panic."

"I agree," Dumbledore nodded, "and I feel that we should adjourn the meeting now, and digest this information. Harry, you are not to go anywhere alone, and Draco, you are to continue training with your cousin Tonks, and Ron. You too, should not be alone. While even I do not believe it is possible to resurrect the dead, I do not want anyone to make it look as if it has been done either. That would create a mass panic and people are finally starting to believe that Voldemort is gone for good," Dumbledore addressed the room.

The members all rose, and began talking amongst themselves, lines of worry etched on many of their faces. Harry knew that if Voldemort should return, she would have to be the one to stop him. As far as she knew, she and Voldemort had been the only two Parsel Mouths in the Wizarding world right now, and if he resurrected Lucius Malfoy, then Draco was in almost as much danger as she was. Bidding the members good night at the door, she was glad to find that Dumbledore stayed behind.

"Albus, is it really possible to raise the dead?" Remus inquired thoughtfully, brow furrowed with worry.

"I don't know. Our ancient ancestors knew things that have been lost through the ages by war, famine, disease, and Muggle destruction from ignorance and fear."

"More importantly, have we found a counter spell?" Harry looked at Dumbledore with a steady gaze. "Unless you know of someone else who would be able to perform it? Somehow I don't think Nagini would be too helpful."

"Bill Weasley believes he has uncovered it while he was in Egypt, and also has a partial inscription done by the Mayans. The spells seem to be identical, but he is not certain. I have a friend at the British Museum who will help us to find out."

"So...in other words, I will have the power of life and death? It is no wonder the ancients stopped using it. When you get that much power you believe yourself to be a god."

"Yes, Harry, you are quite right. That is why there are so many gods in the form of serpents, for they were the bearers of the Serpent's Tongue."

"Padfoot, I think I could use some puppy love tonight, or I may never fall asleep," Harry looked over at Sirius, knowing he understood that she wanted him to transform and stay with her for a while.

"Of course," he hugged her. "I think you have had enough excitement for one night."

"Would you like a sleeping draught?" Severus asked with concern.

"Just a mild one," Harry agreed. "Will you be spending the night, Headmaster?"

"Yes, I want to discuss some things with Tiberius, and I am happy to see you have released Sirius and Severus."

"For the time being. I know Remus is happy with the full moon so close now. Maybe the two puppies can go out for a run together," Harry teased, trying to lighten the somber mood.

"Ah, if only we could," Remus smiled, "but unfortunately it wouldn't be a good idea. Even with the Wolfbane Potion, there may be too many people about. I would not want to risk it. Maybe when we go back to Hogwarts. A nice run in the forbidden forest would be great."

"I'll second that," Sirius grinned.

"Well, it is passed ten, and it has been a long and stressful day, so I am going to bed."

"I will bring you up the sleeping draught in a few minutes."

"Thanks, Severus. Padfoot, give me ten minutes to change, and then come on up. Just try and be quiet so Phaedra doesn't wake up."

"Please do, she was quite upset earlier. It took me quite a while to calm her down," Circe remarked, stifling a yawn. "Good night, Harry."

"Good night, everyone," Harry nodded, climbing the stairs slowly. She was exhausted physically, but her mind was racing. If Voldemort really could come back what would happen then? 'God, this is the worst thing that could ever happen. The ancients were right to fear it. What happens to a person's soul? Does it come back with them, or are they just some kind of soulless monster?' The thought terrified her, and she climbed into bed grateful that Severus had offered her the potion. Tonight she didn't care what the others were going to discuss. She just wanted to sleep.

Severus and Sirius came up together, and after she drank the potion, she lay down and Sirius transformed and curled up beside her. She was glad of his comforting presence, and fell asleep gently scratching him behind the ears, as he nuzzled her neck with his soft nose.

Part 9 - Graduations and Reunions

Harry did not sleep well since her first meeting of the Order of the Phoenix. She was restless at night and kept waiting for word that Voldemort had returned, but none was forthcoming. She wanted desperately to know that the legend was just that, but every time she saw Dumbledore, he looked older and more worn. So much so, that she had taken to working on advanced Potions with the Snapes even harder than ever. She wanted to pass the Potion Master's exam in the spring, not to show Severus that she could do it, but to make Dumbledore proud of her. She was also studying Latin and had made an interesting discovery in a book on advanced Transfiguration. Sirius, Harry, and Professor McGonagall were animagi, each able to transform into a different animal. However, Harry discovered that there was also such a thing as an Animagimultiplico. This was an animagus with the ability to transform into more than one animal. It was extremely rare, as was her ability to turn into a phoenix, and she wondered if she could do more than one animal. Resolving to keep her mind off her worry about Voldemort, she decided that this would be a good way to do it. She would choose an animal and start trying to transform. The book had said that the most advanced animagimultiplico had been Merlin. She also resolved to improve her telekinesis, much to Phaedra's delight, and would practice at the breakfast table. Dumbledore allowed her to do so, under the pretense of using her ability as a reserve Auror.

This had been going on for the past three weeks, and today was the day she would be graduating from Hogwarts. She was happy and excited and knew that after today, she would be able to do any form of magic without having to ask permission. The ceremony was scheduled for eleven o'clock, and Sirius had planned a party afterwards, on the Hogwarts grounds, for Harry and her friends. All their families had been invited along with Sirius grandmother, and her namesake, his cousin Andromeda with her husband, Ted Tonks. They would be there for Draco, along with Nymphadora, who would actually be working as part of the security team. Sirius had also hinted that she was going to be very happy afterwards, and she wondered if he was up to something, as her birthday was in another week.

All the graduation robes were white, and each was trimmed in the colors of the house each student had been in, but they all now bore the Hogwarts Crest rather than that of the individual's house. Harry was graduating third in her class, tied with her old rival, Draco Malfoy. Hermione, of course, was graduating first, and Ron was fifth. The second place went to a boy named Phillip Thistlebush, a Ravenclaw, who would give the welcoming speech, and fourth place had been awarded to Marilyn Bloodroot, a chubby little Hufflepuff. They would both be sharing several awards with Harry and her friends, although they were not permitted to know exactly what awards they would receive until the actual graduation.

Ron's father, Arthur Weasley, who had just been named permanent Minister of Magic, was to make the presentation of the Awards, along with Professor Dumbledore. Hermione had been practicing her Valedictorian speech for the past week, and Harry and Ron probably knew it better than she did. They were both glad that after today they would not have to hear it anymore, and had lost count of how many times she had made them listen to it. Ron also had a special present for Hermione, and Harry had helped him to select it. The sun was shining, and there wasn't a cloud in the sky. It was a perfect summer day, and while warm, there was a slight breeze. Overall, the day was shaping up to be one she would always remember, and she determined to put her worries aside for a few hours, and enjoy this last day as a student with her friends.

Harry had just finished donning her robes and was fixing her hair into a French braid when Phaedra bounced into the room, all excited.

"Miss Harry, you look so pretty. Are you going to wear your glasses?"

"Do you think I should?" Harry asked, enjoying the child's scrutiny of her features.

Phaedra screwed up her face in a thoughtful frown, before answering, "No! I love your pretty green eyes, and so does Uncle Severus. I want you to wear the little round lenses you can put in them."

"You mean my contact lenses?"

"If that is what they are called, yes. You should be the prettiest girl at the graduation today," she said flopping on the bed, ignoring the fact she too was in formal robes.

"Okay, then I will wear them, but I think there will be prettier girls there than me, and don't let your mum see you wrinkling your robes! She will yell if she catches you on the bed like that."

"Humph, I wanted to wear the pretty pink dress you gave me, but mummy says it is too small now. She had me wear this green one and my dress robes."

"I got you that dress last year, and you have grown, so she is probably right. How about if I buy you another pink dress and you can wear it at the next party?"

"Would you? Oh, thank you Miss Harry. I love you!" Phaedra exclaimed, flinging her arms around Harry's neck.

"I love you too, Phaedra," Harry smiled, realizing it was true. "Now help me to pick out some jewelry to wear while I pop in my lenses."

"I think you should wear these pretty pearls, Phaedra told her, studying the items Harry had in the small jewelry box on her dresser, "and the pretty red ring with the Dragon that Mummy and Uncle Severus gave you for your last birthday."

"All right then, I will," Harry said, taking the items from the box. "Did you know that Mr. Sirius bought me these pearls when I was born? He saved them for when I was old enough to wear them. I think they are one of my most special possessions."

"Why?"

"Because if he had not gotten out of prison, I never would have received them. He gave them to me the first Christmas we were together after he was cleared of my parents' betrayal and murder, when everyone found out I was really a girl," Harry explained clasping the pearls around her neck.

"Do you think Uncle Severus will ever give me special pearls?"

"I'll bet he does," Harry replied, making a mental note to tell him to do so when Phaedra was a few years older. "Now hand me the ring, and I will have on something from both of them."

Phaedra did as she was told, and Harry placed the ring on her right hand. She immediately felt its power and knew that trouble was coming. The ring locked onto her finger again, and would help to warn her of danger, as it had in the past.

"Do you have anything from Mr. Remus?"

"Hmm...Not really, he doesn't usually give me jewelry. It doesn't seem right somehow that I have something on from Sirius and your Uncle Severus but not Remus," she frowned sadly.

"Wait here," Phaedra bounced up, "I have an idea." She ran from the room, and Harry could hear Circe yelling at her to calm down and not wrinkle her robes before they even got to Hogwarts.

Harry waited patiently, donning some eye makeup suitable for the afternoon, and studying her reflection in the mirror. Her hair was pulled back, but her bangs were covering her scar. She knew she looked like her father, but was thinner, and of course, her features were feminine. She was most definitely a Potter, but loved the way her mother's green eyes complimented her dark hair. She didn't think she was beautiful though, she was too short, and didn't have the olive skin that she always associated with exotic and beautiful looking women. Nevertheless, she did realize that men found her attractive, and for the life of her, she did not know why. She wasn't ugly, but she didn't have any features she felt you could call outstanding, unless you counted the scar, and that, in her opinion, actually marred her face. 'All those years spent acting as a boy, you would have thought I should have learned a thing or two about how they think,' she considered, shaking her head. Her thoughts were interrupted by the sound of Phaedra coming back upstairs at a run.

"Miss Harry, I have something for you from Mr. Remus. I told him you felt bad 'cause you had on something from Mr. Sirius and Uncle Sev, but you didn't have anything from him. He did some special magic and asked me to give you this," Phaedra beamed, pulling her hands out from behind her back, displaying a wrist corsage of red and yellow roses to match her house colors. "I hope I didn't crush it."

"Oh," Harry half-sobbed, "it's beautiful."

"Miss Harry, why are you going to cry?"

"Sometimes people start to cry when they are really happy. Remus made this for me, so I wouldn't feel sad that I had nothing to wear from him, and now I do," she explained taking the corsage and putting it on her left wrist. "Now I think I'm ready. Let's go downstairs since it is almost time to leave," Harry said, placing her wand in her robes. "We are going to apparate to Hogwarts."

"I know, I am going with Uncle Severus. I like when we do it, it's fun. When will I be able to apparate?"

"Not till you're eighteen, or have finished Hogwarts. You have to have a license and if you do it wrong you can leave pieces of your body behind."

"Yech, does it hurt when that happens?"

"I'm not sure. We should ask and find out. It never happened to me, I only ended up in the wrong place once or twice when Dumbledore was teaching me," she said as they descended the stairs to the first floor.

"Mummy said they would wait for you in the Parlor. Uncle Tiberius isn't going. He had to do some work for the Order for Headmaster Mr. Dumbledore. I heard Mummy and Uncle Severus talking about it."

"Phaedra, you should not be talking about the Order, even to Harry." Her mother reprimanded her as they entered the parlor. "Harry, you look lovely."

"Thank you, Circe. Where are the others?"

"Severus will be along in a minute to take Phaedra; he is just locking up his potions lab. Sirius and Remus are making sure the dogs are fed and have enough water before we leave. I'm sorry Tiberius could not come, but he promised Albus he would do some more undercover work."

"I understand," she nodded. "I think I hear the others coming up the hall now."

"Harry, you look lovely." Severus studied her with approval, coming into the room.

"She looks more than lovely," Sirius beamed proudly, "she is exquisite."

"Flattery will get you everywhere," Harry teased, winking at Remus, who stood beside her godfather, a huge smile on his face. Harry thought he looked quite well considering it was the last night of the full moon. "Will you be staying for the party?"

"Yes, it should be over before it gets dark, but in any case Albus has made arrangements for us to spend the night at Hogwarts. I have already drunk my potion so there should be no problem."

"I didn't know we were going to stay the night. I don't have anything with me to wear," she said with dismay.

"Don't worry, Honey, the house elves will bring our things later," Sirius replied warmly. "When we get to Hogwarts we will have to separate since we need to sit with the staff. Will you be okay?"

"I think I can manage. I will show Phaedra the giant squid until it's time to begin."

"There is a giant squid?" Phaedra asked wide-eyed.

"He lives in the lake, and he loves to eat little girls," Severus grinned wickedly at his niece, "so I wouldn't go too near the edge."

"Miss Harry, is Uncle Severus telling me the truth?"

"The squid must eat something," Harry chuckled, as they went out the front door. Remus locked it, using a spell known only to the members of the household.

"Are you ready, Phaedra?" Severus asked at the front gate.

"Yes Uncle Severus."

"Then hold onto me as tight as you can, and we will be off. Your Mum will follow us with the others."

"Okay," Phaedra replied, wrapping her arms around her uncle as he raised his wand.

"Hogwarts," he said, and they disappeared into the morning sunshine.

Circe followed him immediately and then Harry went at the same time as Sirius and Remus. They arrived at the end of the road that led onto the grounds. Harry noted that there were other people arriving too. Some were coming from the town of Hogsmeade itself, having arrived by portkey, and others had come on brooms or used Muggle transportation, Hermione's parents among them. Harry reasoned that the Muggle born children had directed their parents and they were able to get through the barriers shielding the school since a witch or wizard accompanied them.

"Miss Harry, let's go. I want to see the squid," Phaedra begged, tugging at her sleeve.

"Phaedra, calm down," Circe warned firmly, "the squid might be underwater today. He doesn't always surface."

"It's okay, Circe, I don't mind. Come on Phaedra," Harry laughed, "I'll race you the rest of the way to Hogwarts." Harry took off at a slow run in an effort to allow Phaedra to win. Both girls were laughing and smiling with delight as they avoided bumping into the other families walking towards the school...

"It is good to see her so happy," Remus remarked as they walked up the hill towards the castle. "She has been rather quiet since the meeting."

"She's worried, we all are," Snape replied curtly.

"Then we need to make sure she has some piece of mind over the next few weeks. I hope she will enjoy our little surprise. I am looking forward to some time away myself," Sirius said smirked.

"We all are," Remus agreed, "even Severus needs some down time."

"I admit the change of scenery will do us all good. Besides there is a Potions Conference that is scheduled in Paris, and I was lucky enough to be able to reserve a seat for myself and Harry."

"You take her to the conference; I think she will prefer the *Louvre* or a nice walk along the Seine."

"I thought your family chateau was in the country?" Remus asked curiously.

"It is. In fact, it is in Brittany, not far from Merlin's Forest, *Brocelainde*. It is one of the smaller houses. My family being the way they were boastfully called it, *Le Chateau de Noir*," Sirius smirked.

"It will be good for Harry to learn some of our history," Severus mused, "up till now she has not had much information except what she has heard from the other students, or Muggle myths and legends."

"I think she should see Merlin's grave and some of our other historic sites such as the *Fontaine de Barenton*, where Merlin met Vivian, and the *Val Sans Retour*, where Morgane held the unfaithful lovers prisoner until they were freed by Lancelot," Remus agreed.

"Ah...Moony old friend, always the scholar," Sirius shook his head with a grin. "I still think she will enjoy *Saint Malo*. It is one of the finest bathing resorts in France."

"I think you just want to see her in a bathing suit. You know she will wear one of those Muggle styles," Remus laughed. "I hope for your sake she just doesn't decide to wear a sting bikini or a thong! I need not remind you that payback is a bitch. Can't you just see all the young men following her around on the beach?" Remus taunted wickedly.

Sirius growled softly in his throat, frowning his brow in consternation.

"If I know Black they won't get within ten feet of her. He would just transform and go after them," Severus replied. "Of course the up side might just be that he is hauled off as a vicious dog by the Animal Control," Snape gloated.

"Now little brother, it is a good thing Harry is not here to hear you say that or you and Sirius might just end up tied at the wrists again," Circe admonished playfully, as they reached the castle. "I see that Phaedra got her wish. The squid is swimming in the middle of the lake today."

"Who is that with Harry?" Snape asked shielding his eyes from the sun.

"Judging by the hot pink hair, I would guess it is my cousin, Tonks."

"Sirius, I have to agree. Who else but Nymphadora would have hair that shade of pink?" Circe smiled.

"Sirius, what color is her hair, anyway?" Remus asked curiously. "Do you have any idea?"

"If I remember correctly, it is dark brown, and her eyes are blue."

"Isn't it time the three of you got inside? I am sure Albus is waiting," Circe said checking her watch.

"Yes, we should get going," Remus agreed. "Minerva said she wanted all the staff to help greet the families and make everyone feel welcome. She said it would help the Muggles feel comfortable."

"Circe will you tell Harry we will see her at the ceremony?" Sirius asked as he moved towards the castle doors, which were open to accommodate the throng of people.

"Certainly, I need to go and get Phaedra before she decides to find out if the squid is tame. She appears to be trying to attract its attention, and I don't need her to get soaking wet," Circe remarked, waving goodbye to the three men, who were grinning at the antics of the little girl, as they entered the castle...

"Phaedra, don't get so near the edge, you will get mud all over your shoes," Harry warned.

"Look Miss Harry, he is swimming towards us," Phaedra squealed with delight. "Do you think he really eats children?"

"He may not eat you, but he has been known to pull people into the lake!" Harry exclaimed. She knew the squid was actually harmless, but it did like to grab an ankle from time to time.

"Does it have a name?"

"I don't think so. Maybe you should name him."

"Okay, I will call him Blue Eye."

"That sounds good, since his eye is blue."

"Hello Blue Eye," Phaedra curtsied, as the squid swam closer to the shore, reaching one of its giant tentacles towards her.

"Phaedra! Step back from the edge now!" Circe yelled, as Harry pulled her back.

"Uh oh...I think my Mum is getting mad," she groaned.

"Now you're really in for it," Harry agreed. "I told you not to get too close. You're lucky he didn't pull you in." Even as Harry said the words, she heard a yell, and a splash. Turning around, she saw that the squid had zeroed in on Circe and latched onto her ankle, pulling her into the lake, before swimming off. Circe was standing waist deep in the water, walking slowly towards the shore.

"Oh, Circe, I'm so sorry!" Harry exclaimed as Tonks came running up from where she was standing under one of the large shade trees.

"Tonks, could you take Phaedra up to the castle while I help Circe?"

"Sure, Harry. I will meet you both in the Great Hall," Tonks replied taking the child by her hand and hustling her off towards the school.

"Circe, I feel awful. Your new robes are ruined," Harry cried in dismay.

"It will be all right, Harry. It was my own fault for not paying attention. I know how that squid likes to catch people off guard, and was so busy watching Phaedra that I failed to make sure I was out of his striking distance," she answered doing a drying spell as Harry followed suit and ran her wand up and down to iron out the wrinkled fabric. "At least the water was shallow and I didn't get my hair wet."

"I still feel like it is my fault," Harry answered regretfully.

"Well, I am as good as new, so why don't we get moving on up to the castle. I believe the ceremony will be starting soon."

"I for one will be glad when it is over. Ron and I know Hermione's speech better than she does. We are planning on doing an incendiary spell on it afterwards," she grinned playfully.

"Is it very long?"

"Maybe half an hour, but she worked really hard on it."

"What is it about?"

"Most of it is the usual graduation stuff, but she does say that the magical community and the nonmagical people need to learn to work in harmony and accept one another for their abilities. It is a nice theory but she doesn't seem to understand that many Muggles are frightened and jealous of the magic."

"And you do?"

"I grew up with it. My aunt and uncle considered me a freak. They hated anything magical. My aunt had always been jealous of my mother and severed ties with her before I was born. She only took me in since it afforded her some protection from Voldemort because she and my Mum were blood relatives, and her blood would act like my Mum's."

"So you agree we should keep our world separate?"

"That's a hard question. I would like to think my relatives are the exception to the rule. Hermione's parents while wary are very proud that they have a magical daughter. I would like to see more understanding on both sides. I think we all would."

"Me too," Circe agreed, as they entered the castle and Severus strode over to them.

"Circe, are you all right? Phaedra told me the squid pulled you into the lake," he questioned, dark eyes glittering with laughter.

"You do not want to go there right now, little brother," she warned.

"I can see that," he sneered. "By the way, she named the squid Blue Eye. Dumbledore loves it."

"Leave it to my daughter to name a giant squid," Circe laughed exasperated. "Where is she, anyway?"

"Sitting in the back with Tonks," Severus indicated, directing his attention towards where they were seated. "They saved you a seat. I believe you know Sirius' cousin Andromeda."

"Yes, she was behind me in school by a few years, but we were both in Slytherin. It will be nice to see her again. As I recall she was a very nice girl, not at all like her older sister Bellatrix. I will see you both after the ceremony." Circe told them as she moved over to where her daughter was sitting with the Tonks family.

"Harry, I believe Minerva wants all of the students to line up outside of the Great Hall. She brought you all in as first years, and she likes to bring you in as graduates," Snape informed her.

"I think that is rather nice. She was there when we came in for the first time, and she likes to be there when we come into the hall for the last time," Harry responded with a catch in her throat.

"Then I would suggest you not keep her waiting," Snape said looking at her down his nose. "I will see you later."

"All right," Harry agreed moving back towards the entrance foyer.

The students were waiting in one of the rooms across from the Great Hall where they were to line up before entering to take their seats. Professor McGonagall was signing them in as they entered to make sure everyone had arrived. She was dressed in her dark green robes with her Scottish Tartan. Harry sensed the old witch had been crying, knowing it was the last time she would see most of them until their children came through the massive front doors for the first time.

"Hello, Professor," Harry greeted her. "It is good to see you again."

"Thank you, Miss Potter. I was wondering when you would finally grace us with your presence. I understand you had some kind of mishap at the lake?"

"The giant squid pulled Professor Snape's sister into the water, but she's fine."

"I am glad to hear it, now if you would take your place in line..."

"Yes, Ma'am," Harry acquiesced going over to stand with Ron and Hermione as she greeted her other friends.

Scanning the room, she was relieved that they were all having the same flurry of emotions as she was; happy, sad, excited, and uncertain. Even the Slytherins were fighting tears. After today, they would all be considered adults in the wizarding world. She only hoped that her fears about Voldemort were groundless and they would all have bright futures in front of them. As the last of the students entered the room, Professor McGonagall rose to address the graduates.

"In a few moments you will be walking through the doors into the Great Hall for the last time as students. You will take your seats..."

"Trevor!" Neville's voice burst out, as he moved over to retrieve his toad, accompanied by the chuckles of his fellow students. "I'm sorry, Professor, but I figured Trevor was here on my first day so I kind of thought he should be here on my last," he apologized sheepishly.

"It seems to me Mr. Longbottom he did the same thing on that day as just now," McGonagall's thick brogue agreed. "Please try to keep him in your pocket."

"Yes, Professor."

"As I was saying, you will walk through the doors and will sit in the areas designated for each of your houses. When it comes time for you to receive your diplomas you will each be called up to the podium by the sorting hat and Professor Dumbledore will hand you your diploma in your left hand so that you can shake with your right. Before we go in, I would just like to say that you have been among the finest students this school has ever seen, and it has been my privilege to teach you. I wish you all luck and happiness in your future endeavors," she said, a catch in her throat, as she held her head up high. "It is time to start."

They followed her across the hall and the doors to the Great Hall swung open. The ceiling was a crystalline blue, and fluffy white clouds scudded across it. Harry almost wished the ceremony had been at night so she could see the candles floating against the stars, but knew in a few weeks she would be back as a teacher and would get to enjoy them then. All the teachers were sitting on the dais, except for Firenze, who was standing to one side. Harry wiped a tear from her eye as she saw that two of the chairs were draped in black for Professor Flitwick and Professor Trelawney, who had been lost in the battle to save the school. Once all the students had taken their seats, Professor Dumbledore stood to address the room.

"Good morning, as Headmaster I wish to extend a warm welcome to all of our visitors. I know you are all anxious to get started, but I wish to remind our non-magical guests that their cameras will not work in the building and any pictures taken outside will also be blank. This has been done for security. If you would like a picture of your son or daughter there are teachers standing by who will charm your camera so it will work. However, you may not be facing the building or anywhere indoors. I would suggest you go down by the lake as it is a pleasant day, and a nice place for photographs. I will also ask our magical guests to also refrain from taking pictures while in the castle as a courtesy to our other guests..."

Harry and Ron were sitting patiently as the faculty each addressed the students briefly. Next, Ron's Dad, Arthur Weasley, Minister of Magic, rose to address the students.

"Good Morning everyone, I am happy to be here on this wonderful day. This graduating class will long be remembered. They have had to live through a violent war, and helped to protect this institution from forces that would seek to destroy the freedoms and opportunities to learn and understand one another for which it is noted.. I am proud to announce that every student here will be receiving The Order of Merlin along with his or her diplomas. Of the fifty-two students seated here, forty-seven will receive the third class, four the second class and one student will receive the Order of Merlin first class. However, before we give out these awards, there are other school awards to be given, and our Valedictorian, Miss Hermione Granger, will present her speech. Miss Granger, if you would please come up to the podium?"

The students all applauded as Hermione rose and walked up onto the dais. Harry leaned over and whispered into Ron's ear?"

"Did you know about all of us getting an Order of Merlin?"

"Hell, no, Harry. I bloody well would have warned you. I know how you hate this kind of stuff. Now I know why I saw Rita Skeeter in the back of the room representing the Quibbler, along with another reporter from the Daily Prophet."

"Oh great, that's all I need, my picture in the papers again. I just want to be left alone."

"Harry, you know that isn't going to happen. You're a celebrity. People want to know about the witch who defeated Voldemort."

"Yeah, and what will happen if he comes back? They'll all say I failed or faked the whole thing!"

"No they won't. There were too many witnesses, and his body was brought to the Ministry after Grimmauld Place. Besides, no one comes back from the dead!"

"Sh! Dumbledore is watching us. I think he knows what we're talking about," Harry warned uncomfortably. "I want to hear Hermione's speech anyway."

"We've heard it at least ten times. I love Hermione but enough already," Ron groaned, looking up at Hermione as she began her speech.

"On behalf of the graduating class of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, I would like to welcome you all here today. Seven years ago, we all came to Hogwarts for the first time, from all walks of life. Many of us come from non-magical families, others from a home where only one parent was a witch or wizard, and finally there are those from all magical families. Yet when we entered this building for the first time, we all had one thing in common. We were all afraid of failure..."

Hermione's speech continued for the next half hour without incident, but just as she was getting ready to deliver her closing lines, Harry caught sight of Peeves, drifting up from the ceiling. He was holding a water balloon, and she could tell he was up to mischief.

"Ron, look," she said nudging him in the shoulder. "Peeves is going to ruin Hermione's speech! We have to stop him."

"Oh no!" he muttered anxiously. Bored as he was with Hermione's speech he did not want to see her embarrassed. Even as the thought struck him, he knew it was too late. Everyone in the room had spotted the mischievous ghost as he took aim at Hermione's head and let the balloon go.

"So now, as we prepare to leave Hogwarts for the last time," Hermione intoned unaware of the poltergeist's activity, I will say thank you..."

At that moment, Harry jumped up, and pulling her wand, took quick aim, uttering a fast spell, "*Verto globus aqua in fulgor*," turning the water balloon into glitter, which drifted slowly down onto Hermione. The room burst into applause, as Peeves stuck out his tongue and disappeared.

Hermione suddenly realized what had been about to happen, and laughed out loud. "As you all can see, Hogwarts has not been without its times of fun and pranks. Peeves loves to catch us all unawares with his little tricks," she said altering the end of her speech, "and I think those are the things we will all remember the most," she finished, and resumed her seat, amid a round of applause. "Thanks, Harry; I should have seen that coming," Hermione whispered.

"Anytime," Harry grinned.

"Now I believe the Sorting Hat would like a few words, and then we will present the awards,"
Dumbledore said, addressing the audience from the dais.

All eyes were drawn to the tattered old hat sitting on the stool at the front of the room.
Twitching, the large tear above the brim opened and the hat began to sing.

I am the Hogwarts Sorting Hat

As most of you do know,

I sorted them into each house

On their first day of school

Twas then they put me on their heads

To look inside each mind,

For each had suited talents,

For which they were assigned

The Ravenclaws intelligence,

With Slytherins so cunning,

In Hufflepuff hard workers go,

And Gryffindor the brave

Endeavoring to learn their craft

From morning until night,

With chants and spells and potions mixed

They passed from year to year,

Till now you see before you

As young adults today

Their minds all crammed with knowledge

Of Wizardry's best skills,

They learned them here at Hogwarts,

So now their time is done

For when I call their name and house

As I did so long ago,

They may come for their diplomas

Then God Speed them on I say,

To face the world outside this place

That started them on their way.

The room erupted into cheers and applause, and the Sorting Hat tipped its point down towards the brim in a show of gratitude. The parents of the Muggle borns looked on in awe. Even though they knew their children had magical abilities, the reality of how extensive the magical world really was astounded them, since their children had not been permitted to use magic while still in school.

Dumbledore rose along with Mr. Weasley and with a wave of his wand a small table appeared with the diplomas neatly tied with ribbons in the color of each house. Mr. Weasley also waved his wand, and a second table appeared with a stack of rectangular boxes each containing an Order of Merlin.

"We also have some school awards to bestow, and they will be given out by the Professors who taught the particular subject," Dumbledore spoke from the dais, "to save time we will present the awards with the diplomas. If our Sorting Hat is ready, we shall begin."

The hat twitched again, and yelled, "John Abbott, Hufflepuff."

"Congratulations, Mr. Abbott," Dumbledore said handing him his diploma. He then went to Mr. Weasley.

"Mr. Abbott it is my pleasure to bestow upon you the Order of Merlin Third Class for your heroism in the defense of this school, congratulations," he repeated, shaking the young man's hand.

"Susan Bones, Hufflepuff," the hat called again.

"Congratulations, Susan," Dumbledore beamed. "Miss Bones is also the recipient of the Muggle Studies Award, which will be presented by Professor Blackburn."

Susan went up to the dais, received her diploma from Dumbledore, and then was given a plaque from Professor Blackburn, for outstanding performance in Muggle Studies. She then was also awarded an Order of Merlin Third Class from Mr. Weasley.

This procedure was repeated until the only students left were Neville, Draco, Ron, Hermione, and Harry. Harry knew they had purposely been placed last due to the significance of the Order of Merlin each was to receive.

"Neville Longbottom, Gryffindor," the hat yelled and all the students applauded loudly.

"Neville will also receive the Herbology award, and Order of Merlin Second Class, for his outstanding help during the battle of Hogwarts," Dumbledore smiled, and Neville's mother

could be heard crying softly, as his father cheered, and grandmother announced to those around her, "that's my grandson!"

Dumbledore then gave Neville his Diploma, while Professor Sprout gave him a small statue in the form of a tree inscribed with his name. He then received his Order of Merlin from Mr. Weasley.

"Ronald Weasley, Gryffindor," the Sorting Hat announced with a flourish.

"Mr. Weasley will receive awards in Divination and Care of Magical Creatures and the Order of Merlin Second Class for his outstanding performance during the battle of Hogwarts," Dumbledore smiled, winking at Ron. Taking his diploma, he then received his other award from Firenze, a crystal ball with an inscription on the base, as the Muggles talked excitedly about seeing the centaur. Hagrid then gave him a plaque engraved with magical creatures on the border. Finally, his father then presented him the Order of Merlin Second Class, hugging him profusely. His family cheered wildly, and Hermione wiped a tear from her eye. Harry gave him thumbs up, beaming proudly.

"Draco Malfoy, Slytherin," the hat called. His name was greeted with mixed enthusiasm, but you could hear Tonks, stating he was her cousin. Sirius also warmly applauded for his cousin, along with Ginny. Severus actually smiled for his godson.

"Mr. Malfoy will receive awards in Astronomy, and Potions, along with an Order of Merlin Second Class, for his organization of the students preceding the battle. As he received his awards, Draco held his head up proudly. He was the last of an old and noble line. Despite their association with the Dark Arts, he wanted the people in the room to know that he was not among those who would use such magic to their own ends.

There was a brief pause as Draco resumed his seat, and then the hat again called out, "Hermione Granger, Gryffindor, Hogwarts Valedictorian," and the room burst into applause. Hermione was receiving the most awards of the graduating class.

"Well done, Miss Granger," Professor Dumbledore approved as he gave out her diploma. "Miss Granger is receiving awards in Arithmancy, Ancient Runes, History of Magic, Charms, and the second of the two Potions awards. She will also receive the Order of Merlin Second Class for assisting the younger students to safety prior to the attack on the school."

The room went wild with applause, Harry among them, but she also felt a stab of jealousy. She had hoped Severus would give her the Potions Award. She had worked so hard with him, and had actually surpassed Hermione, but she knew that was only due to the special tutoring she had received. Hermione was a natural with Potions. 'Stop feeling cheated,' Harry thought to herself, 'I know damn well she deserves the award. It just bothers me that Severus didn't recognize me for all that hard work I had to do to earn the NEWT he gave me. He also gave Draco the other award and that makes it hurt all the more.' She looked at Severus, and wanted to cry. 'What is the matter with me? I never cared about what he did before, why should I start now?'

"Miss Harry Potter, Gryffindor!" the hat yelled, interrupting her thoughts. Harry didn't want any awards. She just wanted some privacy, and now she knew her picture would be in all the papers again. She rose slowly as the room went wild with applause and cheers of "Our Savior," and quietly walked up to the dais.

"Miss Potter will receive awards in Transfiguration, Defense Against the Dark Arts, the Quidditch Flying Award, and the rarely given Natural Healer's Commendation. She will be permitted to seek Licensure by the Ministry of Magic following demonstration of her skills to three Senior Healers. She will also be given the Order of Merlin First Class, for her defeat of the Dark Wizard known as Lord Voldemort, her role in the evacuation of the younger students, and her defense of the school during the attack. She is the youngest person to ever receive this honor," Dumbledore announced proudly.

Harry was stunned. She had not expected the Healer's Award. She also was embarrassed by the continued applause from the students and families. Even the parents of the Muggle born students were aware of the role she had played in protecting both the Wizarding world and the non-magical world. She graciously accepted her diploma, looking mischievously at Professor Dumbledore. Sirius and Professor McGonagall hugged her as she accepted the Transfiguration Award, a plaque inscribed with a Phoenix. Remus beamed as he handed her the Defense Against the Dark Arts Award, a wand made not of wood, but the antler of a stag, with the core enchantment of another one of Fawkes feather's, to represent her Patronus and her heart. She then received the Healer's Commendation from Poppy.

"You just can't seem to stay out of my infirmary." The nurse whispered playfully.

"I like the company," Harry chuckled, making Poppy grin happily. She then received her Order of Merlin from Mr. Weasley amid furious applause and the flashing of cameras from the Daily Prophet and the Quibbler. She had a feeling Rita Skeeter was going to be looking for an interview later. As she moved to exit the dais she could feel Snape watching her, and decided to send him a mental message. 'Don't talk to me. I worked my ass off for you and you didn't even acknowledge my hard work. The one award I really wanted, I didn't get,' she glared, letting him know how hurt and angry she was feeling. He merely arched an eyebrow in her direction, a slight sneer on his lips.

"That concludes our ceremony for this year," Dumbledore announced. "Please try not to use all your magic skills at once when you leave here today, and be discreet so that those of you who live in non-magical communities are not seen. Other than that, I wish to say good fortune and enjoy whatever celebrations your families have planned. Class Dismissed!"

The graduating class cheered one last time and the air was suddenly filled with pointed hats as the former students cheered one another in jubilation. Harry quietly worked her way through the crowd and toward the doors at the front of the castle. She just wanted a quiet place and some privacy.

"I'll see you guys in a little while," Harry whispered to her friends as she reached the exit. I have something I have to do. Keep Rita Skeeter on ice for awhile," she chuckled in Ron's ear."

"Where are you going?"

"Visiting," Harry replied mysteriously, as they walked out into the warm summer sunshine. "Let Sirius know I will be back in a little while."

"Visiting?" Ron questioned. Who are you visiting?"

Harry merely smiled, transforming into her phoenix, and took off towards Hogsmeade."

"Now what? Sirius and the others will want to know where she went," Ron said rolling his eyes, putting an arm around Hermione.

"Ron, if you want to be an Auror you need to be more observant. She flew off towards the road to Hogsmeade, but if you were paying attention you would have realized she turned west."

"Of course, how could I have been so stupid? She's gone to the cemetery to visit her parents."

"Come on then, let's go and find Sirius and the others and let them know. She is probably feeling a bit sad, wishing they could be here too," Hermione tossed her head knowingly as they hurried off to locate Harry's three protectors...

Harry landed in the tree she had come to think of as Artemis Watching Tree, remaining in her animagus form. Resting, she looked about and noticed the fresh lilies neatly placed on her parent's grave. The sweet strains of a flute were drifting upwards and Harry caught sight of Artemis lavender hair as she swayed with the music. She was sitting in the shadow of the tree. The music had an aura of mystery to it, mesmerizing Harry, and the beautiful scarlet Phoenix began to trill contentedly.

"I have been waiting for you," Artemis soft childlike voice spoke from the shadows.

Harry jumped, startled, and looking down from the tree, saw that Artemis was smiling up at her. She immediately flew down, and transformed.

"I didn't want to startle you, and the music was so...wait a minute...how did you know I was coming?" Harry asked confused.

"Did you not just attend your rites of passage at the castle?"

"Oh, the graduation...yes, I did."

"Then I knew you would wish to speak with those who sleep here," she smiled, indicating the grave.

"Good old fashioned common sense; and here I thought there was some kind of magic involved."

"Common sense has a magic of its own. But I do wish to speak with you," the elf explained, her lavender eyes growing serious.

"You're worried, I can sense it."

"Yes, Miss Harry. I have already spoken to the wise one and he too is concerned," she answered referring to Professor Dumbledore. "I have been listening to the wind in the trees, much as the centaurs watch the stars. There will be great turmoil coming in the weeks ahead. You need to watch for she who shifts with the night. She will be your guide."

"I don't understand. What do you mean?"

"I can tell you no more, only that you will have to face a crisis within your soul. Do not fear your other selves, for they will be your salvation. Your heart is that of the Phoenix, but your cunning comes from the snake that lies upon the mother earth. When the two have been joined, you will have the power of the ancients. Remember...what is in our hearts is not always what is right. This is my gift to you for your right of passage into woman hood. I must go now, for another approaches." Artemis bowed, and vanished, before Harry could ask her more.

Harry just stood there open mouthed, wondering what it was that Artemis had just told her. What was all that stuff about someone who will shift with the night and the power of the ancients? Obviously, this was some kind of warning. A knot was forming in Harry's stomach, and a cloud passed over the sun, causing a chill to run over her spine. Artemis had used the same words as her father and Dumbledore, *'what is in our hearts is not always what is right!'* Glancing up the path, she saw Artemis had been right. Severus was hurrying in her direction.

"Weasley and Granger told me I would find you here. Black and Lupin are waiting for you. Everyone is gathering in the garden for the party."

"I needed some quiet time, not that you would care."

"I am more that aware of your adolescent outrage towards me over a silly little award. You are acting like a spoiled and jealous child."

"I worked harder for you than anyone else. I deserved your recognition. That Potions Award really would have meant something to me," Harry yelled angrily.

"Oh, and what is that?" he sneered.

"It would have told me that you had real confidence in my ability to pass the Potions Master's exam. It would have been proof that you really cared, but you don't know me at all."

"My dear girl, just the fact that I am sponsoring you to take the exam should have told you that I care."

"All that tells me is that you don't want to be embarrassed so that you are making sure I pass. You could care less about me," Harry said turning to walk away from him. Before she had taken more than two steps, she felt the pressure of his long slender fingers digging into her arm with a vise like grip, spinning her round to face him.

"You think that I don't care, Potter, that I don't know you? You're wrong. I know you better than you know yourself," he hissed. "You aren't happy unless you're challenged. You need a goal to focus on to satisfy that stubborn Gryffindor pride. You claim not to enjoy all the attention, yet you thrive on it. I care about you more than you know. I understand the lonely aching within your soul better than Lupin does or Black ever will." Severus stared down at her, black eyes glittering furiously, embracing her, as he crushed his lips to hers.

Harry struggled against his onslaught as he forced his tongue to meet hers, before she relaxed and responded to his embrace. 'This is not happening,' she thought confused. 'I can't be in love with him...Sirius...' Jerking free, Harry stared up at him in disbelief. CRACK! She slapped him across his right cheek. Shaking her head, she started backing away from him. He threw back his head, laughing, ignoring the stinging of his cheek.

"You aren't ready to admit you love me yet, but I'll be waiting, Harry...I'll be waiting," Snape sneered softly.

Harry continued to stare at him in shock, taking deep breaths to calm herself down, before she was able to transform and fly back towards Hogwarts.

Severus just stood watching until she disappeared from sight. Turning, he conjured another bouquet of flowers, placing it on James and Lily Potter's grave.

"Potter, if anyone had told me twenty years ago that I would fall in love with your daughter I would have hexed them into oblivion. I did though, and I am telling you and Lily now that I will marry her, and she will always be happy," Snape remarked, looking down at the quiet grave. Nothing moved, and a peaceful quiet had settled over the little cemetery, as Severus raised his wand, apparating back to the bottom of the hill where the path led back to Hogwarts...

Reaching the castle, Harry spotted Professor Dumbledore, and flew over alighting on the grass beside where he was talking with Rita Skeeter.

"Ah, our Little Phoenix, we were wondering when you would return. Did you have a nice visit with your parents?"

"I ran into an old friend," she replied, having resumed her human shape. Her green eyes reflected some of her worry, and his blue ones met hers with understanding.

"You can tell me all about it later, but I believe you promised Miss Skeeter a brief interview," Dumbledore answered looking sternly at the reporter.

"Yes, I will be happy to answer a few questions for Miss Skeeter."

"Then I will excuse myself. Harry we will talk later," Dumbledore assured her before moving off in the direction where Sirius and Remus were talking with the Longbottoms.

"Thank you, Miss Potter," Rita nodded. "I will be brief, as I am also here as an associate of Mr. Lovegood and his daughter. I know they are friends of yours."

"Yes, they are. Now tell me what I can do for you?"

"The world is still waiting to hear how you defeated the Dark Lord."

"I killed him with the killing curse and a lot of luck. I prefer not to go into details," Harry said quietly.

"Ah, the modest heroine," Miss Skeeter commented. "What will you be doing now that the war is over?"

"I will be teaching here at Hogwarts, Miss Skeeter."

"Yeah, she turned down a position as a relief seeker playing professional Quidditch and working for the Ministry of Magic as an Auror." Ron's familiar voice said from over her shoulder.

"Really? How about you Mr. Weasley? You were also at the final battle when the school was attacked. Can you tell me what happened?"

"I'm sure Luna has already told you and her father as much as she has wanted to, Miss Skeeter. So why don't you just relax and enjoy the party?" Hermione remarked coming up behind Ron.

"But the public really wants to know how everything went. You kids are all news. The Quibbler would like to tell all of your stories."

"Miss Skeeter," Harry frowned, "we have all gone through a horrible experience. I for one wish to try to forget the horrors I witnessed that day. Good people were killed, and others maimed for life so please let it go. If you would really like a story why not write about how we are going on with our lives?"

"Ah...very well...I can see none of you are going to give me the details of the battle."

"Did Luna?" Hermione questioned.

"No, she also refused to give us the details. According to her father, she is still having nightmares."

"We all are," Harry stated matter of factly. "Print something happy. I'm sure the world would like to know how we are really coping, instead of telling of the blood and gore. It will come out at the trials anyway."

"All right then, you are going to teach. What about the two of you?" she asked Ron and Hermione.

"I'm in Auror training with Draco Malfoy," Ron explained, "and Hermione is going to work at the Ministry in Muggle Relations."

"You're Muggle born, aren't you, Miss Granger?"

"Yes, I am. That is why I am so interested in working to further the relationships between the two worlds. We need more understanding, and less distance if we are ever going to bridge the gap between the two worlds."

"Yes, well, that is one way to put it," Miss Skeeter agreed, her bug like eyes studying Hermione shrewdly.

They spent another fifteen minutes telling her what some of the other students would now be doing, and she was particularly interested in Neville Longbottom. She knew there would be a good story there, with his parents returned and how they were all adjusting so she drifted off in their direction.

"Thank god that's over," Hermione remarked. "Now we can have some fun."

"I will drink to that," Harry grinned. "Do we have any Butterbeer?"

"Of course, it is over there," Ron replied pointing to where all the tables were set up. "Let's get something to eat. I'm starved."

"So what else is new?" Harry teased. "I will meet you two in a few minutes. I just want to see Sirius and Remus first."

"Okay, but try and hurry," Ron replied. "Hermione, I forgot to tell you, but Mum wanted to see you about staying over for a few more days. I told her you were going to start your job on Monday and to talk with you about it."

"Oh, Ron, I wish I could. Let me go and see her and I will meet the two of you over by the buffet table," she responded moving off to find Mrs. Weasley.

"I suppose you did that to get rid of her for a few minutes so we could talk about that little surprise you have planned for her?" Harry grinned slyly.

"I purposely didn't tell her about Mum's wanting her to stay longer since I knew I would need to talk to you for a few minutes. I'm a nervous wreck."

"Take a hint from George, he did okay the day of the meeting."

"Oh, Harry, stop it!" Ron blushed. "I really want to get this over with."

"Let me just go for one minute and then I will help you out."

"You're sure?"

"We will make the announcement together. After all, what are best mates for? How do her parents feel about it?"

"They're really happy and understand the final decision will be up to Hermione, but they seem to think she will be willing."

"Then let me give Sirius and Remus a quick hug and we will be off." Harry laughed running over to where her two protectors were still deep in conversation. Snape had also arrived on the scene, but she could not meet his eyes.

"Harry we all have a surprise for you. It is a combination graduation and birthday present," Sirius beamed, hugging her.

"Do I get it now?" She questioned with a smile.

"Remus do you think we should make her wait?"

"I don't know, what do you think, Sev?"

"I for one would like to see her reaction. I hope she will appreciate our little present."

"I'm sure if it comes from the three of you, I will love it," she replied, finally looking up at Severus, who had on a wry smile.

"In that case, here it is," Sirius smiled, handing her a large envelope.

Opening it, Harry gasped, "Travel papers to France!"

"That's right, Princess, we're going on holiday in Brittany. We all thought you could use a little fun and rest away from here," Remus beamed, while Sirius hugged her and Snape arched his brow sardonically.

"I love all three of you. When are we going?" she asked looking at the papers.

"We leave in the morning. That is why we are staying over at Hogwarts tonight," Sirius explained.

"I need some new clothes!"

"Relax, Circe has seen to it. She and Phaedra will be coming too," Snape informed her.

"I thought she had to work?"

"I had already put in for my vacation so it all worked out well," Circe smiled, coming over to stand beside her. "The house elves have all your belongings packed, and we will go by Portkey at ten tomorrow morning."

"Does Phaedra know?"

"I told her a little while ago. Speaking of Phaedra, where is she?"

"Young Longbottom is showing her the Whomping Willow," Severus remarked, staring in the direction of the tree.

"Oh great, I had better get over there. No telling what she will do if she wants to see it move." Circe hurried off, nervously.

"Listen, I have to go and meet Ron. He is about to have a case of nervous prostration worrying about giving Hermione her present."

"What is Mr. Weasley giving her?" Snape asked.

"You mean you don't know?"

"Neither do I, Princess."

"I didn't tell them. I wanted to see the look on their faces," Sirius chuckled.

"Oh, well, then I had better get going," Harry smiled, giving her godfather a wink.

Dashing over to find Ron and Hermione by the buffet table, Harry decided to help Ron end his agony quickly. After filling her plate with food, she took her wand and pointed it at her throat. "If you will all give me your attention," she addressed the crowd. "I would like to thank you all for coming today, and would appreciate it if you would all listen up for one minute. My best friend, Ronald Weasley, would like to say a few words, he would like to share with everyone," Harry grinned wickedly as Ron blanched.

"Ah...right...ah..." Ron stammered, then looked at Hermione, and fell onto one knee. "Hermione Granger, would you marry me?" he managed, his voice shaking, as he pulled out a sapphire and diamond ring from his pocket.

Hermione started to cry, stunned, and managed to nod and sob, "Yes, Ron, I'll marry you."

Everyone at the party whooped and cheered. Their parents came over, and hugged them both. Mrs. Weasley and Mrs. Granger both were crying. Harry just quietly drifted back into the crowd, wiping the tears sliding down her cheeks. She wished her life could be so uncomplicated and happy.

The rest of the afternoon was spent eating, dancing, drinking, and having an overall good time. Harry danced with all three of her protectors, making sure to step on Severus feet. He merely arched his brow amused, and kept dancing. Remus was hurting since it was the last night of the full moon, so he begged off, and retired early, but Sirius stayed. She felt happy and safe, and spent most of the evening by his side. She laughed when he and Snape gave Phaedra a dancing lesson, while Circe looked on. Overall, it had been a good day.

Harry was glad when everyone had gone though, and retired to her new rooms to get ready for bed. She had been given rooms on the second floor, over near Professor McGonagall, and was pleased with the comfortable sitting room, with a large bedroom and bath adjoining it. They would be her rooms when she returned to teach in the fall.

Dumbledore was happy that she was satisfied, having come by to speak with her as he had promised. Harry told him what had happened at the cemetery, leaving out the part about Severus. He was thoughtful and had her repeat exactly what Artemis had told her. Blue eyes serious, he told her not to worry, and that things would work themselves out. He was certain she was in no immediate danger. Harry questioned him about this shape shifter, but he merely shook his head, blue eyes twinkling. She knew he was aware of something, but was not yet ready to divulge any information. Finally, he kissed her forehead, and he too retired for the night.

As she lay in bed, she heard a dog barking outside, and then heard the howl of a wolf from the forest. She recognized the voices as those of Padfoot and Moony out for a midnight run in the moonlight, and smiling to herself, fell asleep.

Part 10 - The Actions will Determine the Outcomes

Harry was happily playing a Muggle guessing game with Phaedra while she awaited their turn to enter the long distance Floo System, connecting Britain with the mainland, to return home to England. The two weeks they had all spent in France had been fabulous, and Harry had gotten to learn more about the history of the Wizarding world. *Brocelainde* had been beautiful, and she had been awed by the presence she felt surrounding Merlin's grave when she and Sirius had gone to visit the places she had only heard about in legends or at Hogwarts.

She had also enjoyed a day at the beach, much to her godfather's dismay at the lovely little bikini Circe had gotten for her. The sly looks she had received from her three protectors had not gone unnoticed, and Harry had rather enjoyed it when she and Phaedra went for a long walk on the beach. Sirius and Severus had both followed them, at a discreet distance, or so the two men had believed. She and Phaedra had been collecting shells in a bucket, and Harry decided to sneak up behind the two men. Besides, the bucket was getting heavy, and since there were quite a few Muggles present, she was not able to levitate it. Whispering to Phaedra, they disappeared into a large group of people watching a volleyball game, and circled up behind the two men, who were growing concerned that the two girls were no longer within sight.

"Black, do you see where they have gotten off to?"

"No, damn it, I don't. If anything happens to either of them I will personally..."

"Not before I do," Snape cut Sirius off.

"I wish Harry had on something more substantial. What was your sister thinking to get her such a revealing swimsuit?"

"I noticed you didn't complain when Circe wore a similar bikini," Snape sneered scanning the beach for the two girls.

"Circe is of an age where she can take care of herself," Sirius snorted, "Harry is only just eighteen years old and has been sheltered more than most girls."

"Oh, I don't know, I seem to do all right. It isn't anyone who could defeat the darkest wizard of the century," Harry's amused voice came from behind them, accompanied by Phaedra's high-pitched giggles.

"Harry thank Merlin you're safe," Sirius hugged her with relief.

"Yes..." Severus sneered. "It is amazing how she just happened to find us in this crowd," he said, voice dripping with sarcasm.

"You set us up," Sirius eyed her suspiciously, trying not to laugh.

"Well, for an ex spy and a former Auror, I think you are both in need of a little refresher work. Honestly, you can't even keep track of two girls," Harry laughed. Sirius shifted uncomfortably, and Severus naturally pale features turned a faint crimson. "I have been aware that you were both following us for the past twenty minutes, and what is this business about revealing swim wear?" Harry asked, looking the two men up and down in their Speedo's and

t-shirts. "Remus seems to be the only one of the three of you who is rather modest, and chose to wear loose trunks."

"Harry, I don't think we need to be discussing this in front of Phaedra," Snape replied sternly.

"I hate to admit it, but I agree with you."

"Miss Harry, what do bathing suits have to do with carrying home this heavy bucket of shells?"

"Well, Phaedra, my godfather and your uncle don't particularly like my bikini, for reasons you are too young to understand. So, since I think it is quite nice, we shall make them apologize by having them carry home the bucket," Harry grinned wickedly at the two men.

"I like your bikini," Phaedra replied smartly, "when will I be able to wear one?" she questioned. Her mother had gotten her a one piece with attached skirt, popular with little girls.

"Not for quite some time," Snape replied sternly, taking the bucket from her.

"Come on Phaedra, let's race Sirius back to our blanket," she laughed mischievously, grabbing the little girl and breaking into a run. Sirius dashed ahead of them, and made it back easily since he ran into the water and disappeared beneath the waves, only to reemerge as Padfoot. He then took off up the beach, and repeated the process just before reaching their blanket, transforming back to his human form.

"No fair," Phaedra scolded. "Miss Harry can't transform in the water. You cheated!" she panted dropping onto the blanket beside her mother.

"So did your uncle. He found a quiet place and apparated," Sirius laughed, indicating Severus, who was casually relaxing in a beach chair, the bucket of shells beside him."

"Sev, how did you manage with all the Muggles on the beach?" Harry asked.

"I'm a former spy, remember?" he sneered arching his brow in amusement, but did not reveal how he had managed to apparate on a beach crowded with Muggles.

The rest of the day had been spent swimming and relaxing in the sun until it came time to return to Sirius' family estate. Harry had found it very different from his boyhood home at Grimmauld Place. This house was sunny and cheerful. The serpent motif was still present through out, but the grim feeling of decaying evil did not pervade her senses. Harry had learned that the house had belonged to his grandmother, Andromeda Snape Black's side of the family. She did a double take when hearing Andromeda's maiden name. Severus arched his brow, while Sirius chuckled at the look on her face.

"We told you all pureblood families have a connection," Severus gloated.

"Severus and I just pretend our grandparents were not second cousins," Sirius explained with a scowl. "Grandmum was ostracized like me for not being a good little Slytherin. She wanted no part of the so-called Pureblood ideals, let alone Voldemort. The raving about separation of the bloodlines sickened her. Unfortunately, her marriage to my grandfather was arranged, and if she did not go through with it, her family would have disowned her. She would have been

penniless with nowhere to go. So you see, we are both related to Severus, but on opposite sides of the family.

"This is just too complicated," Harry frowned, shaking her head. "You could make a game show out of it for the telly. I could just see it now," she said, getting up to imitate the announcer, pretending her wand was a microphone, "Welcome to *Guess the Bloodlines*, the show where all good wizards and witches try to decipher their family tree and win a trip to the magical paradise of their choice."

"Uncle, Sev, I think Miss Harry has one daft. Why is she talking into her wand like that?" Phaedra had asked confused, while the others had looked on in amusement.

"She is playing a game, Phaedra," Severus explained. "She is pretending to be the host of a game show on the telly. Muggles use what they call a microphone to magnify their voices, so she is pretending the wand is the microphone."

"Oh...Can we get a television so I can play too? You said we could if Mr. Sirius wanted to."

"I do not think your mother approves," Sirius replied, "but I will see what I can do." He winked at Circe, who was shaking her head in disapproval.

"Miss Harry, Mr. Sirius is so nice, and he is handsome too," Phaedra had beamed, ignoring her mother, who had nudged Sirius in the ribs disapprovingly.

Harry had just laughed, and joked at her godfather, "I don't know what I am going to do with you...Haven't you stolen enough hearts already?"

"I am making up for the time I lost in Azkaban," he had bantered good-naturedly.

Harry just shook her head, rolling her eyes heavenward, as Remus had looked on grinning.

Remus had also seemed to have a good time, and he wasn't looking so worn and tired. Of course, he always did best following the full moon, and now that the new moon was coming, the wolf would be at its weakest. She was glad, since he had obviously needed the rest, and it had given her some much enjoyable time with him. He had taken her to the Louvre and the Eiffel Tower while they were in Paris, and insisted she go shopping for some new clothes at his expense. She naturally refused to let him spend the money. However, she did let him help her pick out a few things for her upcoming teaching job at Hogwarts.

Severus had taken her to the Potions Lecture at the Sorbonne, in Paris. Oddly enough, she found out that the original founder, Robert de Sorbon, had been a wizard. He had started the school in 1257, but due to its theology, was suppressed in 1792. The Muggles believed it had ceased to exist in 1850, but like Hogwarts, it was now securely hidden amongst the rest of the University of Paris.

Harry had found the lecture quite enthralling, since it had to do with creating a potion that might one day be able to reverse the effects of the Dementor's Kiss. Many people had started to feel that this form of execution was unacceptable as it kept the soul from whatever judgment would have been passed upon it. There was also the question of when the innocent lost their souls, either by a wrong conviction or in a Dementor attack. The potion was merely theoretical at present, but many of the Masters of their craft felt it was entirely possible, and

had started to develop various ideas of what mixtures to start with and how it could be administered. Severus himself had seemed quite interested in the idea, and Harry knew the reason, although his son was dead.

"Sev, if it were possible to reverse the kiss, what would happen to the souls?" Harry asked cautiously. "Would they go on to the afterlife or could they go back into the person's body?"

He studied her thoughtfully, before answering, "Perhaps both. If the body was still alive, and some are, it may be possible to reintroduce the soul, although I don't know how. The others, well..." his voice trailed off, and Harry could sense his pain.

She looked up at him, and took his hand, letting him know she understood. "Let's go and get some ice cream," she smiled changing the subject to brighten his mood. "I think we could both use a treat after sitting in that stuffy lecture hall all afternoon."

"Very well," he agreed. He had taken her to a sidewalk cafe, and they had both enjoyed a view of the Seine, while relaxing with their treats. Harry had a chocolate parfait, while Severus enjoyed a cup of coffee and an éclair. They had then returned to the Black estate.

The whole two weeks had just flown by, and now that it was time to go home, Harry almost wished she didn't have to. She did not want to testify at the trials, and hoped there would be some way she could get out of it. She made up her mind to speak with Dumbledore as soon as possible, when they got back to England.

Her thoughts were interrupted by Phaedra, who was growing impatient waiting for Harry to answer her.

"Miss Harry I asked if it was the blue sky!" she demanded

"What? Oh, yes...yes it is the sky. Now it is your turn."

"Okay...hmm... I see a color and the color is green!"

"My eyes?" Harry answered playfully.

"Oh pooh! You got it too fast!"

"Now it's my turn...lets see...ah...I see a color and the color is black."

"Uncle Severus, robes?"

"No, try again."

"Mr. Remus boots?"

"Wrong!"

"Mr. Sirius hair?"

"No, but you're on the right track."

"Mummy's hair?" she asked, noting her mother was waiting beside Sirius.

"Yes! Now it's your turn."

"I see a color and the color is gray," Phaedra announced smugly.

Harry glanced around and smiled, "The streaks in Mr. Remus hair."

"Miss Harry, that's no fair. You always get it right!"

"That is because I watch you as you look around. You have to pick something after you have looked at it while you are looking at something else."

"I thought you were doing some magic, like Uncle Severus can. I heard him call it Legumes."

"No Phaedra, it's called Legilimens," Harry laughed, "legumes is French for vegetables."

"Then what is le-Jil-i- menz?" Phaedra asked pronouncing each syllable.

"It means I can read minds," Snape replied obviously annoyed at the two girls.

"I can do that too, what is the big deal?"

"No, Phaedra, you are a telepath. It is somewhat different. You can only know what someone is thinking when it is happening," Harry explained. "A person who can practice Legilimency is able to look into someone's mind and find what they want to know. It works best with eye contact."

"I don't think Phaedra needs to know this at the moment," Snape hissed in Harry's ear.

"Why, she is too young to even try, let alone understand the procedures involved to use it," Harry retorted. "Don't go and spoil a nice trip with your arrogant attitude."

"Legilimency is an art, young lady, and it should not be discussed as if it were a simple parlor trick!"

"Remind me not to let you teach me then. I will ask Dumbledore instead. At least he is pleasant to work with," Harry remarked annoyed by his haughty demeanor.

Snape was about to reply when the Floo Master at the departure point called out, "Black, party of six to depart for the Leaky Cauldron, London England!"

"Come on, Phaedra, that's us," Harry remarked, taking the little girl by the hand and moving over towards Remus, who would depart first, followed by Harry. Sirius, Phaedra, and then Circe would follow with Severus going last for security purposes.

"Everything okay, Princess? You look a bit flustered."

"I'm okay. I just don't like the floo system. It gets me dizzy," she lied, not wanting to tell him about Severus.

"Me too," he said, winking. He then disappeared into the hearth with a burst of green flames.

Harry then followed him, emerging from the hearth at the Leaky Cauldron. Looking about, she was surprised to see Professor Dumbledore waiting, along with Tiberius Snape. She was immediately concerned as he moved over to greet her.

"Professor is anything wrong?" she queried, looking from one man to the other.

"Patience, Harry, I will tell you as soon as the others have all arrived." Dumbledore gave her a reassuring smile, but his blue eyes reflected his true concern.

"Albus will fill you in over lunch, while I take Phaedra out shopping on Diagon Alley. Some things should not be discussed in front of the child," Tiberius remarked, leading Harry to a secluded table towards the rear of the room.

Remus was already seated, studying the lunch menu. Long experience with the Order had taught him not to ask questions. Dumbledore would fill them in when he was ready.

"I see you didn't miss the proper grate," he teased.

"I only did that once, and I was twelve then," she retorted, cheeks red.

"The floo system can be disorienting for those who are not accustomed to it from a young age," Tiberius remarked casually, as he sat down with them. "Did you enjoy your holiday?"

"Yes, I did. You would have really liked the Potions lecture. Severus brought you back some of the literature."

"Regrettably, I had some other affairs to attend to. However, once I review the literature I will be happy to give you both my opinion."

"I would like that," Harry smiled. In the time she had been working with Tiberius Snape, she had found that she really liked him. He was easier going than Severus was, but that was simply because of the way Sev had to live for the past number of years. She also realized that in time, Severus' manner would calm down, and the kindness and humor she knew he was capable of would come back.

"Ah, now that we are all here, we can have a nice meal, and you can tell us all about your holiday," Dumbledore's pleasant voice stated, as the rest of their party seated themselves.

"Headmaster, Mr. Dumbledore, we had a real good time," Phaedra bubbled. "Miss Harry and I collected shells on the beach, and Uncle Sev and Mr. Sirius didn't like her bikini, but they liked Mummy's."

"Did they now," Dumbledore laughed, blue eyes twinkling as he eyed the two men. "How did you like Harry's bikini, Remus?"

"Hmm...I thought she looked absolutely ravishing," he replied with a grin, hazel eyes bright with amusement at Sirius' scowl and Snape's glare.

"Thank you Remus. At least some one around here besides Circe is able to recognize the fact that I am a young woman now, and not a child!"

"My dear Harry, I never insinuated that you were a child," Snape answered coolly; "I merely wish that you hadn't been so exposed."

"Why? Your sister's bikini was even more revealing than mine," Harry told him pointedly.

"My sister is a mature woman over forty who has every right to show off her figure if she chooses."

"I beg your pardon, little brother. Did you say I was a mature woman? Do you really believe I am that old?"

"I was not inferring you are old, Circe. I only wanted to stress to Harry that she should be a bit more discreet at her age. You are a seasoned witch and..."

"A seasoned witch!" Circe snapped. "I would consider Minerva McGonagall a seasoned witch. Just because I am a few years older than you..., " she sputtered.

"You've really done it now, Severus," Harry interrupted, "implying that Circe is getting old."

"I never said such a thing!"

"No, little brother, you didn't have to. I am not so seasoned that I need to show off my figure to draw attention to myself."

"Ahem..." Dumbledore cleared his throat. "Circe, I think Severus meant it as a compliment. He merely wanted Harry to know that at her age the young men are not necessarily looking at her in a polite manner and...."

"Not you too! Albus I will have you know that many a man both older and younger than me have ogled my feminine charms. I see nothing wrong with either mine or Harry's bathing attire."

"Mummy, how come I couldn't have a bikini and why are you and Uncle Sev fighting?" Phaedra asked, perplexed by the commotion her mother was causing, and upset that Severus had gotten her angry.

"Oh, Baby," Circe began, flustered, "Uncle Sev and I aren't fighting. We are merely expressing a difference of opinion."

"Then why didn't I get a bikini?"

"I bought you what all the little girls were wearing this year. Don't you like it?"

"Are all the grown up ladies wearing bikinis?"

"Most of them."

"Then why are you and Uncle Sev getting mad? I think you are both daft. You should be happy we all had a good time!"

"Out of the mouths of babes..." Dumbledore's blue eyes twinkled over his half moon spectacles.

"She's right, Circe, I didn't mean to get you upset. I only wanted you to know that you are an extremely attractive woman and that Sirius and I were concerned that Harry was unaware of how provocative she can be."

"I understand, Sev, and apologize for jumping to conclusions. I hate it when we argue."

"Me too," Severus flashed his sister a quick smile. "Harry do you understand why your godfather and I were so concerned about your swim wear?"

Harry pursed her lips, trying not to smile, but the creeping blush on her cheeks gave her thoughts away.

"Severus, need I remind both you and Sirius that for sixteen years I had to dress and try to act like a boy. I was more than aware of what the opposite sex thought about my skimpy swimwear. For that matter, sometimes being an empath does have its little attributes, since I was also aware of how you and Sirius both felt. Shall we say it was not just concern for my virtue?" Harry gloated grinning at the two men, as Remus erupted into a rare fit of laughter. "And I don't have a clue why you are laughing so hard, Moony. The beast in you could have used a little music to soothe him too."

"It seems Miss Wings; you have us all dead to rights." Sirius hugged her. "Do you forgive us for our male protectiveness?"

"More like desires," she whispered, causing him to chuckle deep in his throat, and look at the ceiling. "Now if no one minds I for one would like to order lunch. I'm starving."

"Excellent idea, Child. So am I. An old man needs to keep up his strength you know," Dumbledore remarked with a wink.

Tom came over and took their orders, and the food appeared on the table. Harry and Phaedra were both having a nice juicy burger and fries. Each also had a milkshake. Harry's was chocolate and Phaedra chose her favorite, strawberry. Sirius chose to have a cheeseburger and a Butterbeer while Remus preferred a hot open-faced roast beef sandwich. Severus decided on a turkey club, while his sister and uncle both chose tuna salad. Professor Dumbledore opted for chicken salad and a small bowl of soup. They were all hungry and the conversation turned to more mundane matters while they ate.

Dumbledore was pleased to hear all about their trip to France and glad they all had taken the time to relax. He was happy that Harry had taken such a keen interest in her wizarding history and laughed when she suggested that Professor Binns, Hogwarts History of Magic instructor, and only teacher ghost, should take a trip to liven up his curriculum.

Tiberius Snape was most interested in the literature from the Potions Lecture, and promised Severus he would review the speaker's suggestions and comments before making any kind of decision as to whether a person's soul could be restored after the Dementor's Kiss.

As their meal wound to a close, Harry noticed that Mr. Chang was coming towards them. Dumbledore immediately rose from his seat to greet his friend.

"Albus please forgive my interruption," the old Chinese wizard bowed, "I have only recently returned from the lands of my ancestors where I was needed by my sister's family owing to the death of her husband."

"I understand completely, Chin, you need not apologize."

"I would express my sorrow at having missed the rise of our new Phoenix," Mr. Chang bowed again, looking at Harry with a smile.

"Thank you, Mr. Chang. I am honored that my elders have seen fit to bestow me with such an awesome responsibility."

"You are a giver of light and truth as is my old friend Dumbledore. I have consulted the oracle of the I Ching and studied your destiny in the stars. Your name will be revered and remembered, as are those of Merlin and Confucius, the great Chinese wizard and philosopher. You will be the slayer of darkness, and the deliverer of justice, for to you will go the power of the ancients. Look for she who will come from the west, who will teach and guide you on your way. She who shifts with the night of the wolf. Remember what I say, Little Phoenix, for you are soon to face your greatest trials. Do not fear your other self, for that is where you get your courage." Mr. Chang then bowed, and looked at Dumbledore, who was studying him intently. "Albus if you would join me for tea on Saturday, I would be honored."

"I am afraid that I will need to be at Hogwarts as we are getting ready for the fall term which will start in a just over a fortnight, but if you would wish to come and lunch with me I would be glad of the diversion," Dumbledore smiled at his old friend.

"It will be my honor. My youngest great grandson will be starting his first year and is more than a little excited."

"Ah, yes, Lee Chang. I am looking forward to having him with us. Harry will have him as one of her first year students."

"Then I am doubly privileged," Mr. Chang said, smiling at Harry. "Now if you will all excuse me, I must be getting back to the restaurant. Little One," he addressed, Phaedra, "I know you will be going shopping with your uncle shortly. If you wish to stop by the restaurant for some tea and almond cookies as my guests I will be happy to read your tea leaves."

"Can we Uncle Tiberius? Please?" Phaedra begged.

"I think it could be arranged. We will pick up some things for you to bring to school and then stop for tea with Mr. Chang before it is time to bring you back."

"Goody!" Phaedra bounced with delight as Mr. Chang bowed and withdrew. "Will Mummy be coming with us?"

"No dear, I need to be here for a little while. I need to review a few things with Dumbledore."

"Uncle, how do you know what to buy me? Did you get my list from the school?"

"Yes, Phaedra, I have a school list. When we get home your mother will also need to speak with you about a few things."

"Am I in trouble? I didn't touch anything that day I snuck into the Potions lab, honest I didn't."

"The Potions Lab? I was referring to your return to school," Tiberius remarked taken back by the child's admission.

"Phaedra, when did you sneak into the Potions Lab?" Severus looked at her sharply.

"Just before we left on holiday, Uncle Severus. I was looking for you, and the door was open, but you weren't there. I just looked around and studied the jars...honest. I would never touch anything..."

"We shall discuss this later," Severus interrupted her sternly.

"Indeed we shall," Tiberius agreed.

"Yes, Uncles," Phaedra replied cowed.

"Phaedra, if you did nothing wrong, then there is no reason to be upset." Harry hugged her. "You leave your uncle Severus to me," she whispered, "but promise me you will never go in alone again?"

"I promise," she choked back softly.

"Come along then, Phaedra, we have quite a few stops to make. If you are a good girl we will stop at Fortescue's for some ice cream before we go to Madam Malkin's for some new robes."

"Mr. Snape, could you do me a favor while you are out shopping?"

"Of course, Harry. Is there something you require?"

"Would you stop in the children's store run by Miss Flitwick? I promised Phaedra a new pink dress." Harry winked at the little girl, whose face brightened.

"I will be happy to do so."

"Just have Miss Flitwick charge it to my account at Gringott's."

"Very well. Let's get going Phaedra so that we will have the time to get your tea leaves read by Mr. Chang," Tiberius said, taking the child by her hand. Bidding them good afternoon, he led her towards the hidden entrance to Diagon Alley.

Harry waited quietly as they exited the room, having been careful to hide her anxiety from Phaedra, but when Mr. Chang had been speaking she had instinctively taken hold of Sirius hand under the table, dropping it only when she had hugged Phaedra. Harry was more than aware that the old Chinese gentleman had said almost the same thing as Artemis, and she was becoming unnerved. Dumbledore was studying her, blue eyes intense.

"Anyone for a lemon drop?" he asked popping one into his mouth.

They all declined, except for Harry who held out her hand in acceptance as she met the old wizard's sparkling blue eyes. 'I know you are using your Legilimency on me. It is obvious that

you think I would hide my thoughts from you otherwise,' she considered, maintaining her eye contact. Albus Dumbledore merely smiled, so Harry tried another tactic. 'Have you decided whether to marry me yet? I think your beard is sexy!' Dumbledore laughed aloud, still maintaining his eye contact. 'Will you teach me how to do Legilimency? I could chase you out of my head, you know. Sev said I am getting quite good with the Occlumency.' Dumbledore maintained his eye contact, blue eyes amused as Harry started to clear her mind, closing one door at a time, until her mind was blank.

"Very good, Harry. I am pleased with your progress," Dumbledore laughed, breaking his eye contact. "Are you more relaxed now?"

"Umm..." she nodded, a slight flush creeping up her cheeks.

"Good, because I do not want you to become distressed by the news I have to tell you. I am afraid it is not good."

"Albus, did something happen while we were on holiday?" Circe asked concernedly.

"Yes, I am afraid so. The three Death Eaters who were to go on trial this week have been found dead in their cells."

"Could it not have been from the Dementors?" Snape queried.

"No. They were not being held in Azkaban."

"Then where were they being kept?" Sirius asked quietly. He knew from experience that there were temporary holding cells in the basement of the Ministry.

"In the holding cells at the Ministry. They were transferred there three days ago. Nymphadora found them dead in their cells yesterday when she went to relieve Sidney Greystone for guard duty."

"What about Greystone?" Remus asked softly.

"He too was killed. It is believed there is a spy within the Ministry, since most people are unaware that there are holding cells in the basement."

"How were they killed?" Harry questioned nervously.

"It is believed they were victims of the Avadada Kedavra. There were no marks on them. Arthur has kept it from the papers so far. He stated that the trials have been postponed since the three men have been having difficulty finding legal council to represent them. All members of the Ministry who have access to the area have been questioned, and all have been cleared of any involvement."

"Then it had to be someone who used to work at the Ministry," Harry remarked.

"Not necessarily, Honey. The Death Eaters could have gained the information through torture. Then all they had to do was send in their spy who could be anyone from a member of the Board of Governors to a simple secretary," Sirius explained patiently.

"But why were they murdered?" Circe looked at Dumbledore.

"It could be for any number of reasons. Perhaps they were going to incriminate someone high up in the Ministry, or maybe they were aware of the reasons for the disappearance of Voldemort's body."

"Headmaster, it is very possible they had information about the legend and Voldemort's plans in the event of his death," Snape remarked shrewdly, dark eyes unfathomable.

"I agree. It is for that reason I am going to have you all report to Hogwarts now rather than return to Severus' London town home, as we had originally planned. Circe, you Tiberius and Phaedra will be staying at the castle also. You will be acting as my private secretary and Tiberius will be teaching the NEWT and OWL level Defense Against the Dark Arts," Dumbledore explained, holding up his hand before Severus could protest. "Severus, I will need you to teach NEWT and OWL level Potions and the younger students in Defense Against the Dark Arts. Harry you will be teaching the first through third year students in Potions and Transfiguration. Minerva will be assisting me, as I will have to spend a good deal of time at the Ministry again. In addition I have asked her to teach the NEWT and OWL Level Transfiguration classes."

"Albus, what about Phaedra? She needs to get to school." Circe inquired nervously.

"I have made arrangements for her to go to the school in Hogsmeade. She will have a bodyguard at all times. She will be escorted to school daily by Hagrid. When the weather is too inclement, she will be able to floo from my office. Remus, I am going to ask you if you would mind taking over teaching the Care of Magical Creatures rather than Charms since Hagrid will be spending the day in Hogsmeade while Phaedra is in class. Sirius, if you would take over Charms, I would appreciate it since Minerva and Harry will be sharing the Transfiguration classes.

"I will enjoy teaching the Care of Magical Creatures, Albus. You know it is my other specialty, being as how I am a werewolf," Remus replied.

"I have no objection to teaching Charms, especially since Moony already made up his lesson plans," Sirius grinned, and they all laughed.

"Albus, don't you think this is a bit presumptuous?" Circe questioned. "You don't really believe that we are in that much danger yet, do you?"

"I would rather be accused of overkill than have something happen we were not prepared for."

"Harry, you're awfully quiet. What's wrong, Princess?"

"Remus, if anyone can come back from the dead, Voldemort will find a way. I have been warned by both Artemis, and Mr. Chang that I will be facing some kind of crisis, and in case you haven't noticed, I have been wearing the ruby dragon ring I got last year for my birthday. I put it on for graduation, but what I didn't tell any of you is that it has locked itself. I can't take it off."

"Harry, why didn't you tell us this immediately?" Sirius asked sharply, brow furrowed with concern.

"I didn't want to worry you needlessly. What ever is going to happen has already begun. All we can do is wait and watch."

"Child, Sirius is right. You should have told us immediately. I'm relieved that I have taken these precautions."

"Headmaster, if I had told you about the ring would you have prevented us from going on holiday?"

"Perhaps, but I knew how much you all needed the rest. I know it did you all good to be away from the situation for even such a short time."

"Then I'm glad I didn't say anything," Harry smirked. "I actually slept the night through for a change with no nightmares."

"Then I am glad you went, Child. You needed to relax, as did your family," Dumbledore beamed at them all. "Now let's have some dessert. Tom has some wonderful home made Pumpkin Cheese Cake, and I would like to discuss this years lesson plans with you all, and explain Circe's duties to her."

The next two hours were spent in a leisurely fashion talking about the upcoming school year and what would be required from each instructor. Harry promised she would talk with Minerva about forming a lesson plan with her when she got to Hogwarts. It seemed Professor McGonagall was already there since she was there getting ready for the first years and was in charge of organizing this year's welcoming feast. Harry learned that all the special functions the school had put on over the years had been organized by the staff, and each took a role. This year there was going to be a Yule Ball, and Harry was to be on the committee along with Remus, Professor Sprout, and Neville Longbottom, as part of his apprenticeship.

"I have... to... organize the... Yule Ball?" Harry sputtered, choking on a glass of pumpkin juice.

"Relax, Princess, it will be fun. You can help to plan the decorations and arrange for the band. I'll help and so will Pomona Sprout."

"With Longbottom on the committee you will need all the help you can get," Snape sneered, amused.

"Now, Severus, you needn't be so negative towards the young man. You yourself admitted he has blossomed into quite a capable wizard," Dumbledore admonished.

"I apologize, Albus. He has made a good deal of progress," Severus replied contritely.

"I am glad you think so. Now there will also be a Valentines Day Dance and I'm putting you and Sirius in charge. I will want an afternoon party for the younger students and a formal dance in the evening for the fourth through seventh year students."

"Headmaster, I would prefer not..."

"No arguments, Severus. You have gotten out of these committees for the past few years as your spying duties and Harry's Protectorship prohibited you from making the time. Harry is a member of the staff now, so you should be able to manage it quite nicely."

"Um...Professor Dumbledore," Harry began uncertainly... "could you put Severus on the Yule committee and me on the Valentine's Day Dance. I think it would work out a bit better."

"No, Harry. Severus and Sirius will do quite well together. They have quite a bit in common as you have pointed out to me on more than one occasion."

"Yes, Sir," she pouted. Harry would have liked the opportunity to work with her godfather. "Who is handling the leaving feast?"

"Professor Vector and our new instructor in Ancient Egyptian and Native American Mysticism, Arsinoe Darkmoon. The class will be for the upper grades, and is being given for advanced students only. Miss Darkmoon's grandfather and I are old friends. Her mother is of Egyptian ancestry so she is also versed in the magic of the ancient priests. We also have a new librarian, who will be assisting them."

"Wait a minute!" Harry looked at Dumbledore suspiciously. "This new teacher suddenly arrives here to teach about ancient magic when we are being faced with a possible corruption of an ancient spell that absolutely no one believes will work! Headmaster I am not a fool. You obviously brought her here for a reason, and I for one would like to hear it."

"She is just as I said. The granddaughter of my old friend Ichtaca, which means secret in Nahuatl, the language of the Aztec's. We met many years ago, when I was traveling in the America's for the Ministry. He worked in the Department of Magical Antiquities and Mysteries, and is one of the foremost archeologists in his field."

"I've heard of him," Remus said excitedly. " He is one of the shamans in charge of finding the missing Crystal Skulls and retrieving the ones in the hands of the Muggles. Isn't there one in the British Museum?"

"Yes, there is. Our Ministry of Magic over sees its keeping and handles the Muggles when they claim to have visions when looking into it. Our governments have been collectively studying the ancient skulls, more of which have been discovered in Mexico and Central America. It is also believed that the Aboriginal Shaman of Australia have one in their possession," Dumbledore explained. "But I am getting side tracked. Harry is quite correct. Arsinoe has come to help, should the need arise. Her grandfather would have come himself, but he has been unwell."

"So she will be working as a teacher unless something happens?" Sirius questioned.

"Yes and no. She will be able to read the hieroglyphs should the spell in question be the one associated with ancient Egypt, and she also can translate Aztec and Mayan."

"I thought the spell could only be done by a Parsel Mouth?" Harry asked confused.

"No, Child, the spell must be spoken in Parsel Tongue or it will not work but since there is no written version of the snake language it would have been saved in whatever human tongue was spoken at the time. According to my friend, that was how the secret was kept from being

misused. Legend says that the spell of life and death was given to the priests by the serpent gods who carried it on the wind and imbued the priests with the ability to speak the words."

"Did your friend say why the priests were given this knowledge?" Severus inquired with interest.

"There is no definitive answer but many scholars believe it was to be used only when times of great strife were at hand. Some think it was supposed to be able to wake the elders who would be able to help solve the problems that plagued the lands. Other theories are that it was to be used in times of war to keep the warriors from being lost forever. Whatever the real reasons we may never know," Dumbledore shrugged, "for they were lost in antiquity."

"Well I for one hope that if the Death eaters have found the spells that they don't work," Circe sighed nervously. "My family has studied the Dark Arts for generations, but something like this is just too bloody gruesome."

"Studying the Dark Arts is one thing, performing them is quite another," Dumbledore reassured her.

"It seems to me that I heard somewhere that to attain the title of Sorcerer one has to be versed in the Dark Arts," Harry stated, eyeing Dumbledore.

"You are correct, Little Phoenix. I am quite versed in the subject; however I have never put them into practice."

"Uncle Tiberius has also attained the title of Sorcerer," Snape replied proudly.

"Why doesn't that surprise me," Sirius smirked.

"All right you two, don't start," Harry chided "Headmaster, you told us there is also a new Librarian. Who is she and what happened to Miss Pince?"

"Irma decided to retire. It seems a distant uncle died and left her quite a sum of money. Fortunately I was able to secure another Librarian, who is absolutely delighted to be with us at Hogwarts."

"Who is it?" Remus questioned.

"A good friend of Harry's; a young lady by the name of Hermione Granger," Dumbledore laughed, blue eyes twinkling.

"Hermione!" Harry gasped. "What happened to her job at the Ministry in Muggle Relations?"

"She started it, but found that all she was doing was filing reports on Muggles who had their memories altered after coming into contact with various wizarding artifacts. She had been hoping to act as one of liaisons between our two governments, but that position was given to an older witch who transferred from within the Ministry."

"Probably a pureblood with no real knowledge of the Muggle world," Harry muttered.

Dumbledore pursed his lips amused, while Snape snorted his disapproval at her remark and looked at her down his aquiline nose, but refrained from commenting, as the Headmaster continued.

"Anyway, she was frustrated and I just happened to mention to Arthur that Irma had suddenly decided to retire. Ron had told him about Hermione, who was too proud to tell her future father in law how miserable she really was, so he asked me if I thought she would be interested in the position."

"I will assume she was absolutely delighted. She probably knows every book in the school library as well as Irma Pince ever did," Harry grinned. "Now all we need are Ron and Draco to show up."

"Didn't I tell you that they will be among the Aurors assigned to the school as part of their training?" Dumbledore remarked mischievously, blue eyes dancing with mirth. In addition, we will have Tonks, and Kingsley Shacklebolt, as well as Stan Ghostly and Susan Lookinglass. The six Aurors will rotate shifts over the twenty-four hour period. They will be living at the school. Moody also asked me to tell you and Sirius that he may also require your services."

"Did he say in what capacity?" Sirius brown eyes were dancing with excitement.

"Spying in Hogsmeade in your animagus forms."

"That might work for him, but a big red bird isn't exactly unobtrusive."

"Ah...but you can hide overhead where you won't be seen and listen in on conversations. Aberforth has a rafter all picked out for you at the Hogshead," Dumbledore teased, referring to his brother's inn. "Now, it is getting late, and I see that Tiberius and Phaedra have returned so we should be getting back to Hogwarts."

"Albus do we need to close up the house in Ottery St. Catchpole?"

"No, Remus, Tiberius and the house elves have already done so since you were originally to stay here in London. The dogs are at Hagrid's."

The small group rose as Phaedra bounced over excitedly, and hugged her mother and then Harry.

"Mummy, wait till you see my new pink dress that Miss Harry had Uncle Tiberius buy for me. It is beau...ti...ful!" she exclaimed drawing out the word to express her delight. "Wait till my friend Althea sees it. She will be so jealous," Phaedra gloated.

"Phaedra, it is not nice to brag and I didn't hear you thank Harry for the dress yet," Circe admonished her, "and I also have something very important to talk to you about."

"What is it Mummy? Is Uncle Severus really mad about me going into the Potions Lab?"

"This has nothing to do with your going into the lab without permission. Now thank Harry and then we will tell you on our way," she said taking Phaedra by the hand, while Severus and Tiberius took the packages and reduced them for easy transport.

"Thank you for the pretty dress, Miss Harry. I really love it."

"You're welcome. I hope you will put it on when we get home so I can see how pretty you look in it."

"Can I Mummy?"

"Yes, dear, I think we would all like to see it on you." Circe smiled. "Albus will we be apparating or using the floo system?"

"Apparating will be faster. Do you want me to take Phaedra?"

"You're coming home with us?" Phaedra asked excitedly.

"Actually you are coming home with me. Dumbledore's blue eyes twinkled.

"We're going to Hogwarts? Whoopee...Can I see the squid again?"

"I think it can be arranged, but you must be careful," Dumbledore answered smiling.

"How long will we be staying at Hogwarts? Is there another party?"

"Phaedra, we will be living at Hogwarts for a few months," Circe told her soberly. "You will be going to school in Hogsmeade."

"What about my friends?" Phaedra looked at the adults anxiously. "I won't know anybody at the school in Hogsmeade."

"Phaedra, you will make new friends and I will let you use my owl to write to your friend Althea. Would you like that?" Harry questioned in an effort to calm the worried child.

"You will let me use Hedwig?"

"Yes, and you can tell your old friends what it will be like when they come to Hogwarts. Did you know that when I went to Hogwarts for the first time I didn't know anybody and neither did my friend Hermione?" Harry questioned, and Phaedra shook her head. "So you see, going to a new school can be a little scary but it can also be a lot of fun. I bet when you do finally come to Hogwarts there will be a lot of people you meet who don't know anyone, especially if they are Muggle born."

"But I'm not going to be going to school at Hogwarts," Phaedra protested.

"No, but you will be living at the school, so you will know all the tricks long before the others do, that way when you do finally come as a student you will be able to show everyone around."

"Hmm...And you will really let me send letters to my friends?"

"I promise." Harry hugged Phaedra gently.

"Okay, Mummy we can live at Hogwarts. Besides, Uncle Severus will be there with Miss Harry, and everybody else, but what about Uncle Tiberius? Can he come too? Otherwise he will be left all alone."

"I am coming, Phaedra. I will be teaching the older students in Defense Against the Dark Arts to get them ready for their exams," Tiberius explained patiently.

"Then why are we just standing here? I want to go and get Hannibal. He can come too, can't he?"

"Your puppy is already there, Little One," Dumbledore laughed. "Now would you like to apparate with me or one of your uncles?"

"Headmaster Mr. Dumbledore, why can't I go with Miss Harry?"

"I'm afraid Harry still needs more practice before she can apparate another person along with herself."

"Then can I go with Mr. Sirius? He has a motorcycle that flies!"

"Sorry, Phaedra, but I don't have my motorcycle here," Sirius chuckled. "In fact it should be at Hogwarts since I stored it there before we left for our holiday."

"Then why don't you apparate to Hogwarts and get it? Then you could come back for me?" Phaedra asked with a devious little smile.

"How about if everyone apparates and I give you a ride this evening after dinner?"

"Hmm...Can Mummy have one too?"

"If she wants one," Sirius replied winking at Circe.

"What about me?" Harry asked feeling a pang of jealousy. 'Why didn't he think to ask me to go for a ride with him too? He knows how much I enjoy it,' Harry reflected.

"No, Miss Harry, I think Mr. Sirius should take Mummy out for a ride. She never gets to have any fun. She works too much."

"Well then, Miss Phaedra, I will be happy to give your Mum a ride on my motorcycle so she can have some fun," Sirius said giving Phaedra his best smile, "but right now we need to be going."

"Can I apparate with you and Mummy? That would be fun."

"Mr. Sirius does not usually apparate with someone," Harry remarked pouting.

"I don't think it will be a problem, Honey. Circe and I are quite capable of taking Phaedra."

"But you always said..."

"It will be fine, Harry," Sirius stated firmly. "Circe are you ready?" he questioned taking Phaedra by the hand.

"When ever you are," she answered with a smile, taking her daughter's other hand.

"Then we'll go on the count of three." Sirius grinned holding his wand in his free hand. "One...Two...Three...", he counted slowly as they raised their wands and called, "Hogwarts!" disappearing.

Severus and Remus had both been watching Harry closely, each considering her expression.

'Interesting...She's angry with my sister, and even more so with Black. My little green-eyed Gryffindor is a victim of the Green Eyed Monster; she's jealous. This could really work to my advantage...' Severus contemplated the situation with typical Slytherin craftiness.

'Harry's upset. Sirius didn't see that he just hurt her, the bloody fool! I wonder if he realizes how possessive she is when it comes to him,' Remus mused. Yet, how much of it is really love? I think maybe their closeness may be more like the camaraderie he had with James. They were close like that too. One was always there for the other. I know Sirius cares for her very deeply, but maybe...'

"Remus," Dumbledore nudged him, "I asked if you were ready? We need to be getting back to the school."

"I'm sorry, Albus, my mind was elsewhere. Harry would you like to apparate with me?"

"Sure, why not?" she replied flatly, while Dumbledore and Tiberius exchanged glances. Her behavior hadn't been unnoticed by the two older men either.

"Let's all go together," Dumbledore remarked raising his wand, waiting while the others followed suit.

He then nodded, and they all called out, "Hogwarts," as a group, and disappeared. They appeared on the path to the school, where Phaedra was waiting with Sirius and Circe.

Harry was angry with Sirius, and became even more upset when she saw that he and Circe were laughing and having a good time while they had been waiting. Glaring at her godfather, her first inclination was to transform and fly off to the castle. Nevertheless, she realized she would be running away again if she did so, and walked quietly back with the others. Her sullen expression was not lost on Dumbledore, who put a comforting hand on her shoulder, giving it a reassuring squeeze.

'Ah my Little Phoenix,' he thought. 'Sometimes love can be painful, and for an empath it is doubly so. Time will tell if you and he will be lovers, but for now, you need to try to control your feelings. If what I fear is about to happen all of our lives may depend on your innate capacity to love. I will do my best to help you keep your trust in all that is good, for you may not be the child of my loins, but you are the child of my heart.'

Part 11 - By the Dark of the Moon

Following their return to Hogwarts, Circe, Tiberius and Phaedra were shown to their quarters on the third floor. They were given a suite of rooms with two bedrooms, one for Circe and Phaedra, and a smaller one for Tiberius, opening off a large sitting room. In addition, there was a small office for Tiberius and a large bath.

Phaedra was delighted with the oversized canopy beds and immediately closed the bed curtains to play tent while her uncle helped Circe to settle in. Dumbledore had planned for them to visit Phaedra's new school in Hogsmeade the next day in order to acquaint Phaedra with her new teacher. She would be starting the fall term on September first since the village primary school and Hogwarts ran on the same schedule to avoid any inconvenience to the village families.

Remus and Sirius would continue to share a suite of rooms also, although they had been given larger quarters overlooking the lawn leading to the Forbidden Forest.

Severus' rooms were unchanged, and once he had seen that his sister and uncle were satisfied he immediately excused himself and headed for the dungeons to work on his lesson plans.

Harry also excused herself with the premise that she needed to confer with both Severus and Professor McGonagall to formulate the lesson plans for the classes she was to teach on both subjects.

"Severus, I'll be down in a little while since Professor McGonagall's office is over by the Transfiguration classroom."

"Very well, Harry. I know Minerva will want to spend some time going over the lessons with you. In the meantime, I will prepare an outline of what I expect from you with the younger students. I will also give you some assignments to work on with either myself, or my uncle for the Potions Master exam. We will arrange a time for you to do your independent study."

"Sev, stop trying to make me feel like I am back in your classroom; I graduated from Hogwarts two weeks ago, remember?" she grinned.

"My dear Miss Potter, you may have graduated, but it is up to me to see that you pass your Potions Master exam, therefore you are still under my tutelage and I will expect you to follow my directions," Severus arched his brow, giving her a wicked grin. He then turned on his heel, and moved silently down the hallway, calling over his shoulder, "I will expect to see you in my office within the hour." He then disappeared from sight.

"Severus Snape, somehow I think you will still be the strict task master you were while I was still a student," Harry muttered aloud, heading towards Professor McGonagall's office. "My guess is you were just toying with me over the summer when it came to that exam," she sighed, reaching her destination, and rapping on the door.

"Enter," McGonagall responded.

Harry opened the door, gingerly stepping inside. She felt as nervous as if she were still one of her students.

"Ah...Harry, I have been expecting you," she smiled, looking at Harry over her spectacles. "It's nice to see you again, my dear."

"It's nice to see you too, Professor."

"Please, I told you to call me Minerva," she replied in her thick brogue.

"I know," Harry grinned, "it's just hard to get used to calling you by your first name."

"You'll get used to it. It took me a little while when I first started teaching too. One day we're your instructors and the next we are colleagues."

"It does feel weird, but I'm getting used to the idea."

"Good, now let me show you what is required of the grades you will be teaching. It has only changed slightly since you started here as a student," Professor McGonagall stated. Directing Harry's attention to the required textbooks, she showed her the outline that had been prepared for Harry to begin formulating her lesson plans. "In the future you will be doing this on your own, but new teachers get a bit of a break," the elder witch informed her pleasantly.

"That's good, because I really want to do this right," Harry answered a little overwhelmed at the amount of preparation that the teachers actually had to do before even beginning their classes.

"Don't worry, dear, you'll do just fine," McGonagall said, patting her hand. "Now tell me, did you enjoy your visit to Brittany?"

"It was fabulous. We all had a great time. I wish we could have stayed longer."

"I have always liked *Brocelainde* too. It is such a lovely place, and you can still feel the magic emanating from it."

"I know, and Merlin's grave was just awesome. It made me more aware of my powers. I don't know how, but when I stood there, I felt...I don't know...some kind of strength flowing through my body...it was almost like electricity," Harry proclaimed, trying to describe her experience.

"I'm glad you had such a nice time," McGonagall remarked, studying Harry intently. "Now if I am not mistaken Severus will want to go over his potions requirements with you too. I hope he was not too upset with the change in curriculum."

"He was Severus," Harry laughed, and McGonagall nodded in understanding. "I think it would have been worse except that his uncle will be teaching the older students."

"I know. He has a tremendous respect for Tiberius. He is quite a remarkable man."

"I don't know too much about him, but I do like him. He has been helping me with my potions and I thought Severus made it look simple. Tiberius is absolutely amazing."

"He could have been the most respected Potions Master of our time, but he chose instead to go into the import export business. He found potions too lame. I know the Ministry often asks him to proctor for the NEWT's in both Potions and Defense Against the Dark Arts."

"Did you go to Hogwarts with him?" Harry asked curiously."

"He was several years ahead of me. I believe he was a fifth year when I started. I didn't know him personally at that time, but I knew who he was. I know he kept to himself a lot, much like Severus did, but he refused to stay with the boys who became some of Grindelwald's followers."

"Did he ever marry?"

"I believe there was talk of a girl he was in love with, but their families did not approve. It was rumored that she was a Muggle born and of course, the Snape family were all purebloods. Apparently, her family took her to live in Belgium during the war with Grindelwald, as she was younger than Tiberius was and still in school. I do not know what actually happened, but I heard that she and her parents died in one of Grindelwald's raids. After that, Tiberius separated himself from his family and refused to have anything to do with them. He was the younger brother, Severus' grandfather being a few years his senior. He came to work for Albus to help prevent any further atrocities."

"If he had nothing to do with his brother how did he come to know Circe and Severus?"

"He knew Severus' father's first wife Eleanor, since they were in school together. It had been an arranged marriage and Severus' father was an abusive husband, and much older than she was. When she became ill, she contacted Tiberius in secret and begged him to look after Circe. He promised he would, and while he could not get custody of the child, he warned him that if she were harmed in any way, he would see to it that she became an orphan."

"Did he carry out the threat? I mean, it was his nephew. Surely his estranged brother would have interceded."

"I don't know. I do know that he was always there making sure Circe was well cared for; at least by the house elves. Her stepmother was a neglectful bitch," McGonagall spat.

"Professor McGonagall!" Harry shook her head in amazement. "I don't think I have ever heard you curse before."

"Sorry dear, I don't usually gossip like this but I know you are often kept in the dark about things that have happened. Some of this might help you to understand Severus a little better. Anyway, Severus mother could have cared less about him. She was only interested in the Snape name and fortune. She provided the heir and then went on her way, spending money and going to parties. Severus was a lonely little boy, and Circe did what she could, but once she was away at Hogwarts...well....," McGonagall shrugged.

"I guess Tiberius didn't get too involved with him, then?"

"On the contrary, he did, but Severus was so deeply hurt and had been shunned for so long that he did what he thought his father would have wanted just to try and gain his approval."

Unfortunately, it was a tragic mistake. Thank Merlin that Circe and Tiberius came to his rescue along with Albus," Professor McGonagall sighed. "You have been good for him too."

"He only hated me for the first five years of school," Harry laughed.

"No dear, you simply reminded him of your father, but he tried his hardest not to let it cloud his judgment, although I did hear about that incident with the pensive."

"Yeah, well...that also had its downside for me too. I realized my dad was not the perfect man I had painted in my mind. Neither was Sirius or Remus for that matter."

"They weren't really bad boys, just adventurous. It is just a shame that they did not like Severus. Things may have turned out differently if he had been sorted into Gryffindor instead of Slytherin."

"Who knows? It is entirely possible that the reverse is also true about me," Harry remarked thoughtfully.

"I will never believe that," Professor McGonagall stated firmly. "Now you had better be on your way," she said glancing the clock on the wall.. "Severus will be getting anxious, and you know how he hates tardiness."

"Oh great, I'm over twenty minutes late," Harry replied, hastily collecting her papers and heading for the door. "I will see you at dinner Pro...er...I mean Minerva," she chuckled, and the older witch smiled and nodded in agreement. Harry flew down the hallway and used one of the hidden passages to access the dungeons faster. Reaching Severus office door, she knocked, briskly, opening the door at his reply.

"Come in, Potter, you're late as usual."

"Professor McGonagall took longer than I had expected," Harry replied, ignoring the fact that they had actually been discussing the man who was now glaring at her from over his desk, taking the seat in front of him.

"You might have sent word down to me that you would be delayed. Minerva does have a fireplace you could have used to contact me," he stated in annoyance.

"I apologize for not contacting you, but we both lost track of the time. Besides you could have contacted her to see why I was delayed," Harry retorted smartly.

"It wasn't that long ago that your cheekiness would have cost Gryffindor some house points," Severus reminded her looking down his nose.

"Professor, I don't think I need to remind you that I will be teaching here too, and that Slytherin students can get a bit disobedient at times too. I hope as my supervisor you will support my decisions when it comes to disciplinary actions." Harry stared back at him in defiance.

"As your supervisor and Head of Slytherin House I hope you will use appropriate judgment when meting out punishments," Severus sneered.

"I will treat the Slytherin students in the same manner as you treat the Gryffindors," she smiled wickedly, challenging him to be fair.

"Then it should prove to be a very interesting school year...very interesting indeed," he remarked arching his brow. "Now shall we get started? I believe the outline that Minerva gave you can be modified to fit my requirements for the Potions classes. I will also need to set up times for you to do independent study towards the Potion Master's exam. I have received the forms for you to fill out to register for the exam. Let's hope you don't fail for your tardiness, shall we?" he remarked sarcastically, handing her the paperwork.

Harry did not give him the satisfaction of a reply, and began filling out the forms, before turning her attention to the outline format. Severus wanted her to combine the theory with the actual lab work by the end of the second week. He also reminded her of his rule that no student would be permitted to mix any ingredients until they had passed the safety exam with a grade of B and wrote an essay on the dangers involved in the making of potions."

"May I make up my own exam, or should I use yours?" Harry asked curiously.

"You may make up your own, but as your supervisor I want to approve it first. I will still expect a grade of B on it though. Later on, if you teach potions on your own, it will be up to you to determine what grade you want on that particular test. I do however recommend that you do not drop it from your curriculum."

"I may change the passing grade to a C+ but make the essay longer," Harry mused. "I would do it now, but I know better than to even ask you."

"What makes you so certain I won't agree?"

"You already told me you will require the grade, and I am an untried instructor," she grinned, as he nodded in agreement. "Besides, I never heard of anyone who didn't eventually pass the test."

"It is simply memorization."

"I know, necessary, but boring. Will there be anything else?"

"No. I will give you two days to complete the lesson plan and return it to me for my consideration before we pass it on to Minerva for her final approval."

"Two days!" Harry exclaimed. "Severus that's impossible."

"I think it should be more than enough time. You need only do the lessons for the first half of the year as we do one for each semester."

"What if you don't like it?"

"That is why I am only giving you two days. If you take longer and it is unsatisfactory you will be hard pressed to get done on time. Remember you also have to do one for Minerva."

"At least she gave me four days for hers," Harry muttered.

"Which is understandable, since you are quite talented in Transfiguration, as it is one of your specialties. Potions is not. I will expect a good deal from you, Harry, and I know you are capable of giving it to me or I would not ask."

"Somehow I think there is a compliment in there, and as soon as I figure it out, I may just thank you."

"I will be waiting. You can go now, Harry. I still have to work on the rest of my lesson plan for the older students."

"What about the one for Defense Against the Dark Arts?"

"I have already completed it."

"I should have guessed. Severus..." Harry began uncertainly.

"What is it Harry?" he asked his voice softening.

"You aren't going to embarrass Remus with his being a werewolf are you?" she asked in a rush, remembering how he had told the students about him at the end of third year.

"No, Harry, I will not say anything," he answered aloud. 'No, I would not want to hurt you like that. I know how much Lupin means to you. He has been a good protector and friend to you,' Severus considered to himself.

"Thanks," she smiled, leaning over the desk to give him an appreciative peck on the cheek.

"Now I suggest you go and get started before dinner. I will see you later."

"All right," Harry answered, once again gathering her belongings, and leaving his office.

Severus Snape sat quietly for a few moments, fingers steepled beneath his chin, staring after Harry. 'She will be a wonderful addition to our household, and her powers are still growing. I know Uncle will be pleased with the match. Now all I have to do is to convince her. I know Black will do whatever makes her happy, even if it means her marriage into the infamous Snape family. Humph...as if the Black's were a virtuous family,' he thought, twisting his lips into a grim smile...

Harry reached her room on the second floor just as Sirius and Remus were coming out of theirs. She was still upset with Sirius and did not wish to speak with him, so she merely nodded to Remus and ignored her godfather. Entering her room, she was greeted by a soft bark.

"Woof," Snuffles got up from the hearthrug, and came over to her mistress.

"Snuffles!" she exclaimed with delight, "I wonder who brought you up from Hagrid's," Harry remarked scratching her behind the ears affectionately. "I missed you while I was away," she cooed burying her face in the soft black fur. "I could use some puppy love right about now. Do you think I am acting silly being jealous of Circe?" Harry questioned the dog, not really expecting an answer. "It's just that she is a beautiful woman, and Sirius has been paying her quite a bit of attention since our vacation. I don't know what to do," she sighed moving over

to give the dog a treat from the can she kept on the mantelpiece. "Oh well, I had better get started on those lesson plans. I know Severus is planning on making me do it a second time, so I will just have to make sure I do it right the first time," Harry informed the dog, with a mischievous laugh.

Sitting down at her desk, she started doing her lesson plans, and had just finished the plan for Transfiguration, when she realized her stomach was growling. Glancing at her watch, she noted that it was almost five thirty. It was time to go on down and get something to eat. Not sure if the meal would be served in the Great Hall, she rang for one of the house elves to find out where to go.

"Harry Potter, welcome home," Dobby's happy voice greeted her.

"Thank you, Dobby. It is good to be back. I brought you a present too," she grinned.

"You brought Dobby a present?" he asked. Hopping excitedly from one foot to the other and trying to hide his blush by pulling his large ears over his face, his big green eyes peeking out excitedly. "Dobby is flattered that Harry Potter would think of him while on her holiday, and you brought me back a...a...present," he sobbed throwing himself into her arms.

"Dobby...Dobby...calm down. I brought presents for all my friends," Harry stated firmly, pulling the elf from around her. "Come over here," she said going over to open her trunk, "this is for you." Harry had brought him back a complete outfit from a children's store. It was a pair of knickers, in a loud orange plaid with a matching solid orange shirt. There was also a pair of orange socks with a plaid beret.

"All this is for me?" Dobby questioned bursting into tears. "Harry Potter is...the kindest...and...greatest witch...there ever was. Dobby is...priveledged to...have her...as his friend," he cried.

"Then do me a favor and stop crying. I am glad you like the outfit. Now where will we be having dinner tonight? Nobody told me where to go."

"The full staff has not yet arrived, so the Headmaster has requested that dinner be served in the garden tonight. He will be dining privately with the new professor from Central America."

"Have you seen her yet?"

"No, but I know she arrived about an hour ago."

"Well, since the Headmaster will be entertaining this evening, would you please have my dinner brought up to my room? If anyone asks just tell them I am busy working on my lesson plans and didn't want to be interrupted."

"Is Harry Potter unhappy about something?" The perceptive elf questioned.

"Never mind, Dobby, it is a private matter. So I will take my meal here and then take Snuffles out later for some exercise."

"Dobby will do as Harry Potter requests, but Dobby is worried she seems troubled."

"Then make me happy and enjoy your new clothes. I have to get my work done," Harry dismissed him, and he disappeared with a pop.

A few minutes later, the food appeared on the table in her sitting room. After seeing to Snuffles dog food, Harry sat down to eat her dinner. She felt lost and alone, and missed the company she had become so used to. Severus quiet conversations with his uncle, Phaedra's happy babbling about her day, Remus and Sirius teasing and Circe's quiet dignity. They were her family, but she felt they had not wanted her there with them since returning home from Brittany.

'I hope it is just my overactive imagination but it seems to me that Sirius and Circe did spend a lot of time together while we were in France. He is also spending more time with Phaedra than me...,' she thought considering the possibility she did not want to face. 'Please Merlin; if he really loves her don't let him see how hurt I am. I want him to be happy, even if it means I have to give him up...' A lone tear slid silently down her cheek, as she looked at the sumptuous meal of fried chicken, potato salad, and a fresh tossed salad. She forced herself to eat, knowing Dobby would tell Professor Dumbledore if she didn't, and then turned her attention to Snuffles.

"Come on, girl, let's go for a walk. I know you have to go out by now." Whistling for the dog to follow she headed out of her room and downstairs. She exercised Snuffles for a while, and turned to go back into the building when she heard the sounds of Sirius motorcycle, flying overhead with Phaedra. Sirius landed the motorcycle a few feet away, and Harry forced herself to walk up to them.

"Miss Harry did you see us flying?" Phaedra asked excitedly.

"Yes, Phaedra, I did. Are you having a good time?"

"Oh yes," she breathed happily. "Mr. Sirius is a good driver."

"How about it Harry, am I a good driver?" Sirius asked with a wink.

"I wouldn't know since I haven't had a ride in a long time."

"How about if I take you for one tomorrow? I made plans with Circe for this evening, and we're late now," Sirius replied as Circe came over with Remus and Tiberius.

"Do I have to go in now, Mummy?"

"Would you like to play with Hannibal for a little while?" Remus asked pleasantly, taking her off the back of the motorcycle.

"Miss Harry would you and Snuffles stay and play too?"

"No, Phaedra, I'm afraid I have work to do," Harry replied curtly, glaring at Circe and Sirius. "If you will all excuse me I only came out to walk the dog."

"Princess, is something wrong?"

"No, Remus, not a thing," Harry replied unable to hide the rising anger in her voice as she brushed passed him and ran into the castle, Snuffles bounding off ahead of her, and running full force into Severus.

"Harry you seem rather perturbed about something. It wouldn't have to do with my sister and Sirius Black now would it?" he queried with a cold smile. "He has a reputation for breaking hearts, you know," Severus called as she raced up the stairs.

Reaching her room she lay down on her bed, and tried desperately to force down the hurt and jealousy that was consuming her. She was furious at Severus too. 'How dare he say that Sirius and Circe were...were...damn, why does he have to be so happy about it? You would think he wouldn't want his sister to see him! What did I do wrong? Am I so blind that I really believed he could love me other than as my godfather?' Harry thought miserably, tears filling her eyes. She was startled by a knock on her door.

"Who is it?" she asked hurriedly wiping her face.

"Princess, it's me. Can I come in?" Remus worried voice called.

"Please Miss Harry?" Phaedra sobbed from behind the door.

"What is it?" Harry questioned opening the door to them.

"May we come in?" Remus queried cautiously.

"I'm not stopping you."

"Miss Harry why are you mad at me?" Phaedra pouted, lower lip quivering as she started to cry again.

"I'm not mad at you, Phaedra," Harry comforted Phaedra with a hug. "I just have a lot on my mind. I didn't mean to snap at you outside."

"You're sure I didn't do something to make you mad?"

"No, you didn't do anything."

"Princess, it will be all right," Remus consoled her gently, as another knock came on Harry's door.

"Come in," Harry called pulling the door open. It was Severus.

"Harry, I came to take Phaedra upstairs. Uncle Tiberius and I are going to take her down to see the squid while her mother and Black are in Hogsmeade." Snape informed her, eyes glittering with triumph.

"Miss Harry will you come too?"

"I can't baby. I really do have work to do, but I promise to take you to the candy store in Hogsmeade tomorrow, so long as it is okay with your Mum. I know you are supposed to go and see your new school."

"Can you buy me some candy?"

"Why else would we go to the candy store? I could use some nice chocolate frogs myself, and I'll bet the Headmaster would like some treats too."

"You hear that Uncle Sev? Miss Harry and I are going to buy some candy tomorrow!"

"I am sure you will enjoy it," Severus smiled at his niece. 'Harry is close to Phaedra. I wonder if she would be interested in spending time with me if we take Phaedra with us.' Snape mused. "Perhaps Miss Harry and I should give you a tour of the castle? Would you like that?"

"Would you, Miss Harry? I think it would be so much fun. We could hide on Uncle Severus!"

"I think it could be arranged. No go on and have a good time looking at the squid. What did you name him again?"

"Blue eye, because his eye is blue."

"I'm sure he likes it very much. No one ever named him before," Harry grinned. "Just don't end up in the lake."

"I won't," Phaedra promised, taking Severus hand, and leaving her alone with Remus.

"Feeling better, Princess?"

"Remus, I'm fine."

"No, my werewolf senses tell me you are upset and angry."

"So what if I am?"

"Listen, sometimes Padfoot can be a real ass. If you and he are to be together it will happen in its own good time. Don't force the issue."

"It's that obvious, huh?"

"Sure is," Remus smiled, gently brushing the hair from her face.

"Remus it just...hurts...to see him with...with...someone else."

"Like Circe?"

"Especially Circe, and Severus is enjoying every minute of it."

"He loves you too, just like I do."

"I know, but you aren't in love with me. I can sense the difference."

"Is Severus in love with you?"

"I'm not sure. He may be, but his emotions aren't easy to interpret when it comes to his affections. I just don't want any of you to be hurt, especially Severus. He has had a good deal of pain already."

"Is it possible you're in love with him?"

"Maybe, but I love Padfoot too...I thought he felt the same...until now."

"Is he in love with Circe?"

"That's just it. I can feel that she is very much in love, and so is he...but something is not right. I keep telling myself it's because I'm jealous...Oh, Remus...I...I...feel so...bad," she finished lamely.

"Sh...Princess, the Muggles have a saying, *If you love something, set it free. If it comes back, it will always be yours. If it doesn't come back it was never yours to begin with.*"

"I've heard it before. I am trying. Sirius deserves to be happy. He spent all those years in Azkaban. I wish you could find someone too," Harry said resting her head on his chest.

"I will be happy just knowing you are safe and well. Padfoot is here for me too," Remus replied soothingly.

"I'll tell you what," Harry remarked with a shy grin, "if you don't find a nice young woman who loves you and I am still single by the time I'm thirty we should just marry one another."

"Remus threw back his head in laughter, "You my dear are a little minx." He hugged her affectionately.

"Remus, I'm serious."

"I know, and I will accept your proposal. If we're both still single by the time you're thirty I will marry you and we will settle down and have a houseful of children."

"Good, and if I do get married I will fight with the Ministry tooth and nail so that you can be the godfather to my children."

"Thanks," he smiled, hazel eyes serious. "Now why don't you show me how you are coming with those lesson plans. Maybe I can help?"

"Remus I could kiss you," Harry smiled, giving him a quick peck on the cheek. "You're a life saver."

"Severus giving you a hard time?" he inquired conjuring up a chair beside her desk.

"He is being Mr. Perfection as usual."

"Then let's beat him at his own game. Then I will look at what you have done for Minerva. She can be a tough task master too."

"She is fair in her assessments. Severus is not always the easiest man to please!"

"Especially if you're a former Gryffindor and the daughter of James Potter," Remus stated matter of factly, hazel eyes amused.

"You know, Professor McGonagall thinks that if he had been sorted into Gryffindor he just may have been a Marauder too."

"Ever wonder what would have happened if Sirius had been a Slytherin like the rest of the Blacks?"

"Remus, I don't believe such a thing would have happened even if he didn't meet my father. He has the heart of a lion, even if he is a mischief-maker. He is a passionate man, and it shows, but he will admit his mistakes. Severus does not. It is one of their differences."

"I suppose Severus is a cold snake?"

"No, silly, he is just quiet and cunning. He watches and waits, then makes his move, just like a serpent but his heart is in the right place. He is the opposite of Sirius in that respect."

"I see, and what about me?"

"You really are the sensible one. You are as passionate as they are, but you reason things out, and look at life in a much more logical manner. Sirius is impulsive, where as Severus is calculating."

"What about Albus, how do you look at him?"

"All three and cuddly too," Harry laughed. He is shrewd and knows how to manipulate people so that they tell him what he wants to know without making them feel like they are being used. He is also kind and generous and cares very deeply for those he loves. That is why he is our Trust Keeper. Of all the people on this earth, I would trust him with my life, and I have, along with the three of you."

"He is a good man, Harry. I owe him a lot. We all do."

"I know," she agreed, "now what do you think of my lesson plans?"

"I want you to make a few changes. You are going too fast with the transfiguration class. You are going to find that you need to start with something smaller. You don't have to use a needle like Minerva does, but try something in the same vein."

"How about transforming a thimble into a button?"

"That's good. Keep going from small things to something similar or something a little bigger. Other than that it looks good. You have put the required exams in the proper places. You may also want to do a demonstration of your own abilities like Minerva does. I seem to remember hearing you and Ron were quite impressed on your first day when she transformed from her tabby cat," Remus teased.

"Ha ha, very funny," she grinned, red faced, "but I think it would be a good idea. I will wait for the students to come in as my phoenix. It can be very impressive. There is a perch in the transfiguration room for when the students work with the birds, so I can sit on it."

"I am sure the first years will give you their full attention when they see what you can do."

"What about the potions? How bad does it look?"

"Well, not being an adept at potions myself, I am not the one to tell you. I would however change this lesson on sleeping draughts. Do the Pepper-up potion first. I think you should ask Tiberius. He will be flattered that you came to him, and amused since he knows how Severus is with his students."

"What if he tells Severus I asked him for help?"

"He won't have to. I think Sev will know just by the way the lesson plan is presented to him."

"But he might get mad at me."

"I don't think so. If anything he will be pleased that you were not afraid to go to his uncle for assistance. Mind, Tiberius won't do it for you, he will just point you in the right direction."

"I wouldn't expect anyone to do it for me. I am merely asking the more experienced instructors for their assistance in doing it correctly," she pursed her lips, looking coyly at Remus.

"Well, from what I have seen so far, you are doing quite a good job on your own. You shouldn't have much difficulty at all next semester. Just use your originals as a guideline, and you will be able to improve your technique as you go along. So long as you understand the basic principles of the material, you will be able to apply it to whatever subjects you elect to teach in the future," Remus explained, pleased with her determination to succeed.

"Then I think I will go and see if Tiberius has some free time to review what I have already done. I know they are probably still down by the lake with Phaedra. She seems to like that squid for some reason."

"Probably because she never saw one before, she also likes to name everything. Did you know she wants to name my wolf?"

"On no!" Harry exclaimed laughing. "What does she want to call him?"

"Romulus," he replied rolling his eyes.

"Well it makes sense. I guess she forgot the fact I called the wolf Captain?"

"I reminded her of that."

"What did she say?"

"Oh, she remembered, but thinks Romulus is a better name. It seems that her great uncle told her the story of Romulus and Remus and she decided that the wolf is my twin half. Therefore his name should be Romulus and not Captain."

"Well then, Captain Romulus," Harry curtsied mockingly, "it is nice to make your acquaintance."

"Grrrrr...." Remus growled deep in his throat, hazel eyes watching her closely. His heightened senses caught the scent of her perfume, as he drew his lips back showing his teeth with a crafty smile. "Nice perfume, what's it called?"

Harry started to giggle uncontrollably, struggling to answer.

"Full...Moon...Madness...naturally. You gave it...to...me...for my birthday," she laughed tears coming into her eyes.

"So I did," he hugged her. "What else would you expect from a werewolf?"

"Argh...you are just as crazy as Padfoot! No wonder I worry about the both of you so much."

"You mean you don't worry about Severus?"

"Him too, except he doesn't get into as much trouble. I have to worry that he will get himself trapped by vengeful Deatheaters. No wonder I'm so mixed up!"

"Then how about we go and take a walk to the lake so you can at least get your lesson plans done. Then you can spend some time with me. There isn't any moon tonight so we could look at the stars from the Astronomy Tower together."

"Yeah, right. You bloody well know that Sirius is out with Circe and Sev is helping to watch Phaedra, so it might just be a good time for a wee bit of snogging in the tower!"

"Who me? I'm just an innocent little werewolf."

"Dressed in sheep's wool and trying to seduce young virgins with those big sad eyes of yours," Harry grinned gathering her papers to show Tiberius. "Come on, let's go for that walk. As for the Astronomy Tower, I'll think about it."

Harry and Remus headed back out of the castle, and found the two elder Snapes sitting on the bench by the lake immersed in conversation. Phaedra was circling; trying to get the squid to come in closer to shore, but the giant creature was staying just far enough away to entice her towards the edge of the lake.

"Miss Harry! Mr. Remus! Look at Blue Eye! Isn't he adorable?"

Remus and Harry exchanged amused glances. Neither would ever have called the squid beautiful.

"Phaedra, stay away from the edge of the lake," Tiberius warned. "Remember what happened to your mother the day of the graduation."

"Oh, but Blue Eye is a good squid. Mummy says he only likes to play."

"Just the same, you are not a good swimmer."

"Yes, Uncle Tiberius," Phaedra sighed. "Miss Harry do you think you could catch the squid and shrink him for me? He would make a fun pet."

"Phaedra, what about Hannibal? I thought you liked having a dog." Harry remarked.

"I do, but Blue Eye would be fun to watch. I could keep him in a tank in my room."

"Don't you think he would be unhappy living in a tank instead of having the lake to play in?" Remus reasoned with the child.

"I didn't think of that," Phaedra pouted. "I guess I will just have to visit him here. I want him to be happy."

"That is an excellent idea," Tiberius agreed. "Harry, I see you have brought your paper work with you. It is a pleasant evening to sit and do it outside. Would you object if I took a look?" Tiberius asked.

"Not at all," Harry agreed thrilled that she didn't have to ask him. "I would welcome your opinion," she said handing him the folder full of papers.

"Phaedra, you are too close to the edge again," Severus warned, arching his brow.

"Look Uncle Sev," Phaedra giggled, "he is tickling me!" The squid had reached one of its long tentacles out of the water and was running the edge along Phaedra's tummy, exploring.

"Phaedra! Back away..." Severus began.

Splash! Blue eye had grabbed hold of the child and pulled her into the lake. She was struggling against him in terror as he pulled her further from shore.

"Phaedra, relax and he will release you!" Severus yelled as the men all pulled out their wands simultaneously to try to stun the animal.

"No! She is too far out! He might submerge," Harry yelled transforming. Flying out over the lake, she dove down to distract the huge animal, who was tracking her movements, blue eye watching intently. His long tentacles were flying up in an effort to grab onto the big red phoenix, but Harry was just out of his reach. Swooping down, she grabbed onto Phaedra with one claw and dug the other into the soft flesh of the giant squid, causing him to release his grasp.

"*Stupefy!*" three voices yelled at once, stunning the animal, enabling Harry to escape safely with Phaedra before the angry animal could grab hold a second time.

Harry landed a good distance away from the lakeshore, setting the terrified child down beneath a large oak tree, and transformed. Phaedra was soaking wet and crying.

"Miss Harry, Blue Eye tried to hurt me," she sobbed as Harry cradled her in her arms. "I thought he was friendly?"

"He is, Phaedra, but he will pull people out into the lake. We tried to tell you," she replied gently pushing the wet hair from the child's face.

"Phaedra! Are you all right?" Severus asked running over to where Harry had taken her to safety.

"I think she is just frightened, and she swallowed some water," Harry remarked using her healing energy to further examine the little girl as Severus knelt beside her.

"Harry I want to thank you for your help rescuing Phaedra," Tiberius remarked quietly. He and Remus had come over with Severus. "I think we should get her back inside and give her a nice hot bath, and an early bedtime. She has had enough excitement for one day."

"My thoughts entirely, Uncle," Severus concurred.

"I think we should dry her off first," Harry added pulling out her wand and doing a drying spell on the shivering child.

"Let me take her," Severus added. Picking up his niece, he wrapped her in his cloak, doing a warming spell at the same time. "Come along Little Miss, let's go and get you cleaned up. Then you can have a nice snack before you go to bed," he cooed gently, cradling Phaedra in his arms.

"Can I have some strawberry ice cream?"

"We'll see," he replied, moving off in the direction of the castle.

Harry smiled at the exchange, moved by Severus concern for the little girl. 'He really does love her. I wish I could figure him out. One day he is cold as ice and the next...'

"Harry, did you know you have a silly smile on your face?" Remus queried.

"What, oh, I was just thinking how concerned Severus is with Phaedra. It is one of the few times he lets his sensitivity show," Harry replied looking at the two men, a slight flush creeping up her cheeks.

"There is no need to feel embarrassed, Miss Potter, my nephew sets great store by his family. It is just not his usual custom to display his feelings in public."

"Tiberius is right, Princess. Severus showed just as much concern for you when you were injured during your struggle with Voldemort."

"I wish he would show his feelings more often. Even the students would be more relaxed with him."

"Give him time, Miss Potter. He has had a long time to keep things bottled up inside, and his years of spying for the order also took their toll."

"The older I get the more I realize just how many lives Voldemort ruined, Professor. What's even sadder is that if he had directed his energies into doing good, he really may have become the greatest Wizard that ever lived."

"Perhaps, Miss Potter, but we will never really know, so it is not even worth the effort to contemplate what might have been. We should focus on what can still be. Your own powers are considerable and still growing. You may very well become the greatest witch of the age," Tiberius complemented.

"I don't know about that, but thank you for the compliment anyway," Harry beamed, flattered by the older wizard's recognition of her abilities. "So how am I doing with the lesson plan for the Potions classes?"

"Quite well, actually, but I have made a few suggestions in the margins for you. It will save time, and will actually help you to demonstrate the principles involved in the lesson."

"Thank you, Professor, and if Sev says it isn't up to his standards I will just have to tell him that I was just following your suggestions."

"I would love to see the look on his face," Tiberius chuckled. "Now if you two will excuse me, I had better go and see how he and Phaedra are doing." Tiberius nodded moving off towards the castle.

"He is a remarkable man," Remus stated. "I once heard him say that the sorting hat almost put him into Ravenclaw."

"Hey, that hat almost put me in Slytherin and Hermione in Ravenclaw. Didn't you once say that you were surprised it put you into Gryffindor?"

"True, but who really knows what he sees in our minds."

"Yeah, like what was in Pettigrew's head when he was sorted?" Harry shuddered.

"Princess, we will never know the answer to that. All I can say is that somewhere along the line the boy we all knew changed. You saw what he was like. A weak and fearful man, yet loyal to the Dark Lord till the end." Remus' voice was serious, and Harry could see the sadness creep into his eyes.

"Come on, let's go and watch the sun set from the Astronomy Tower. Who knows, you may just get to kiss the innocent young virgin," she teased wickedly, darting off towards the castle.

Remus followed, laughing deep in his throat, and entering the building, they both collided with Professor McGonagall.

"Good evening, Minerva," Remus smiled boyishly. "Going out for a walk?"

"I generally do this time of day. I find it very peaceful and it gives me time to think."

"Then don't let us detain you." Harry smiled. "By the way, have you met the new Professor from Central America yet?"

"I met her briefly when she arrived and again after dinner. I had dessert and tea with her and Albus."

"What is she like?" Remus asked curiously.

"I think she will set Hogwarts upside down," Minerva replied, her expression unreadable. "Have a nice time watching the sunset from the tower," she remarked moving off through the massive doors.

"Remus, how did she know where we were going?"

"I have no idea," he grinned sheepishly. "Maybe she just guessed."

"You know, sometimes I think there is more to Minerva McGonagall than we all give her credit for."

"Princess, you may just be right," Remus nodded. Taking her hand, he led her the rest of the way up the massive stone stairs in the direction of the tower.

Harry and Remus watched the sun set arm in arm. She enjoyed his company and cared deeply for him, but they both knew they weren't in love with one another. Each was content with the relationship the way it was for the time being, and Harry knew that Remus had been serious about her marriage suggestion earlier in the day. She knew too, that if it did ever come to pass they would be happy together, even if they weren't passionately in love.

The first stars had just started to peek out, when she heard Sirius motorcycle in the distance. A few minutes later, he and Circe came into sight, and he landed the bike at the front doors. Harry watched as they hugged one another before Circe entered the building. Sirius then brought his motorcycle down to one of the outbuildings where it was stored along with the one he had given Hagrid the night her parents had died.

"Remember what I told you, Harry," Remus whispered. "You may just be jumping to conclusions about the two of them," he reminded her gently, giving her a quick squeeze. "I know he cares about what happens to you. We all do."

"Yeah, I know," she replied, but her heart was heavy as her earlier happy mood began to dissipate into one of yearning and disappointment.

"Come on, I'll walk you to your room. It's been a long day for both of us," Remus remarked opening the tower door. "Lumos," he said holding his wand up to light their way down the winding stairs.

"I know what you mean. I think I will finish my lesson plans, then take a hot bath and get a good night's sleep. Things may look different in the morning."

"Now that's the smartest thing you've said all day," he praised, kissing her gently.

"You know, I could really get to love Captain Romulus," Harry joked as they walked down the tower stairs.

"What about Remus Lupin?"

"I already care about what happens to him. He is such a cute little sheepskin for his other half," she drawled, watching him furtively from the corner of her eye.

Remus looked at her, hazel eyes reflected in the light of his wand. Grinning wickedly, he threw back his head and howled, the sound echoing wildly off the walls.

"Remus, someone will hear you!" Harry whispered, her mood lightening.

"Then we'll just look at them and pretend we have no idea what they're talking about," he responded playfully, pushing open the lower door and stepping into the hallway.

"Moony," Sirius grinned coming up the hall towards them, "did I just hear you howl?"

"Me, howl? Never," Remus replied feigning innocence. "I was just enjoying the sunset with Harry."

"You should have seen it from the air. It took my breath away," Sirius agreed. "Would you like to watch it with me tomorrow, Honey?"

"The way my luck has been running it will probably rain," Harry remarked pushing past Sirius. 'Harry you stupid git,' she thought, 'what are you doing? You know you want to go with him.'

"Honey is something wrong?"

"Ask Remus, at least he isn't blind to a person's feelings," she answered irritably, annoyed by his ignorance. Reaching her room, she uttered her password and slammed the door behind her.

"Remus, did I do something?" Sirius asked jaw dropping in amazement at Harry's attitude.

"You sure did, Padfoot. Come on in to our room and I'll explain it," Remus shook his head.

Sirius was usually pretty understanding when it came to women, but it had never occurred to him that Harry would be jealous, and he shook his head with concern. This was going to complicate things with Circe, but he knew that what ever happened it would be for the best. It would also give Harry time to sort out her true feelings over the three men. If she realized she loved Moony or Severus, at least he knew the decision would come from her and he wanted her to be happy. His features were grim as he listened to Moony's account of Harry's feelings, but knew he had made a commitment to Circe and planned on following it through....

Harry waited for about an hour for the knock on her door, busying herself with finishing the lesson plan while she waited. It never came, and glancing at her watch, she decided to take a hot bath and go to bed. Running the water in the tub, she felt the tears start to sting her eyes again.

"You fool, he wanted to spend time with you and you slammed the door in his face!" she berated herself aloud. "What does he see in her that he doesn't see in me? Padfoot, how could you just ignore me without an explanation? I can't believe you were just using me. The way you kissed me..." she sobbed, letting the hot water soothe her tired limbs. "Come back to me Padfoot...please..."

Drying off, she wiped her eyes, and climbed into bed. Snuffles sensed her distress and came over to sit by her bedside. Harry automatically began to scratch her pet's ears, but began to cry again, reminded of all the nights she had scratched Padfoot's in the same manner. She felt lost and alone as she listened to the sounds of the crickets wafting in through the open window...

Harry knew she was dreaming, but at first was unconcerned. She hadn't had the need to practice her Occlumency at bedtime since Voldemort's death. Even after the meeting of the Order of the Phoenix, she didn't bother since there was no indication that Voldemort could

actually pull off the old magic necessary to return from the dead. Therefore, she let the dream take her where it wanted to go. At first, it was pleasant. She was walking under the night sky amid a copse of trees, moving towards a small clearing. There seemed to be a light coming from within the clearing and she was curious as to what was going on. There was no moon, but she seemed to know her way through the woods. She could hear popping noises and realized that people were disappearing where the light was coming from, and a feeling of apprehension overcame her mixed with excitement. She felt drawn to move closer, and knew she needed to see what was happening. She was also becoming aware that this was no ordinary dream. She was actually there, but didn't know how. Harry had heard of astral travel, but had always dismissed it. She smiled in amusement despite her anxiety, as she made a mental note to discuss it with Albus in the morning.

Reaching the edge of the trees, she could see about six figures standing in a semicircle. They were dressed in the robes of the Death Eaters! Another group of Death Eaters was entering the clearing, levitating a large litter between them. Harry was reminded of a funeral and her stomach was tied in knots. As the group moved nearer, she saw that they were indeed carrying a body. She stood, hidden by the trees, wondering idly if she moved if they would become aware of her presence. Deciding it was too risky she skirted the ring of trees to position herself where she could see better. As she did so, she saw that sitting on top of the corpse, and it was a corpse, was Nagini; Lord Voldemort's pet snake!

Harry's heart was beating so hard she could feel it pounding against her chest. 'This can't be happening,' she argued with herself, 'I am just having a bad dream because I'm upset about Sirius and Circe.'

As she watched, the Death Eaters set the litter down in the center of the clearing, and they all completed the circle around it. Harry knew she had to get a better look at the body, praying that the dead person was just another one of their ranks, and she was observing some kind of burial rites. Crouching low, she shimmied over to a small outcropping of rocks, and climbed on top of them, laying flat against the stones since she still wasn't sure if they were aware of her presence. 'Even if I am dreaming I don't want to get caught,' she laughed nervously to herself. She now had a clear view of the scene, and what she saw made her hair stand on end. The litter had been placed on two sawhorses with a torch on either side. Nagini was curled up with her head raised as if to strike and her forked tongue flickered in the torchlight. However, what made Harry's stomach churn was the man she was sitting on. His hands were folded across his chest in repose, but his eyes were wide open, and his face was contorted with his mouth open in a silent scream. Harry had seen that face not three months earlier. It was the face of Lord Voldemort, frozen in terror as he had realized he was dying!

'Oh Merlin, please let me wake up...I know this is not possible,' but even as this thought passed through her mind she could hear Moody's gravelly voice telling them that Voldemort's body had been stolen, along with that of Lucius Malfoy. Scanning the clearing again, she realized that Malfoy's body was not anywhere to be seen, but she was sure it had to be nearby. As she continued to watch, she realized that all the Death Eaters save one had fallen to their knees, as if in prayer. The sole Death Eater who remained standing addressed the others.

"Tonight our Master will be returned to us thanks to our comrade Justin Blackdrake," the man in the center announced pointing in the direction of a stout man on the far side of the circle. "It was Justin who translated the spell from the ancient parchment he found in South America. The spell only Lord Voldemort can do. Nevertheless, our Master was a smart man. He knew Nagini could say the words for us if we told them to her. He hid these words in his father's

mansion, and only Lucius Malfoy and I knew where to find them. He put a spell on the hiding place so that it could only be opened in the event of his death. Tonight we will perform the spell and restore our Master to his former glory. He will be invincible, for he will become immortal as only another Parsel mouth will be able to reverse the spell!"

"What about Harry Potter?" One of the Death eaters called out. "She too is a Parsel mouth. Did she not bring our Master down twice already?"

"Harry Potter will be dealt with by our Master. He has a special plan for her," the man in the middle laughed coldly, and Harry shivered despite the warm night.

"Tonight Nagini will complete Lord Voldemort's quest for immortality, and then our Master will return Lucius to us. Unfortunately, our other brothers and sisters who were lost have had their bodies destroyed, but we shall overcome. New members are being recruited daily, and Lord Voldemort will be pleased. Tonight begins our time of revenge and retribution!"

The circle of Death eaters cheered and waved their wands in the air, as the leader looked on. Harry recognized him as the one who had escaped the evening they had been attacked at the Burrow. Raising his arms he motioned for quiet, and the group immediately fell silent. Nothing stirred, and a wind had sprung up, causing the clouds to race across the dark sky overhead.

"Let us begin the ceremony!" he intoned, turning to face Nagini and with a wave of his wand, a parchment appeared in the air. "We will ask the ancient Serpent Gods of the night to deliver our Master unto our hands." He then knelt down and began to read, as the others followed. Nagini repeated after them...

"Hail to thee Lord Voldemort

May you rise up and stand.

May you return

May your astral soul return

May your psyche return

May your life force return

May you return from the grave of your mother

May you return with the blessings of the dark serpents

Set, Am-Mut, Basilisk, Hydra, Leviathan, Kulkulcan, Naga, and Youalcoatl

May you come into the Region of Unification

Where you will be blessed with health

This is Lord Voldemort

Behold, you come with life

May your limbs, and your bones,

Your organs and your head

Come away from the jaws of the Abyss

May you stray from the path of chaos

This is Lord Voldemort

Rise up and be whole!"

The wind had continued to rise, and was now blowing hard as the sky grew darker. A peal of thunder resounded and shook the earth as a flash of lightening struck the ground in front of the litter where Voldemort's body rested. The scar on Harry's forehead sprang to life and felt as if it were on fire. She was ice cold and shaking with terror, but was unable to tear her eyes away from the scene in front of her. Suddenly all was deathly silent. No one moved and nothing stirred. All eyes were on the body of the Dark Lord as he slowly sat up and looked about. Scanning the circle of his followers, he smiled, and then he seemed to look beyond them, red eyes coming to rest where Harry was still pressed up against the rock.

"Harry Potter," he rasped. "How nice of you to come to my rebirthing party. I will be seeing to you in due time, as well as that traitor, Severus," he laughed manically, "and this time I will not be stopped, for I am planning quite a little surprise for you."

Harry could feel herself pulling away, and moving back through the trees the way she had come. Her head was pounding, and the sound of Lord Voldemort's laughter was ringing in her ears as she found herself sitting bolt upright in bed, screaming. Snuffles was howling with fright, and Harry's scar had burst open, a thin trickle of blood running down into her eyes. Harry knew that what she had just seen was not a dream. Lord Voldemort had returned...very much alive!

Part 12 - Yea, Though I Walk Through the Valley of the Shadow of Death

Severus Snape had been sitting and quietly sipping a glass of firewhisky as he finished his lesson plans for the upcoming school year that was to begin in less than a fortnight. He had just put the final changes on his lesson plan for Defense Against the Dark Arts for the third year, when he became aware of a burning pain in his left forearm.

"What the Hell?" he muttered glancing down at his arm. A red mark had slowly begun to burn into the soft skin where Harry had removed the Dark Mark tattoo not three months earlier. As he watched, it was growing steadily darker and taking form. Snape inhaled sharply, and pushing back his chair, moved swiftly over to his fireplace.

"*Incendio*," he yelled directing his wand into the hearth, causing the fire to spring to life. Grabbing a pinch of Floo Powder, he threw some in, hoping that Dumbledore had not yet retired for the night. "Albus...Albus are you awake? This is urgent," he called sharply, the image now unmistakable as it seared into his flesh.

"Severus? What is wrong?"

"Get down to Harry's room. Something is happening," Snape's usually composed voice uttered with a note of alarm. He lifted his arm exposing the now almost completely visible skull and snake being burned into his flesh. "I will meet you there." Severus did not wait for a reply. Moving swiftly out of his door, he entered the secret passage to the second floor, climbing the stairs two at a time. He had barely exited into the second floor corridor when the screams began accompanied by Snuffles terrified howls.

Dumbledore was racing down the hall from the opposite direction, accompanied by a young woman whom he assumed was the new instructor. Lupin and Black had just flung open their doors, and Minerva was standing in the hall with her wand at the ready.

"What's her password?" Sirius yelled, as he and Remus threw their shoulders against Harry's door after finding it locked.

"Phoenix tears," Dumbledore responded directing his wand at the door, reaching Sirius side at the same time as Severus.

The men all stumbled into the room, with Minerva and the other woman waiting in the open door, wands at the ready as Dumbledore lit the lamps with a wave of his wand. Harry was sitting up in bed, shaking violently, her face in her hands, which were dripping blood. Snuffles had stopped howling, and was standing protectively beside her mistress' bed. Remus made an odd animal like sound in his throat, and the great dog relaxed, lying down on the floor, watching warily.

"Harry, Honey!" Sirius exclaimed reaching her first, and pulling her into his arms. "What has happened? You're bleeding."

"He did it, didn't he?" Severus' quiet voice asked silkily. "The Dark Lord has risen."

"Princess, is this true?" Remus questioned as he conjured a basin and filled it with water from the bathroom. Placing a washcloth into the water, he passed it to Sirius to clean the blood, which continued to drip from her hands.

"Harry? Answer us...it is all right. You're safe here, and so is Severus," Dumbledore informed her softly, his voice quiet and confident.

She raised her head, and Sirius and Remus both gasped. The lightning bolt scar was an angry open wound, and her face was covered in blood.

"Tonight...I...I was...there. I don't know...how. At first...I...thought it was...just...a dream," she sobbed.

Sirius balanced the basin that Remus had given him on the bed and gently dabbing at Harry's face while Remus did a spell to clean the linens

"Honey, you must have been dreaming."

"No, I was there! I watched...it was...in a clearing...I knew the...way!" she argued frantically.

"Harry, I want you to put your memory in the pensive. Where do you keep it?" Dumbledore inquired. "That way we can all see exactly what happened."

"It is on my closet shelf."

"She is telling the truth," Severus stated quietly. "The Dark Mark has been reburned into my flesh. I believe it occurred at exactly the same time as Harry was witnessing Voldemort's resurrection. I have already shown Albus," he remarked pulling up his left sleeve while Dumbledore placed the pensive down in front of her on the bed.

"Here, Princess," Remus handed her the wand from her nightstand, "this way you won't have to answer any more questions. We will be able to get an exact account of the events as they happened."

"Always practical," she offered giving him a wan smile, placing the wand to her forehead. She closed her eyes and began pulling the silver memory threads from within her unconscious mind, placing them into the swirling glow of the pensive.

"Albus, if you don't need me for anything I will return to my quarters." Professor McGonagall's soft brogue seemed to come from far off.

"Minerva if you would contact Alastor Moody, I would be most appreciative. Let him know what is going on and tell him I will be in touch as soon as I have more information. Have him notify the rest of the Order."

"Right away, Albus," she nodded, starting to leave the room as Harry opened her eyes.

"Minerva," Harry's shaky voice stopped her, "don't use the Floo system to notify Professor Moody. I think it would be prudent if you used Fawkes instead."

"Albus?" the older witch looked at Dumbledore, who was watching Harry shrewdly.

"Harry is right, Minerva. We do not want word of this getting out just yet. We need to proceed with caution."

"Very well, I will see to it immediately," she replied, moving off into the hall, and Harry finally noticed the silent figure who remained standing in the doorway.

"Who are you?" she asked pointedly, staring at the young woman.

She was stunningly beautiful, about as tall as Harry, with olive skin and thick black hair that hung straight down her lithe body to her waist. Her face the perfect oval, accentuated by high cheekbones, with full red lips. However, what struck Harry the most was her almond shaped eyes. They were pale golden amber, surrounded by thick black lashes, with fine brows, and appeared almost feral. She had only seen eyes like that on Remus, and then only during his transformations. They appeared to be looking directly into Harry's soul.

Coming forward, she dropped to one knee, lips curved into a fine smile showing even white teeth. Her fluid movements were almost stealthy, and like Severus, she never made a sound. Harry noted she was wearing a soft wrap around skirt and long blouse beneath magenta robes, which rivaled some of Dumbledore's. A jade bracelet in the form of a snake was coiled around her wrist and a gold and jade-feathered serpent hung from her neck.

"Good evening. I'm humbled to be in the presence of the one whom the ancient guardians of light have deemed worthy to act as their portal to guard us from the ancient lords of chaos and darkness. I am Arsinoe Darkmoon, Aztec high priestess among my father's people, and daughter of Isis on my mother's side. I have come in response to Albus' summons so that you may use your powers as the ancients have decreed with wisdom and love."

"Yeah, right, you and who else?" Harry asked testily. "And while you're at it, don't ever go down on your knees to me again. You look like a Death Eater."

"Arsinoe, I must apologize for Harry," Dumbledore's blue eyes looked at her sternly over his glasses as the young woman stood up gracefully. "As you can see she has just had a terrible shock, and I am sure she has a headache."

"Headmaster there is no need to apologize for me. I am quite capable of doing so for myself. However, I don't believe my personal problems are any of Miss Darkmoon's business."

"Honey, she has come a long way to help us. I know you don't like the attention and are distrustful of strangers, but she is a friend of Albus," Sirius counseled as he finished wiping the blood from her forehead.

"Princess, there is also no need to be rude," Remus remarked, studying the newcomer with fascination.

"Next Severus will be telling me that she is a Slytherin since she is wearing a bracelet in the shape of a snake," Harry replied sarcastically.

"Actually, Harry, I believe she is a member of the League of the Feathered Serpents. It is where Albus got the idea for the Order of the Phoenix."

"You are the head of the house of the serpent?" Arsinoe smiled, pleased that he understood the significance of her necklace.

"Yes, I am Severus Snape, head of Slytherin house."

Excuse me, Miss Darkmoon, I don't wish to be rude, but I am Sirius Black, Harry's godfather," he interrupted, staring openly at the beautiful young woman. "I understand you will be teaching here at Hogwarts with us."

Harry did not like the way Sirius was studying the new professor. She was already upset with him, not being used to the feelings of jealousy that were overwhelming her. Casting an annoyed glance at Sirius she closed her eyes, taking the washcloth from him and pressing it onto her scar in an effort to disguise her feelings. Concentrating, she used her telekinesis to flip the basin onto his lap.

"Bloody Hell!" Sirius yelled jumping up. "I don't know how that happened, sorry love," he smiled fondly at Harry, pulling out his wand to clean up the mess.

"Mr. Black I'm pleased to meet the one who is both protector to the young Quetzalpetzatl and friend to the one who shares his soul with the wolf."

"Wait a minute," Harry looked up suspiciously, "who or what is Quetzalpetzatl and how do you know about Professor Lupin?"

Arsinoe looked over at Remus, who stood gaping in amazement, then back to Harry, who was staring at her through narrowed eyes.

"Dumbledore, I fear I have made an error. Have I said something wrong?"

"No, Arsinoe, they're just confused by both your knowledge and words."

"I will explain then. Miss Potter are you familiar with the feathered serpent god of my people?"

"If you mean Quetzcoatl, then yes I have heard of him."

"I refer to you as Quetzalpetzatl since she is his twin sister. You speak with her tongue and can become one with the Phoenix. You are as the winged serpent. Dumbledore has asked me to show you that hidden within you is both the winged serpent of Quetzalpetzatl and the serpent goddess of life known to my father's people as Coatlicue and the Egyptian healing serpent known to my mother's ancestors as Uraeus."

"Are you trying to tell me that in addition to my Animagus form of the Phoenix I can also transform into both a snake and a feathered serpent?"

"Yes, the power is within you if you will..."

"You're daft! Albus you don't really believe this nonsense do you?"

"Yes, Child, I do. Arsinoe wouldn't say it if she didn't believe it too."

"And how do you explain her knowing about Remus?"

"Quite simply. As an instructor in my employ, she needs to be aware of his other nature. I told her."

"How dare you tell a stranger..."

"Harry!" Remus cut her off sharply. "It's okay. Albus has my permission to inform staff members that I am a werewolf. It is in my contract."

Harry just looked around the room, and slumped back onto her pillows. She was tired and confused, and she winced as another sharp pain shot through her scar.

"Harry, are you still having pain in your scar?" Sirius asked gently.

"I am sure she is," Snape interjected, "since my Dark Mark is also burning."

"He's probably resurrecting Lucius Malfoy. That's why I am still in pain," she said flatly. "I don't see how this could be happening to me. I thought the prophecy was fulfilled."

"Harry is right, Albus, she did kill him. What has gone wrong?" Sirius inquired, putting his arm around Harry's shoulder.

"I have been considering this. I believe they were two separate prophecies. The first was Chandra Mathias' Prophecy, which has been fulfilled just as she predicted. I think that the second prophecy, the one Sybil Trelawney gave me at the Hogshead, was a different one altogether. It is the only explanation that makes any sense."

"The evil one used the power of the ancient serpent gods to come back from the realm of darkness. It's up to you to use the same power to send him back," Arsinoe remarked solemnly.

"Then you all believe me that he is alive and probably reviving Lucius even as we speak?"

"It is time we saw what is in the pensive. Perhaps then we can determine what is going on," Dumbledore remarked noncommittally.

"Severus you believe me, don't you?"

"Yes, Harry, I do. I cannot believe that this tattoo came back without some kind of magic. Nor do I believe you had anything to do with it."

"Harry we need to see what happened so we can determine exactly how to proceed," Remus responded gently. "We all believe you."

"Remus is right. We know you would never say such a thing unless it was true. Now you try to rest while we review the events in the pensive." Sirius stroked her hair gently giving her a kiss on the forehead.

"Okay," Harry smiled, pleased with his attentiveness. 'Maybe I am silly feeling jealous, but I just care so much for him. I wonder if I am going to be like my dad was with my mum,' Harry mused.

Dumbledore set the pensive down on the sitting room table and they all gathered round it leaving the bedroom door open so she could observe them. Harry was not happy that Arsinoe was seeing what happened, but she had sensed Dumbledore's displeasure with her attitude towards the new witch, and did not want to anger him further.

Harry lay back on her pillows while they watched the events from her memory play out in the pensive. When her protectors and Arsinoe finally looked up, she allowed herself to put down her guard and scan their emotions as they filed back into her bedroom. Sirius was as usual his protective self and ready to take on whatever fight was in store for them. Remus was anxious and thoughtful, while Severus was grimly determined to downplay the danger. Albus merely looked back at her, blue eyes serious, and blocked her from feeling his emotions. She looked at him astutely as she sensed his power. Next, she focused on the newcomer, Arsinoe. Harry thought she would be terrified, but she wasn't. Instead, she was outraged and disgusted that Harry had been exposed to such dark magic. Arsinoe turned to study the young witch, her golden eyes unblinking as they locked with Harry's.

"This is among the darkest of magic to my people and I'm ashamed that you had to witness such a thing. He is strong, but you are stronger, for while he uses the power of the serpents he does not truly possess it as you do. However, we must move cautiously, as his evil is unprecedented. He can be injured; he will not die, for he is already dead. That which now moves among us has been brought back from the chaos of the abyss."

"Oh this just keeps getting better and better." Harry rolled her eyes, trying to disguise her worry, but her voice sounded hollow and high pitched in her ears.

"Honey, everything will be all right," Sirius remarked sitting back down on the bed.

"How can you all be so calm about this? Voldemort is back and I have no idea how to stop him." Harry's nerves were near breaking point, and Snuffles stood up to nuzzle her gently.

"Hey," Sirius grinned petting the dog, "that's my job."

Harry looked up into his soft eyes and gave him a halfhearted smile.

"Miss Darkmoon, are you familiar with this magic? Have you ever seen it done before?" Snape asked, dark eyes glittering with unabashed interest.

"The serpent is strong within you, but it is dangerous for you to discuss such darkness, for it has nearly seduced you once, and you have tasted the poison of the serpent's fangs," Arsinoe remarked wryly, eyeing his left arm.

"Interesting analogy," Remus mused. "Wouldn't you say so, Albus?"

"Severus is more than aware of the lure of the dark arts; probably more so than any of us. He has proven his loyalty and shown he can be trusted."

"Thank you, Albus," Severus inclined his head respectfully.

"You have said there were two prophecies about the young Quetzalpetzatl. I should like to hear them," Arsinoe said soberly.

"Harry, do you have any objections to my showing the prophecies to Arsinoe," Dumbledore asked, looking deeply into her green eyes.

"You know, Headmaster, sometimes I think you are the devil in disguise. You know damn well I can't say no to you," she pouted, "so why do you even ask?"

"I want you to accept Arsinoe's help, Child. I know how distrustful you are, but she has studied this ancient magic since childhood. She can help you where I cannot."

"Princess, I think you should listen to Albus. You are always telling us we keep you in the dark about our decisions for your safety. Albus is giving you the chance to show you are able to act in the manner befitting your ranking within the Order."

"Remus, just once in my life I wish I could sit back and look at things as objectively as you do. You always make things sound so simple," Harry sighed.

"I told you he was the one who always tried to keep us out of trouble," Sirius hugged her.

"I for one agree with Lupin. It would be unwise to refuse Miss Darkmoon's assistance. The League of the Feathered Serpents is amongst the oldest guardians of magic in the world," Severus quietly intoned.

"I don't know how I feel about a stranger interfering in my life, but I will at least give her a chance, on one condition."

"I will be happy to do anything that will make you feel comfortable enough to accept my help," Arsinoe agreed, amber eyes studying her keenly.

"First off, stop referring to me as Quetzalpetzatl. I am not a serpent goddess, despite whatever abilities you think I may possess. Secondly, you are not to discuss any of this with anyone other than the four of us unless I specifically ask or agree with them that you should."

"That's two things," Dumbledore chuckled, blue eyes twinkling over his half moon spectacles as he glanced at Arsinoe and then back to Harry.

"So it is," Harry met his gaze defiantly, the trace of a smile on her lips.

"Then I suggest we get started. Arsinoe, do you wish to use my office to read the first prophecy? I can show the second one in Harry's pensive as it was told to me. All I need to do is pull the memory."

"No, Albus. I can see the young Que...Er...Miss Potter is still in pain. I don't think she should be alone. For now, we should all stay with her. I will need to ease her discomfort as well as that of Professor Snape." She moved lithely across the room to Severus without a sound, and removing the winged serpent from around her neck, placed the amulet on his dark mark. It had an almost instant numbing effect. Next she moved over to Harry who was watching her with suspicion. "I know you don't trust me, but this might help you to see that I really want to help. I only ask that you allow me to help you as Albus would to ease your suffering. My doing so will also send a message to the dark one that you are amongst those who would see him returned to his eternal torments."

"Go ahead, Harry, we're all here and you know Dumbledore would never let anyone cause you harm," Sirius coaxed.

Harry merely nodded and held onto Sirius hand. Arsinoe then placed her amulet against Harry's scar. Harry winced once, as she felt a white-hot power shoot through the still raw wound on her forehead before a strange numbing effect occurred. The strongest feeling of the utmost peace and comfort she had ever felt followed this. She blinked in awe at Arsinoe.

"Are you a healer?" Harry asked.

"No, the feelings come from within you. All I did was to cause the influence of the dark one to flee. You are bonded to him as he is to you. Take care or he will try to gain control. He will use your own feelings and insecurities against you. You must guard against feelings of anger, hatred, and jealousy, for he feeds off them. The goodness and love within you will repel him. You have used a part of this once already to defeat him. I'll know more once I have read and seen the prophecies."

"Are you ready to read the first of the prophecies?" Dumbledore inquired. "The copy is kept in my office, but I can easily summon it."

"Please do, Albus," Arsinoe nodded seating herself at Harry's writing desk. The others had already conjured chairs, and Sirius continued to sit with Harry, absently stroking her hair.

"*Accio Mathias Prophecy*," Dumbledore stated. A few minutes later, the rolled up parchment flew in through the fireplace. The old wizard then gave it to Arsinoe.

The room was quiet while she read the prophecy that had already come to pass, every now and then glancing over at Harry with an amused smile. After she finished Arsinoe rolled up the parchment, tying it securely, and turned to Dumbledore.

"You hold the memory of the second prophecy within you?"

"I do. I shall place it into the pensive for you to see," he nodded. Pointing his wand at his head, he withdrew the silver memory thread placing it into the pensive, which he had retrieved from the sitting room and placed on the desk.

Arsinoe watched as the image of Sybil Trelawney rose up and floated in front of her... '*For neither can live while the other survives.*' She watched the memory three times, studying it closely, before turning to the others in the room.

"The clue is in the wording. It simply means that he will not be able to continue should she live. His survival in his present form will not be assured otherwise, for he's no longer alive. On the other hand she can't live while he survives. She's linked to him and can't be free while his influence attempts to poison her soul."

"But I killed him once! He came back!"

"Hush, Child, let Arsinoe finish," Dumbledore counseled her soothingly.

"You killed his body, but he was ready for that event and learned how to restore his soul with the help of the ancient magic. You must now send him back to the abyss and destroy his body. Only then will you be free to live."

"So I have to kill him again?"

"No, his body is still dead, although it will always remain as you see it. I take it that the undertakers preserved it?"

"I believe so," Dumbledore replied.

"But won't it decay on its own?"

"No, Harry," Remus answered. "When wizard undertakers prepare a body they preserve it with magic. Have you ever heard of some of the religious icons or saints preserved in Muggle churches that still look as if they are alive?"

"Yes, I saw something on the telly once, but what has that to do with this?"

"Those bodies were preserved with magic. Some of them were probably witches or wizards. This may surprise you but some of us do pursue the Muggle religions."

"So what your telling me is that his body is still dead?"

"Yes," Remus nodded emphatically.

"Then how is he alive? I don't understand."

"His soul is merely using the body as a vessel, as do our own. The difference is that our bodies still function. His doesn't," Arsinoe explained patiently. "He has no need to eat or sleep, and will be driven by his anger and obsessions."

"Then he can't be killed," Harry shuddered, her stomach knotting in fear.

"He can be stopped though. His body is immortal, but his soul can still be sent back. You must do the reversal spell and then destroy both his body and the copy of the spell his followers stole to prevent his ever returning."

"Then let me do the reversal spell now," Harry stated hopefully.

"I am afraid Harry, that there is more to it than that," Snape remarked.

"Professor Snape is correct. The reversal spell must be done in his presence, and during the full moon, since he was brought back during the new moon."

"Why?"

"Because you and he are opposites; one good, one evil," Arsinoe sighed.

"Do you know this spell?"

"I know where to find it. My people are searching for it even now. The one that you call the Dark Lord had the spell he used stolen from deep within one of our ancient temples. Fortunately the thief was unaware of the need to take the other spell from the altar beneath the Temple of the Moon in our ancient city of Teotihuacán, in present day Mexico."

"Miss Dark Moon, if Harry has to do this spell under the full moon..."

"Professor Lupin," Arsinoe smiled, "you will be able to better protect her as the wolf, for you will be able to sense the changes in the wind that will open the way to send the dark one back. You will also be able to guard her from those wizards you call Death Eaters. They fear your bite, lest they too bear the mark of the wolf," Arsinoe chuckled softly.

"I do not find that at all funny," Remus grumbled. "I would not inflict this curse on my worst enemy."

"Professor Lupin, I am sorry. Apparently, you are unaware that many of the Native Americans of North America revere the wolf. Those with the mark of the wolf are considered honored to be one with their brothers." Arsinoe smiled, golden eyes sparkling with amusement at the redness creeping up his cheeks.

"See that Moony, some people have the right idea about werewolves," Sirius grinned.

"Cool," Harry agreed. "I wish I had four legs and paws sometimes."

"Miss Wings, I thought you liked being able to fly?" Sirius teased.

"I love it, but sometimes it might be fun to join the two of you and find out just what it is you are trying to sniff out," Harry laughed, beginning to relax.

"Harry, if Miss Darkmoon is to be believed you have the Animagus form of the snake and a second magical animal in the guise of the winged serpent, or dragon if you prefer. I should think you would be pleased," Severus sneered.

"Sev, I never told you this, but while I recognize that snakes play an important part in the ecology, and they can be interesting to talk to, I don't much like them. You see, the girl in me likes soft furry things much better!"

"Rats are soft and furry," Severus taunted, referring to the late Peter Pettigrew's Animagus form.

"No, rats are fodder for the snakes," she shot back, "not to mention the canines and cats."

"And the furry animals are food for the dragons," he jeered with an evil smile.

"For that matter, so are humans, if you wish to get right down to it."

"Aha! You see, you will be able to stop the Dark Lord if you keep that in mind."

"You know, Severus, sometimes I just hate your logical mind," Harry replied, trying unsuccessfully not to grin at the way he had out maneuvered her. "So now what do we do?"

"We wait and see what Voldemort will do next," Dumbledore answered, "and we call an emergency meeting of the Order for tomorrow night."

"What about Lucius Malfoy? This will complicate things with Draco," Severus remarked.

"As of now, we don't have any proof that Voldemort has revived Lucius, although I won't discount the possibility after what Harry overheard tonight."

"I still don't understand how I even got there, Headmaster."

"Arsinoe, perhaps you would like to explain?" Dumbledore inquired, blue eyes twinkling at the beautiful witch.

"I can only guess, but among many cultures it is believed that when we dream our souls can actually leave our bodies, although they remain connected to them. While you were sleeping the connection to the Dark One and your own sense of curiosity and goodness brought you there. Has this ever happened before?"

"Sort of, but Voldemort was alive then. He was still dead when this started tonight."

"But your link is strong, and your soul, for what ever reason, was drawn there tonight."

"Professor Dumbledore, is this really possible?" Harry asked looking from one to the other.

"Harry, you have powers even you don't understand or know about, so yes, I would say that it is entirely possible."

Harry just sighed and buried her face in Sirius shoulder, happy to have him close to her. 'How am I ever going to face Voldemort again, let alone kill...no...destroy him? You can't kill someone who is already dead. Christ, I fell like I'm one of those people in a Muggle horror film, and now they're asking me to trust this strange Aztec witch.'

"Harry," Remus soft voice interrupted her thoughts, "do you want one of us to stay with you for a while? I'm not tired so I wouldn't mind."

"I can provide you with some dreamless sleeping potion if you wish," Snape offered, keeping his voice neutral, but Harry sensed he was genuinely concerned for her.

Harry looked up at Sirius, but he did not offer to stay, and could not meet her eyes. She felt a stab of pain in her heart, and all the pain and jealousy she had felt earlier came flooding back. Her empathic senses told her he was deliberately hiding something.

"I'll be fine. I promised Phaedra I would take her to Honeydukes tomorrow, so I had better get some sleep."

"Harry I would prefer it if you stayed on the Hogwarts grounds," Dumbledore stated firmly. "Phaedra can go to Honeydukes with Sirius and Circe. I believe he has to go to Hogsmeade tomorrow anyway on an errand for Alastor Moody."

Harry couldn't believe what Dumbledore had just told her. He was sending Sirius with Circe and Phaedra! 'How can he not know how I feel? Or maybe he does...Oh, Albus, why are you doing this to me?'

"I'll be happy to take them," Sirius said, before Harry could say anything out loud. "I'll bring you back some chocolate frogs, Harry. I know how much you and Ron like them and maybe you'll find that card you've been looking for. It's Sigmund the Sad, isn't it?"

"Yeah...yeah it is," she responded, looking at Remus as she fought back another round of tears and jealousy.

"Headmaster, if Black could take them in the morning, Harry and I promised to give Phaedra a tour of the castle so she doesn't get lost. I think that perhaps she would enjoy having a picnic lunch on the grounds first."

"Excellent suggestion, Severus, I shall inform the house elves to prepare you a basket and provide a blanket. Afterwards you can show her the grounds and the castle, and if Harry is willing maybe she will take her out onto the Quidditch Pitch and do some flying."

"I think she'll love it Princess," Remus encouraged her. "I wouldn't mind joining you, if Miss Darkmoon would like a tour of the building and grounds too?"

"I had planned on having lunch with Professor Dumbledore to review my curriculum with him," Arsinoe replied apologetically.

"Nonsense, I think it will do you good to see our fair school. In a few months, we will all be cooped up indoors with the winter storms and it will help you to get acquainted. After all, tonight's little adventure hardly qualifies as a proper introduction," Dumbledore beamed.

"In that case, Professor Lupin, I will be happy to join you so long as Miss Potter and Professor Snape don't feel we are intruding. You also said there is another teacher, Phaedra?"

"No, Miss Darkmoon," Severus arched his brow amused, while Harry snickered despite her hurt feelings, "Phaedra is my niece. She will be seven in September. Her mother is my elder sister and is in our Headmaster's employ as is our great-uncle, Tiberius Snape. I will introduce you tomorrow."

"Oh," Arsinoe flushed, embarrassed. "I was unaware any children were here."

"She is the only one until the students arrive next week. Phaedra will be going to primary school in the village," Dumbledore explained, blue eyes twinkling. "She is quite precocious, as I am sure you will soon find out for yourself."

"Then I look forward to meeting her. I am used to young children as I have several nieces and nephews, as Dumbledore knows."

"Well, Harry needs her rest, so I think we should let her get some sleep," Sirius remarked, still unable to meet his goddaughter's eyes.

"Severus I think I will take you up on the offer of some of the sleeping potion. I am out of practice with my Occlumency and would prefer not to have a repeat of Voldemort's earlier performance."

"I shall bring it up shortly," he nodded taking a dash of Floo Powder. "Incendio," he said pointing his wand into the fireplace. Throwing in the Floo Powder, he stepped inside and firmly stated, "Professor Snape's office," vanishing in a swirl of green fire.

"Do you want me to stay until Severus comes back?" Remus asked quietly. He knew Harry was hurting and confused by Sirius sudden change of behavior.

"No...I'll be fine, Remus. Sev won't be long I'm sure."

"Then we will say good night, Harry. If you need anything, you know Remus and I are just across the hall," Sirius remarked giving her a quick squeeze before standing up.

"Child are you certain you're feeling all right?" Dumbledore's blue eyes studied her closely.

"I'm just tired, Headmaster, and I was really looking forward to going into Hogsmeade with Phaedra tomorrow."

"I know, Harry, but it really will be safer for you here until we find out some more information on what is happening."

"I'll bet you would let Severus leave the grounds if he wanted to."

"I doubt I would be able to stop him. He can be quite narrow minded at times, as well as stubborn," Dumbledore laughed, "but don't go getting any ideas, Little Phoenix. I want you to stay safe. You will have a hard ordeal ahead of you, and you must be prepared."

"Yes, Sir," she conceded with a sigh. "I will see you all tomorrow," Harry remarked as they all headed towards the door. "Oh, and Miss Darkmoon," she called, stopping the beautiful witch, whom she gauged to be in her early thirties, "welcome to Hogwarts."

"Thank you, Miss Potter. I am looking forward to getting to know you better," Arsinoe responded. Turning back, she took Dumbledore's arm, and left without a sound, leaving Harry alone in the room.

While Harry waited for Severus to return with the sleeping potion, her mind was a torrent of conflicting thoughts and emotions. She was depressed and anxious, and it was an effort to try not to cry. Three months ago, she had a future. Voldemort was dead and she had three wonderful young wizards, albeit somewhat older, that wanted to make a life with her. Her only problem had been trying to decide which one she was actually in love with. All that had ended within the past twenty-four hours.

Her godfather and favorite among her suitors had been showing interest in an older woman. Not that she didn't want him to be happy; on the contrary, she cared enough to step aside if it meant he could finally find love and peace of mind. The twelve years he had spent in Azkaban had taken their toll, and she knew how much he felt he had missed. Nevertheless, what really upset her was that he was interested in Circe Snape, Severus' older sister. Harry

felt as if she had been stabbed in the back, and that's what hurt the most. She still wasn't used to the cattiness of women, having masqueraded as a boy for so long.

Then there was Severus, himself. She knew that he wanted her, and she couldn't deny that he was her soul mate, but that didn't mean she was in love with him. Indeed, he was intelligent, and had an inner kindness that he tried to hide from the world. He loved to challenge her mind, and unbeknownst to most people he had a really good sense of humor. She respected him, and knew that his judgment on magical matters was usually sound, even if it wasn't always what people wanted to hear. He had been there for her from the day she had first entered Hogwarts, even if he hadn't been the nicest of teachers.

Finally, there was Remus, the one stabilizing factor in her life. He was always so calm and practical. She loved him too, but knew he would prefer she married someone else, since he was a werewolf, and the Ministry of Magic frowned on werewolves marrying and having children. He knew that if she determined she was in love with him she would go to any lengths to secure a happy future for them both, and the ministry be damned. He had suffered silently for most of his life with the various tragedies that had taken place. He deserved to be happy. They all did.

Voldemort had left deep scars which had finally begun to heal, but now that was all changed too. Tonight, Harry had somehow witnessed his resurrection from the dead. The source of evil that had plagued the wizarding world was back. Harry's future was bleaker than ever. Indeed, she may not have one anymore. If Voldemort had his way, none of them would be alive by this time next year. Harry had won the battle, but the war was about to resume...

She was pondering this when Severus stepped out of her fireplace and back into her bedroom with the vial of Dreamless Sleeping Potion in his hand.

"The Headmaster told me he would prefer it if I stayed with you for awhile. He is more worried than he is letting on."

"Severus you don't need to stay. You should try to get some rest too. Lord knows there will be many a sleepless night ahead for all of us."

"Just the same, I will stay," Severus responded calmly, pulling up a chair to sit by her bedside. "Whatever happens I am still your protector and have been watching over you for a long time. I shall continue to do so."

"Do you want to talk for awhile? I don't really need to take that yet," she said indicating the vial of purple liquid he had placed on her night table. "I only asked for it because I don't want to be seeing his red eyes laughing at me..." Harry's voice trailed off. The thought of Voldemort's evil smile sent a chill down her back.

"You defeated him once. You can do it again."

"He was mortal then! How do you stop a dead man?"

"I believe we went over this earlier. Miss Darkmoon has knowledge that is vital to your success. Why do you resist her help?"

"I don't know her. For all we know she is in league with Voldemort."

"I don't believe that for a minute. Albus trusts her implicitly and has known her family for a long time. He cares what happens to you, Harry. He considers you his family. You made him our Trust Keeper, but where is your trust in his judgment?"

"He's made mistakes before."

"He's human, just like the rest of us."

"I know, but it worries me when he has to ask for help from someone we don't know. I wish he had at least consulted with us before sending for her."

"Harry, she is a member of the League of the Feathered Serpent, which makes her Aztec royalty. They have knowledge that has been hidden for generations. Albus was wise to send for her."

"I guess," Harry shrugged staring off into space. "Sev, I'm afraid."

"I know."

"Why aren't you?"

"What makes you think I'm not?"

"You're always so sure of yourself."

"Harry, I have had to live with fear of the Dark Lord for more years than I care to count. I have trained myself to take it in stride and go on with my affairs. There is no point in worrying. What will be..." he shrugged, arching his brow.

"Severus. . . ." Harry lowered her eyes, "how come you can be so nice and caring one minute and such a pain in the ass the next?"

"What has that got to do with Lord Voldemort?" he asked, cupping her chin, an amused smirk playing about his lips.

"Nothing, I just wanted to know."

"I like to see people's responses. It also helps to keep the students guessing."

"You're evil," Harry chuckled.

"I was a Death Eater."

"I know. Ron still has his suspicions."

"How about you, are you suspicious of my motives too?"

"I think you're smart enough to know which side to butter your bread on." Harry pursed her lips thoughtfully. "You left the Death Eaters because of what they did to you when you expressed your opinion that torturing Muggles was a waste of time."

"And if Camilla and Marcus were still alive, where would I be then?" he questioned, referring to his wife and son.

"If Voldemort had taken a different approach and didn't waste his time with Muggle bashing you would have stayed."

"You're quite possibly right, but we will never know for certain."

"Answer me another question?"

"What is it?"

"Why did you force that kiss on me after the graduation when I was visiting my folk's grave?"

"I wanted you to know how I felt. You seem to be obsessed with Sirius Black. I plan on fighting for you."

"Well, Sirius seems to want your older sister," Harry replied glumly. "You're right though. I love Sirius. I have told you that before. He's my heart and you're my soul."

"What will you do if he marries Circe?"

"Smile and pretend to be happy at the wedding. Then I will go and have one hell of a good cry."

"I will be waiting."

"It doesn't bother you that he is interested in your sister?"

"He is from an old and established pureblood family. Just because I don't get along with him does not mean it won't be a good match."

"I'm not."

"You're not what?"

"Pureblood, as you have so often pointed out," Harry replied bluntly.

"I can overlook that. You are quite a powerful witch and I can teach you so many things."

"Love doesn't matter to you?"

"What makes you think it should?"

"You bastard! Don't you realize I could never marry anyone who isn't in love with me? It's what Dumbledore says makes me what I am."

"There you again, jumping to conclusions. I never said I didn't love you. You know I am not one to display my emotions in public. The question is...how do you feel about me?"

"I don't know. You know that I care for all three of you."

"Are you in love with Sirius Black or do you just love him? There is a difference you know."

"That's the problem. I'm not sure. I thought I was falling in love with him, but now he doesn't seem interested. . . ." Harry's voice cracked, as she fought off another round of tears. "It may no longer matter anyway, now that Voldemort is back."

"On the contrary, it may matter more than ever. Your love for each one of us may just be the deciding factor in this war. It may be what gives you the strength, courage, and endurance to fight and win," Severus replied, giving her one of his rare smiles, referring to each of their roles in the Protectorship. "It was that love that sent you into the Department of Mysteries a few years back. All you need to do is learn how to control your impulsiveness so that the Dark Lord does not trick you by using your emotions against you."

"That scares me even more. I haven't practiced any Occlumency in a long time."

"You will be starting tomorrow evening. I have prepared a Potions schedule along with my Uncle and we will also restart your Occlumency lessons."

"I suppose he will be working with me too?"

"If you think I'm hard, wait till he gets into your head," Snape sneered with a chuckle.

"Is nothing sacred any more?"

"That is the purpose of learning how to close one's mind," he teased. "Now take your potion and get some rest. We're entertaining Phaedra tomorrow, and that is akin to spending the afternoon chasing the golden snitch."

"Sev, if it makes any difference to you I happen to love Phaedra very much. I think she will be a wonderful Gryffindor when the time comes," Harry grinned wickedly.

"Phaedra will be a Slytherin just like the rest of her family," he answered haughtily.

"Dream on Professor Snape. She's too brave and outgoing for Slytherin house and you and I both know it. In fact, she reminds me very much of the stories I heard about my godfather at that age." Harry did not give Severus a chance to respond. She had picked up the vial and swallowed it in one sweeping motion. She was asleep before her head hit the pillow.

Severus sat studying her with a slight smile playing over his thin lips. He was amused by her comments about his niece. He also knew they were quite true. 'Well my dear Miss Potter, you have the brave heart of the lion and the soul of a phoenix, not to mention the cunning and power of the serpent. If you seem to think Phaedra will be a Gryffindor you are probably right. I too can see her lion's heart already beginning to make its presence known, but it will make no difference. I will still love that beautiful and precocious child because she has an inner joy that was almost lost to my family a long time ago, and like you I would never let her fall prey to the darkness. Sleep well for soon you will be tested like never before and I pray to Merlin that you will stay strong and true as you have done before,' he reflected. Settling back in the chair he closed his mind to the thought that she could die. He couldn't face that idea. It was too painful, and he needed to be strong for her.

Part 13 - A Storm Called Phaedra

Harry calmly made her way downstairs to await the return of Phaedra, who had gone with Circe and Sirius into Hogsmeade. She was supposed to go with Tiberius too, but he had been called away the night before on business, and had not returned until almost dawn. Circe had then asked Sirius if he minded going with her to take Phaedra to see her new school as well as to buy some treats at Honeydukes. Of course, Sirius always being a gentleman, agreed. Harry merely looked on, and kept her mouth shut, but inside she was still angry and hurt. Phaedra was also disappointed that Harry was not going, but delighted with the idea of having a picnic lunch with her Uncle Severus and Harry. She also wanted to meet the new witch, but she had not come down to breakfast with them, nor had Dumbledore, Harry thought reviewing the morning's events in her head.

"You will get to meet her later, Phaedra. I am sure she was very tired since she traveled a long way to get here." Severus told his niece patiently.

"What does she look like?"

"She is very pretty," Remus said amused.

"I'll bet she isn't as pretty as Miss Harry!" Phaedra beamed at Harry.

"She is older than Harry. She has long black hair and the most arresting eyes I have ever seen." Remus smiled, sighing at the memory of Arsinoe.

"Her eyes are going to put you in jail?" Phaedra asked confused.

"No Phaedra," Harry giggled, "he means her eyes are beautiful."

"Your eyes are beautiful too! Mr. Remus you should say something nice like that to Miss Harry. Just because she likes to hide her eyes behind her glasses instead of showing them off..."

"Slow down Phaedra," Sirius laughed, "Remus knows Harry has beautiful eyes. He tells her all the time."

"Humph..." Phaedra crossed her arms over her chest, "I'll bet her eyes are not the same pretty green as Miss Harry's."

"Your right, they are amber, which is a kind of golden," Sirius answered.

"They look like Remus' when he is the wolf," Harry remarked softly.

"Is she a wolf too?"

"What? No...No she's not," Remus replied thoughtfully, and Harry knew he was considering some kind of possibility.

"What is her name?"

"Her name is Arsinoe Darkmoon." Severus' melodic voice allowed the words to drip from his tongue like honey.

"Are-sin-oh-ay," Phaedra repeated slowly. "That is a funny name."

"Phaedra, that isn't nice. She comes from far away from somewhere in Central America, I think. She is what the Muggles used to call an Indian," Circe admonished her daughter.

"Can she do a war dance? I saw some Indians on the telly at Althea's house once and they painted their faces and did a war dance!" Phaedra exclaimed excitedly.

"Phaedra, those were the Plains Indians of North America, and what you saw on the telly was totally inaccurate," Severus admonished. "Miss Darkmoon is an Aztec, which is a very old culture. She is also part Egyptian on her mother's side."

"Oh," Phaedra said flatly. She was clearly disappointed. "Miss Harry, I'll bet you're every bit as pretty as she is and smarter too."

"Thank you Phaedra, and for that you have earned yourself one galleon to spend any way you wish in Hogsmeade," Harry grinned, pulling the gold coin out from her pocket.

"Thank you Miss Harry!" Phaedra jumped up excitedly and ran over to fling her arms around her.

"Harry, you shouldn't spoil her so much," Circe commented with a smile.

"Little girls should be spoiled, after all they're sugar and spice and everything nice."

"That's funny, Miss Harry," Phaedra grinned, "did you make it up?"

"No it comes from an old Muggle nursery rhyme. It goes something like this, *'What are little girls made of? Sugar and spice and everything nice. That's what little girls are made of.'*"

"Is there one for boys too?" Phaedra wondered curiously.

"Yup," Harry grinned looking at her three protectors there sure is."

"Tell me," Phaedra begged.

"You ask the question and I will do the answer," Harry teased.

"Okay. *What are little boys made of?*"

"Snakes and snails and puppy dogs tails. That's what little boys are made of."

"Hmm...Miss Harry, you know what? I think they really are. Uncle Sev is a Slytherin and so he is a snake and Mr. Sirius turns into a dog and Mr. Remus a wolf, which is almost the same thing. Do you think maybe it is really an old spell or some kind of potion?"

"You never know, Phaedra," Harry chuckled while the table erupted into grins and snickers. "Maybe it was something long forgotten that ended up as a nursery rhyme. Anyway I think

your mum and Sirius are almost ready to go, so I will see you later." Harry hugged her, getting up from her seat. "If you will all excuse me, I am going to go and review my lesson plans and give them to Severus and Minerva for their review." Harry explained leaving the table.. Phaedra had put her into a better mood and she didn't want to spoil it by watching Sirius leave with Circe on his arm.

Harry had then gone upstairs and reviewed her paperwork before heading over to Professor McGonagall's office. She knew the older witch would be critical of her first lesson plan for transfiguration, but Remus had approved, stating she had done quite well, so she was hopeful that she would not have to do it again. McGonagall had been waiting for her when she reached the office.

"Come in Harry," she called, hearing Harry's expected knock on her door.

"I brought the lesson plan, just like I said at breakfast." Harry placed the required paperwork down on McGonagall's desk.

"So how does it feel to have completed your first lesson plan?" McGonagall asked looking at Harry over her glasses.

"I'll let you know after you've reviewed it," she replied with a smile.

"Do you want to wait, or should I send for you later on?"

"I'll wait," Harry replied.

"Then take a seat, this may take a while." McGonagall motioned to the chair beside her desk.

Harry sat quietly for almost thirty minutes while Professor McGonagall reviewed her work. She would occasionally write a comment in the margin. Harry was beginning to feel like she used to when McGonagall graded her Transfiguration exams. She was about to quietly excuse herself, as the suspense was making her nervous, when the stern old witch looked up and smiled.

"I think you'll find my comments helpful," she told Harry handing the lesson plan back to her.

Harry scanned the comments nervously reading down the page. When she had finished, her face was glowing with delight.

"Thank you, Professor," Harry said beaming. McGonagall had made only one minor change and had complimented her on her outstanding work.

"I will expect you to do even better as you become more experienced, so don't disappoint me."

"I won't, I promise."

"I suppose you are off to see Severus now?"

"Yes, and he will be even tougher than you."

"I expect he will. As assistant Head Mistress I have been reviewing his lesson plans since he started here, and have never had to ask him to change a single thing."

"Then you know he will find something with mine, and I had help from a master."

"I would guess you asked his uncle's opinion?"

"Yes, and he was very helpful. I only hope it was enough."

"You'll soon find out. Now off with you as I still have to review Remus' and Sirius' as well as Pomona Sprout's."

"What about the ones from the Snapes?"

"I did them already, and they're without flaws."

"I should have guessed," Harry replied pursing her lips. "I guess I had better go on down to the dungeon and face the music."

"You needn't make it sound like you're on your way to be tortured," Minerva McGonagall answered in amusement.

"Minerva...we're discussing Severus, remember?"

"I know." She pursed her lips, trying hard not to laugh. "Now get along. You'll have to face him one time or another."

"I expect so. Wish me luck."

"I think you will do splendidly. Severus may be a bit on the brusque side but he is a good teacher."

"I never said he wasn't. He's just partial to his house."

"I hope you will be fair?"

"I already told him that I will be as fair with the Slytherins as he is with the Gryffindors," Harry told her smugly, and they both laughed.

Professor McGonagall knew that Harry would be watching the reasons Severus would dock points from the other houses and that Harry was now in a position to counter him, should she feel he was up to his old tricks.

"Well if your lesson plan for Potions passes his muster, you certainly won't have to worry about my final approval," McGonagall assured her.

"Then I think I will go and see what he thinks of my work. Besides, he also prepared a schedule for me to study for my Potions Master exam. Once I determine my free time I can arrange with Professor Dumbledore to go to Saint Mungo's to practice my healing skills to become a licensed healer. I know Poppy will be thrilled."

"She was very excited when you won that commendation. Natural healers are very rare. I don't think you will have to go to St. Mungo's for long."

"Dr. McBride told me that if there are enough critical cases I may only need to be there for one day, so long as there are three senior healers present."

"Then I hope you will not have to wait. We could use a healer on staff as well as a good teacher," she praised in her thick brogue.

"Thank you for your confidence," Harry said rising. "I will let you know how I do with Severus. Merlin willing I will be back here to submit my final plan by tonight if not sooner."

"I think Severus has more confidence in you than you believe. He would not be sponsoring you for your exam otherwise. Just remember one thing; men like to feel in control, especially men like Severus. Let him think he is guiding you, even when he isn't. It'll make him feel...oh...needed."

"Why Minerva McGonagall...I never would have thought you could be so conniving," Harry grinned.

"I've known many men through the years, Harry. I am single by choice, not by chance. Now get along and let me finish my work," McGonagall directed, but her eyes were sparkling with laughter as Harry left the office.

Harry passed Peeves the poltergeist on her way to the dungeon, and he stopped just long enough to stick out his tongue and make a snide comment before being chased off by the Bloody Baron. Once she reached the lower level, Harry noticed that the door to Severus' office was open. Cautiously poking her head round the corner, she was surprised to see Severus practicing dueling moves with his uncle Tiberius. Obviously, like his nephew, he was able to survive on very little sleep, since he could not have slept more than four hours. Professor Dumbledore and Arsinoe Darkmoon were watching their dueling exhibition. She appeared to be enthralled.

"We don't have dueling like this in my culture," she told Dumbledore, eyes bright with delight. "I would really like to learn this. It is a beautiful art."

"Thank you Miss Darkmoon," Tiberius replied as he gracefully dodged a blast from his nephew's wand, spinning around to utter a counter curse at Severus.

"Ha, Uncle, you're losing your touch. That was far too easy," Severus laughed evading the red light from Tiberius' wand."

Harry grinned since she knew neither man could see her from where she stood, in the corner of the doorway. 'I think that I will remind them to watch their backs,' she reflected grinning to herself. Pulling out her wand, Harry silently shifted her position, alerting Dumbledore to her presence. Diving into the room, she directed her wand at the two men, hollering out, "*Exarmo Caduceus!*"

Tiberius had seen her enter out of the corner of his eye, and dove down onto the floor, rolling away from the red stream flowing out of her wand. Knocking his nephew down at the same time, he directed a counter curse at Harry, "*Caduceus Verto ad Serpentis,*" transforming

Harry's wand into a snake! The serpent immediately curled itself around her arm, hissing angrily.

"Wonderful, wonderful," Arsinoe chimed with delight at the spectacle.

"Nice move, uncle," Snape sneered looking over at Harry, who was standing frozen as the angry serpent bared its fangs.

"Are you all right, Child?" Dumbledore asked, blue eyes twinkling. He knew she was uninjured and could deal with the snake.

Harry nodded, as she continued to make eye contact with the snake. She was completely by surprise, not anticipating this type of counter curse. 'Fool,' she thought, 'you should know by now the Snape's will use anything to win, even if it means playing dirty pool.' Harry grinned at the analogy, knowing how Severus liked to play billiards. 'I had better calm this animal down, since it is upset and I know this was deliberately done to make me speak in Parseltongue,' she reasoned looking over at Tiberius with a thin smile.

"So, little sister," Harry said aloud to the snake, "they all believe you and I have quite a bit in common. Time will tell if this is true, but for now, I think it is time to send you back. Go on and slide on down to the floor, and wait there," she directed. The snake immediately slid from her arm, stretching itself at her feet. "I would appreciate my wand back now, Mr. Snape," she remarked in English looking at Tiberius.

"*Finite Incantatem*," Tiberius Snape replied, pointing his wand at the snake. It immediately transformed into Harry's wand. "Lesson number one, Harry, don't leave your wand open to attack during a duel."

"I should have known that from all the practice I had with Severus, not to mention the time I dueled with Lord Voldemort," Harry agreed ruefully.

"You expected an attack from Voldemort, but you did not expect one like that from me. Always remember that a dark wizard will use any means imaginable to stop an opponent."

"I will keep that in mind, Tiberius," Harry nodded thoughtfully.

"Miss Potter, you are very powerful, and the sooner you learn to control the others within you, the sooner you will be able to stand against this dark wizard you call, Lord Voldemort," Arsinoe said, studying Harry with those disconcerting eyes.

"Miss Darkmoon, on what basis do you stake your claim that I am sister with both the Phoenix and the Serpent?"

"I know others have already told you this, but you have the soul of the Phoenix, and the cunning of the serpent. These are most unusual combinations, and your capacity to love is what keeps you strong. Should this have not been so you would have been one of the darkest witches in history, and a far worse adversary than the one you will have to face. You have made the right choices, unlike your foe, and it is now my job to keep you on the right path. Control the serpent and use its knowledge and you will become wise and loved by all, as is Professor Dumbledore," Arsinoe remarked smiling at the old man.

"Ah...Arsinoe, you flatter me. I am sure there are many people who dislike and even hate me," Dumbledore remarked, but his blue eyes were twinkling.

"Only the Deathaters and Voldemort," Harry quipped, "and I think most of them at least respect you."

"Well I must say," Dumbledore blushed, "it isn't every day that two lovely young women compliment me."

"That's because you are so lovable," Arsinoe beamed, winking at him.

Harry looked on with interest. Could Arsinoe be interested in Dumbledore? That would be interesting, but she didn't seem old enough for him to want to start a relationship with her. 'This situation will bear watching. I don't trust her, despite what Dumbledore says. When was the last time he even saw her? Unless he visited while I was a student here, and I very much doubt it given the politics of the time, he can't have seen her since she was a little girl. For all we know she may be one of the Deathater factions from America and is trying to help Voldemort. It would make sense. She keeps telling me my other self is a serpent. Could it be that Voldemort is going to try and lure me into the Dark Arts and recruit me?' Harry considered thoughtfully.

"Potter, wake up!" Severus voice interrupted her reverie. "You are a million miles away."

"What, oh Severus, I'm sorry. Did you say something?"

"I asked you to give me your lesson plan. I see it is in your other hand."

"Oh, I almost forgot. That is why I came down here to begin with," Harry said, handing Severus the papers. "I just couldn't help joining in your little dueling exhibition. Too bad my plan backfired," she grinned sheepishly.

"But you have learned a valuable lesson," Arsinoe remarked. "You need to maintain your guard at all times. One never knows when they may meet an unforeseen enemy."

"No, one doesn't. Often a foe will turn out to be someone you believed you could trust," Harry replied. She was unable to completely hide the suspicion in her voice and this was not lost on Arsinoe.

"You have no need to distrust me Miss Potter, yet you are wise to do so. I am a stranger to you, and for all you know a spy." Arsinoe's amber eyes glowed as she stared at Harry.

"Miss Darkmoon, I don't know about where you come from, but here it is not polite to use Legilimency on another person," Harry answered irately.

"Why would you think I would use Legilimency? Such a thing would be unconscionable among my people."

"Perhaps among your people, but what about you as an individual?"

"To enter another person's mind without their permission is not something I would ever consider doing. Only a person with no scruples would do anything of the sort."

"Child why would you believe Arsinoe would use Legilimency on you?"

"Never mind, you wouldn't understand," Harry answered, unable to meet the Headmaster's gaze. She heard the disappointment in his voice and knew she had offended him.

"Why don't you and I go for a little walk?" Dumbledore suggested calmly. Harry knew it wasn't really a question.

"Sure, I could use some fresh air."

"I will review your lesson plan for the Potions classes and return it to you later," Severus remarked, glancing over the papers in his hand. Harry merely nodded in agreement.

"Miss Darkmoon, I would be most honored if you would let me show you some of our dueling techniques," Tiberius said to the beautiful witch.

"I would enjoy that immensely until it is time to meet with Professor Lupin for lunch. I am looking forward to the picnic with your young niece. Albus tells me she is a little whirlwind."

"Yes...yes she is." Tiberius arched his brow in amusement.

"Come Child." Albus took Harry by the arm. "I think we would both enjoy the view from the tower while we talk. It is lovely this time of year," he remarked, steering her out of Severus' office.

Harry could sense he was considering what to say to her. Inside she was beginning to feel miserable again. She hated being a disappointment to him. Harry wished that Ron and Hermione were there to confide in. However, they weren't due to arrive until that evening, for the meeting of the Order. Reaching the tower, the Headmaster led her up onto the roof.

"Lemon drop?" he asked, settling her onto the stone base where a gargoyle once stood.

"Thanks." Harry took the proffered candy, popping it into her mouth to quell the dryness that was creeping into her throat. Dumbledore stood above her, blue eyes sad. 'Oh Merlin,' she thought, 'I've really screwed up this time. Why didn't I just keep my bloody mouth shut? Darkmoon may have just been thinking like I was when it came to spying.'

"Why does Arsinoe upset you so much Child?"

"Why did you ask her here?" Harry countered.

"To teach," Dumbledore responded simply.

"Is that the only reason, or is it because of me?"

"Harry, Arsinoe's people have knowledge of the ancient magic that you witnessed in your vision last night."

"That was no vision," Harry recalled, feeling her stomach tighten.

"No...No it wasn't. That is why it is so important that you trust Arsinoe."

"She's a stranger!" Harry blurted out. "I don't know her."

"Harry...Child...things are happening here that are so dark you will need her knowledge in order to survive. I am only trying to help you."

"Headmaster...You're asking me to accept her blindly on pure faith. I don't think I can." Harry could not meet his intense gaze.

"Harry," Dumbledore started slowly, 'have you scanned Arsinoe's emotions?"

"I've tried, but she is a very complex individual. I think she is hiding something."

"I see. If I ask her to drop her guard to enable you to feel her emotions plainly would you then give her a chance and allow her to work with you?"

"If I find she is not keeping secrets from me I will try."

"Then I will speak with her. In the meantime I give you my word you can trust her."

"How do you know?"

"I have known her family a long time and Arsinoe since she was born."

"My parents grew up with Pettigrew and he betrayed them."

"Child, please trust my judgment regarding Arsinoe. I am sure you will find she is being truthful with you. She will not betray us. Her standing within her tribe would be in question as well as her position within the League of the Feathered Serpent. She holds the same position as I have passed onto you, and I know she would sacrifice herself before she betrayed her people."

"Then I will try and be patient and civil with her, but it is not easy."

"I hope you will become her friend. She is a long way from home, and I promised her grandfather we would make her feel welcome."

"Then she will need to understand that I can't just let her walk into my life and invade my privacy. I have seen and been through too much to welcome her with open arms, but I will make an attempt to be friendlier."

"I know you will, Child, and I already know she understands your reluctance about her assisting us," Dumbledore assured her. "Now I see that your Godfather is coming up the path with Phaedra and Circe. Why don't you go down and greet them. I am sure Severus and the others will be along shortly."

Harry followed Dumbledore's gaze and immediately stiffened. Sirius was walking with his arm around Circe. Phaedra was picking wild flowers as they came up the path. Harry did not want to go down and face them, and she sensed that Dumbledore was aware of her feelings. He did not say anything, but pulled her to her feet, hugging her gently, passing on his warmth and understanding. She stood that way for a few minutes until she saw Severus come out of the castle.

"I guess I had better go on down. I know Phaedra will be waiting for me."

"I will speak with Arsinoe before she comes out with Remus. I will also have Dobby bring the picnic basket. I know you will enjoy the meal he helped prepare for you."

"If I know Dobby he probably prepared enough for an army," Harry laughed.

"Then get along, Child. I will see you later," he said, giving her a little push towards the tower door. "Have a good time."

"I will," Harry promised disappearing down the stairs.

It had been an eventful morning and while Harry was not in the best of moods, she was looking forward to having the picnic. Phaedra always lifted her spirits, and she enjoyed the little girls' antics. Reaching the bottom of the main staircase, she met Severus just outside the massive castle doors.

"Harry, I have finished looking over your lesson plan. I have made a number of suggestions, but it wasn't too bad."

"I'll make sure I mention it to your uncle since he helped me with it," Harry sneered with a wicked smile.

"I am aware of that, and I told him I felt you should have done it on your own. How will you lean if someone does it for you?"

"Did he tell you that he merely made a few suggestions of his own? I did the actual work!"

"Then why don't you have a look at it and we can see what you need to do to improve," he said handing it back to her as they made their way down the stone stairs from the castle.

"Miss Harry, Uncle Severus," Phaedra called, waving, as she ran up the path. "Look, I picked these for you. Mr. Sirius said you would like them," she beamed handing Harry a bunch of wild flowers.

"Thank you Phaedra," Harry replied giving her a hug, "Mr. Sirius was right, I love them."

"You have to put them into water so they won't die."

"I know. I will have Dobby put them into a vase up in my room when he brings our picnic basket."

"What do you think he made us for lunch?"

"I have no idea. Did you ask for anything special?"

"No, but I hope he made some fried chicken. I love fried chicken. So does Uncle Severus," she laughed smiling up at her uncle.

"I'm sure that whatever Dobby put into the basket will be fine," Severus remarked, looking affectionately down at his niece, as his sister and Sirius came over to greet them.

"Did you like your flowers Harry?" Circe smiled.

"Of course, I have always like wild flowers. I think this is only the second time anyone has ever given me flowers. The corsage Remus made for graduation was the first."

"Hmm...I think we will have to rectify that," Sirius teased fondly, tweaking her cheek.

"Did you enjoy your day in Hogsmeade, Phaedra?" Harry asked.

"Yes, I got to meet my new teacher and see my new school."

"What is your teacher's name?" Severus inquired with interest.

"Her name is Mrs. Nightsdale, and she is old."

"Was she nice?" Harry questioned.

"Kind of, but I don't think she liked me too much."

"Why?"

"She made me sit and do some arithmetic and read a book to Mr. Sirius while she talked with Mummy."

"I happen to know Cornelia Nightsdale quite well Phaedra. She is an excellent teacher," Severus told her. "The work she had you do was to see what you already know."

"Humph...she could have just asked. I knew all of the problems and the story I read last year. I think she is going to be mean."

"What makes you think that?" Harry prodded.

"She's old and seemed grumpy."

"Just because she's old doesn't mean she's grumpy. Professor Dumbledore is old, so does that make him mean and grumpy?" Sirius grinned.

"She didn't beam like Headmaster Mr. Dumbledore does. Besides, he doesn't act old. She did."

"Nonsense Phaedra, Cornelia has been teaching for over seventy years, and while I believe she is strict she is also a very caring woman," Severus explained to his niece.

"Miss Harry, you said Uncle Sev was strict. Was he mean too?"

"Yes, Honey, was Severus mean when he was your Potions instructor here at Hogwarts?" Sirius grinned, trying to keep from laughing.

"Hmm...Let me think," she smiled looking up at Severus through her lashes. Harry was trying hard not to laugh, but she also did not want to tell Phaedra how Severus would always dock

points from her make her mad. She was saved from answering however, by Dobby popping in with a large basket.

"Miss Phaedra. and Harry Potter! Dobby is happy to bring you your picnic lunch," he chattered bouncing up and down. "Dobby hopes you like what he and Miss Circe's house elf, Hazel, prepared for you."

"I am sure we will, Dobby," Severus assured him.

"Professor Snape, Dobby thought that there would only be five counting Professor Lupin and the new Professor at the picnic. Dobby and Hazel did not count Professor Black and Professor Snape's sister," he wailed nervously.

"Dobby, you counted correctly. Black and my sister will be having lunch with Professors Dumbledore, McGonagall, and Sprout as well as my uncle.

"Then Dobby will go and tell Professors Lupin and Darkmoon that you are waiting for them."

"Dobby will you put these flowers in a vase for me after you find Remus and Miss Darkmoon?" Harry inquired handing him the bouquet.

"Dobby will be happy to do so. Dobby must keep Harry Potter happy," he replied happily, then disappeared with a pop.

"I think we should be getting inside. I need to freshen up before we eat," Circe informed them, "it's a warm day and I am dusty from the walk back."

"Me too, I will meet you later Harry and maybe we can go for a ride on my bike?" Sirius queried, brown eyes warm.

"I would like that. I haven't had a motorcycle ride in quite a while. I wish you would teach me how to fly it."

"We'll see, love," he winked mischievously. "In the meantime enjoy your picnic and keep a close leash on Moony won't you."

"It's nice to see I am not the only one who sees how he has been looking at Miss Darkmoon."

"Lupin is a single man, and is well aware of Miss Darkmoon's beauty. It is only natural that he is attracted to her," Snape sneered.

"Well I don't think anyone can be prettier than Miss Harry!" Phaedra tossed her head, blond curls flying.

"They're both pretty," Sirius winked.

"Maybe I should put a leash on you too?" Harry eyed her godfather, pouting.

"What about Severus," he retorted, "he finds her attractive too."

"Actually, I think Sev has set his sights on me. Miss Darkmoon is not really his type. He likes a woman who can be challenged to grow and succeed in all things; someone with a sense of adventure. Arsinoe is more laid back and intellectual."

Sirius growled deep in his throat, Severus thin smile taunting him. Harry's heart skipped a beat. Sirius still cared about her, but was it only parental concern or something more? She could not be entirely sure despite her empathic ability.

"I see you two are up to your old rivalry," Lupin's cheerful voice came from the door of the castle, diffusing the situation.

"Mr. Remus," Phaedra cried happily, running over to him, "are you ready for our picnic?"

"Yes, and so is Miss Darkmoon," he answered turning to the witch, who had just come out of the castle doors behind him. "Phaedra I would like you to meet Miss Arsinoe Darkmoon. She is going to be a teacher here at Hogwarts this year."

"Hello Miss Darkmoon. I am Miss Phaedra Snape," she said giving Arsinoe a little curtsy, "and this is my Mummy." Phaedra indicated Circe.

"Hello Miss Phaedra Snape. I am happy to meet you and your mother. You are very grown up for someone who is almost seven years old," Arsinoe smiled, her golden eyes amused.

"Thank you," the child replied studying her. "You are almost as pretty as Miss Harry. Did you ever fight a Basilisk?"

"Phaedra! You should never ask personal questions when you meet someone for the first time," Circe scolded gently.

"Well, I just wanted to know," she pouted.

"That is all right, Little One, I shall be happy to answer your question. I have never killed a Basilisk, but I have helped to control Peruvian Vipertooth Dragons."

"Really?" Phaedra's eyes widened. "Did they eat anyone?"

"Almost," Arsinoe nodded, "but the men in my tribe were alert to the danger and the boy was rescued."

"Did you hear that Miss Harry? Miss Arsinoe helped to save a boy from a dragon."

"I heard, but I wonder how she would do if she had to secure an egg from a Hungarian Horntail," Harry glared at the other witch. The more she was around her the less Harry liked Arsinoe Darkmoon.

"Well, I think you should all be getting on with your picnic," Circe remarked, felling the electricity in the air. "Phaedra you be a good girl for Uncle Sev and Miss Harry, and don't get lost when they take you through the castle."

"I promise to be good, Mummy."

"And don't fill up on all those chocolate frogs you bought in Honeydukes," Sirius laughed, his bark causing Arsinoe to study him with interest. Harry wondered if the witch knew he was an animagus.

"You bought chocolate frogs and didn't tell me?" Harry teased closing in on the little girl with a grin.

"Mummy said we can eat them after lunch," she giggled playfully, dodging Harry.

"Not if I get my hands on them first."

"You will have to catch me then," Phaedra called over her shoulder, running in the direction of the lake, Harry in hot pursuit.

The others all laughed at her antics and Sirius and Circe bid them farewell retreating into the castle, while the Severus, Remus, and Arsinoe followed the two girls. Harry had cornered Phaedra under a large Chestnut tree. She was levitating the child about three feet into the air while Phaedra waved the bag of chocolate frogs, laughing uproariously. She did not count on Severus and Remus joining the foray. As they came up behind her, Remus pulled his wand and nodded to Severus, who arched his brow in amusement. Harry was more than a little startled when all of a sudden a pair of familiar voices yelled, "*Wingardium Leviosa*", at the same time.

"Hey...put me down," she yelled surprised, continuing to keep her wand on Phaedra so she wouldn't fall.

"What's the matter, Potter, not used to being the brunt of a joke?"

"Severus, put me down immediately! This is not funny!"

"What about Lupin? He is levitating you too."

"Remus, would you please stop? I am getting dizzy up here."

"Princess, you never seem to have a problem in your animagus form."

"That's not fair. I was just playing with Phaedra. She was having a good time. I'm not."

"Will you share the chocolate frogs with us? You know how I love chocolate," Remus grinned.

"Phaedra should we share the frogs with Mr. Remus and your uncle?"

"Do we have to?"

"Only if you say so," Harry answered contritely, gently lowering Phaedra to the ground.

"Then you can stay up there for chasing me," she grinned evilly. "I will share them with Miss Darkmoon instead."

It was the worst thing Phaedra could have said. A stab of hurt went through Harry, and her face fell. Remus saw it at the same time as Severus, and they both lowered Harry back to the ground.

"Harry...she didn't realize..." Severus began, but Harry was already stalking back towards the castle, Phaedra looking on in confusion.

"Miss Harry...wait. Why is Miss Harry leaving?" she asked as Severus hurried after her.

"Oh, Little One. You should not have said that. Miss Harry does not like me very much, and I fear you have hurt her feelings," Arsinoe explained.

"Mr. Remus, Miss Harry is mad at me," she said biting her lower lip. "I was just playing with her."

"Miss Harry isn't mad at you Phaedra. She is just very unhappy and worried right now. She loves you very much," he replied watching the scene unfold before him. Severus had caught up with Harry before she had reached the castle and Remus wished he could hear what they were saying to one another...

"Potter, you are acting like a child," Severus scowled, grasping Harry by the arm.

"I might just as well. I am constantly being treated like one. No one ever asks my opinion about anything, or how I really feel. I did not want her here, and now I am being brushed aside again. All I'm good for is to do away with the Dark Lord. Never mind what I want. Well, this time I will most likely get myself killed so what does it matter?"

"Stop talking like an ass. You are a brave and powerful witch. She came a long way to help you to stop a great evil and you are treating her like shit! I expected better from you, Potter. I thought you wanted to learn and excel in whatever you did. Apparently, I was wrong about you. You're as arrogant and stubborn as your father was!"

"Don't you bring my Dad into this. He was a good man, and as for arrogance, you are just as bad. All I ever asked for was for someone to really listen and a family of my own. Three months ago I thought I had found it...now..." Harry's voice cracked, and she was sobbing so hard her body was shaking.

"Oh, Potter...what ever am I going to do with you?" Severus sighed, putting his arms around her. "You do have a family and we all love you. I know you're upset about Darkmoon, but I think you are more upset with Black and my sister. I am too, but not for the same reasons." Severus could not believe he was telling her this, only that he wanted her to know. "I do not want your godfather for my brother-in-law, but I also don't want you to come to me on the rebound. I would rather see you happy with him, than married to me, thinking about what might have been."

"Why did Arsinoe have to come here and what is causing Sirius sudden interest in Circe? Sev, I do care about you, but I have always loved Sirius. I thought he felt the same way...how could I be so stupid?"

"Harry, listen, if he does love you the way you are hoping, he will find his way back to you. I know how much you are hurting...I am your soul mate after all. As for Miss Darkmoon, if

Albus sent for her, you can be certain it is because she will be able to help you. I know you're having a bad time right now, but you must focus. I buried too many people in the war, and now it is starting all over. I will not see you taken from me too. The Dark Lord has defied death, and only you have the skill to make things right again. Where is that stubborn Gryffindor pride I am so used to seeing?"

Harry sniffed, and looked up into his dark eyes. She loved how he always seemed to know what she was really feeling.

"Can I hex your sister?"

"Only if I can hex your godfather," he replied with thin smile.

"Sev...I can sense how much you would really love to do so!" she smiled wanly. She also sensed something had changed between them. He had confided in her and she knew this was not something he would do easily. "I'm sorry if I upset Phaedra. It was wrong of me to act like that. I'm just so worried."

"I'm not. I know you will stop the Dark Lord. The last time was just for practice," he grinned wickedly.

"I don't want anyone else to die, but I don't know how to fight this."

"Darkmoon told you how to stop him. Just try and concentrate on that."

"She says I have a serpent inside of me."

"You always knew you were supposed to be a Slytherin."

"Who ever heard of a snake with the heart of a lion and the soul of a phoenix," Harry frowned.

"Who ever thought you would go from a Phoenix to a feathered serpent?"

"I haven't yet."

"You will. Now come on. Let's go back to our picnic. I am sure Phaedra is more than a little upset by your tantrum, Potter," he remarked closing himself off, releasing her. Harry suddenly understood that it was nothing more than a defense mechanism. He had been hurt badly, and the pain still ran deeper than even she had believed possible.

"How did I do on my lesson plan? I haven't had the nerve to look at it yet."

"You can study it while we eat. I think you will find it interesting."

Arriving back by the tree, Harry discovered that Remus had spread a large blanket on the ground, and was sitting with Phaedra and Arsinoe. The little girl jumped up at Harry's arrival and hugged her, relieved that she had come back.

"Miss Harry, I didn't mean to make you feel bad. Mr. Remus says you're worried. Is it because of the bad wizard? Did you have a bad dream like I did last night?"

"What?! Phaedra, you dreamed about the Dark Lord last night?" Severus asked taken back.

"Yes, Uncle Sev. Mummy said it was just a nightmare and gave me some hot chocolate and I went back to sleep."

"Does Circe know what happened last night?" Remus asked as Harry hugged the little girl protectively.

"Not unless Albus said something to her. I did not even tell my Uncle. I believe Albus was waiting until the meeting tonight."

"Miss Harry, what are Uncle Sev and Mr. Remus talking about?"

"Miss Harry had a bad dream too, Phaedra. What did you dream about?"

"I dreamed that the bad wizard was laughing with another man who had on a mask. The man in the mask wants to kill uncle Sev. He said something about a duel."

"Phaedra," Harry began carefully so as not to frighten her, "can you remember anything at all about the man in the mask?"

"He had long blond hair, and the bad wizard called him Lucius."

"Did you dream anything else?" she questioned.

"No, that's when I woke up. I was scared but Mummy said it was just a dream and then gave me the hot chocolate."

"Your mommy did the right thing," Arsinoe smiled. "A bad dream can be very scary."

Phaedra was looking at the adults suspiciously, and turned to Harry.

"Miss Harry, it was just a dream...wasn't it?"

"It was a dream," Harry lied. She knew that somehow Phaedra had seen Voldemort and Lucius Malfoy plotting. Her worst fears had been confirmed. Voldemort had revived Lucius Malfoy.

"Phaedra was anyone else in your dream?" her uncle asked calmly.

"Yes, but he didn't say anything. It was a tall man with black hair. He had on a mask too."

"I see," Severus nodded thoughtfully.

"I think we should stop all this talk about the Dark Lord and have our picnic." Remus smiled, but it did not reach his eyes, which reflected his concern over the child's statements. "I don't know about the rest of you but I'm hungry."

"I am too," Arsinoe agreed following his lead. "I am also looking forward to my tour of the castle."

"Me too!" Phaedra beamed. "Miss Harry I want to see the Quidditch Pitch too. Will you fly with me and teach me how to play?"

"Once you are able to fly better, I will show you how to play and so will your uncle."

"Miss Arsinoe do you play Quidditch too?"

"I play both Quidditch and Quadpot which is another game almost like Quidditch."

"My teacher told us about Quadpot last year," she replied shaking her head with understanding. "Miss Harry do you know how to play that one too?"

"No, Phaedra, but I am sure it wouldn't take me long to learn."

"Harry turned down a position as relief seeker on one of our professional Quidditch teams," Remus remarked opening the picnic basket and pulling out the plates and napkins.

"I wanted to teach," Harry explained to Arsinoe, trying to be friendly.

"Ah...you are wise to want to show others how to use their magic in the right way. What are you teaching?"

"Harry is teaching the younger students Potions and Transfiguration," Severus spoke up proudly. "She will also be doing independent study with both me and my uncle for her Potions Master exam."

"Do you like potions?" Arsinoe inquired as Remus finished unpacking the utensils.

"It can be very interesting, but I am not a natural at it," Harry responded before turning to speak with Remus. "What did the elves pack us for lunch Moony?"

"We have some Butterbeer, and Apple cider to drink, some finger sandwiches of egg or tuna salad, and some fried chicken. There also seems to be some potato salad and cole slaw."

"What is there for dessert?" Phaedra asked with a big grin.

"Hmm...How about some home made cherry pie?" he answered pulling it out from the basket.

"Yummy," Phaedra answered, eyes wide with delight.

"I think someone has a sweet tooth," Arsinoe laughed.

"She sure does," Harry nodded smiling.

They all settled down to eat, and talked about the upcoming school year. Arsinoe was looking forward to teaching the Ancient Egyptian and Native American mysticism to the advanced students in the fifth through seventh year. She also wanted to work with Harry, and show her some of the spells she thought would be of interest to her. Harry understood that she was actually referring to the magic she needed to learn in an effort to stop Voldemort.

It was decided that Harry would work with Severus on the days she had Potions classes and Arsinoe in the evenings. Harry adamantly refused to work with either of them on the weekends since she wanted some time to rest and grade the student's papers when necessary. Harry was beginning to relax with Arsinoe, but she was still uncertain of her, and periodically scanned her emotions. She could tell the older witch was hiding something, but she did not sense anything dishonest. She decided she would continue to monitor the witch until she was satisfied Arsinoe could be trusted and planned to discuss her feelings with the Headmaster.

Following their meal, they were all stretched out on the blanket, and the adults would have liked to just sit and relax, but Phaedra had other plans.

"Let's go and see the Quidditch Pitch, Miss Harry. Can I see you fly today?"

"I will take you down to the Pitch, but I am not flying today. I want to take you through the castle," Harry told her as they all rose and started walking in the direction of the field.

"How many ghosts are in the castle, Harry?" Arsinoe asked.

"I never really counted them, but each house had its own ghost and then there is Professor Binns, he is the ghost that teaches History of Magic, and Moaning Myrtle. She is a student who was killed over fifty years ago by the basilisk. Then there is Peeves the Poltergeist. I believe some of the castle's rooms are haunted as well."

"You need to be careful since all kinds of things happen since the castle is enchanted," Remus joined in.

"I would suggest you try and steer clear of Peeves too," Severus warned her. "He can be quite bothersome."

"Yeah, he loves to make trouble for Severus," Harry laughed, her mood lightening.

"I will remember that the next time he hits you with a water balloon," Severus remarked glaring at her.

"He never seems to bother me, Sev. I think he just likes to torment you because he knows he can get you angry," Remus grinned good-naturedly.

"Humph...He's just an arrogant and nasty little sneak. The only ones who can control him are the Headmaster and the Baron," Snape replied as they entered the Quidditch stadium.

"So, what do you think of our Quidditch pitch?" Harry inquired studying Arsinoe for her reaction.

"It is far larger than I expected. It is almost the size of a regulation stadium. I'm impressed. Professor Lupin said you were the seeker. What was your record like?"

"I didn't keep track."

"That's not true," Remus smiled, "Harry is just modest. She only lost two games in her entire career, and one of those was in the students versus teachers tournament put on during the war."

"And the other one?"

"She passed out and fell off her broom when the Dementors came onto the pitch in her third year. She is highly susceptible to their influence," Severus remarked trying to sound casual, but Harry didn't miss the warning intended for Arsinoe.

"Cedric tried to get the game thrown out. He didn't feel that Hufflepuff won fairly. He was a really nice guy," Harry said sadly, a far away look in her eyes.

"A noble sentiment. Did he graduate with you?" Arsinoe asked as they began walking back towards the castle.

"Cedric is dead, Miss Darkmoon, and all because of me," she answered bitterly.

"I'm sorry. I don't understand."

"Mr. Diggory was murdered by Voldemort following the last Triwizard Tournament. He and Harry had decided to claim the championship for the school together. They had no way of knowing the winner's cup was a portkey intended to deliver Harry directly into the Dark Lord's hands."

"First thing the bastard did was to have Wormtail kill Cedric, then he stunned me and tied me to his father's grave. Wormtail did the blood and bone spell and Voldemort had a new body." Harry was unable to keep the bitterness from her voice. "Won't this ever end?" she sighed under her breath.

"Miss Harry, I think you said a bad word. Mummy would wash your mouth out with soap."

"Yech, I'm glad she's not here," Harry chuckled. Phaedra had a way of lightening her mood.. "How about I race you back to the castle? You can have a head start."

"Uncle will you start us?"

"Very well, on the count of three," Severus directed, "one...two..." Phaedra started running, "three."

"Severus you told her mentally to cheat and go on two. That is not a good thing," Harry reprimanded as the little girl ran towards the castle.

"Just like a Slytherin," Remus remarked.

"Well then, it's time Phaedra learned how to loose gracefully and not to cheat." Harry looked over at Severus evilly. "Two can play at this game." Harry transformed in the blink of an eye, and the beautiful Phoenix flew after the little girl.

"Ooohhh...Albus told me, but I never expected to see her transform so soon. She's beautiful." Arsinoe's golden eyes glowed with pleasure. "If only she will trust me, she could be one of the few witches in the world to become Animagimultiplico. She fears the serpent within her, and as you would call our feathered and winged serpents, a dragon. She may have others within her too, but the phoenix and the serpent are the dominant ones. She must allow the serpent to emerge and learn to merge the two of them into the feathered serpent. She will need to use

both the soul of the phoenix and the cunning of the serpent along with her lion's heart if she is to prevail and stop the darkness, which has begun.

"Arsinoe, if I may be so bold as to call you by your first name," Remus looked at her with a boyish grin, "how do you know that she has these other animagus forms?"

"I am able to walk with the spirits," she answered unsure of how to explain.

"You go into a trance?" Severus looked on with interest.

"Yes and no. I am able to do what I believe Harry did last night. My spirit can leave my body and communicate with my ancestors."

"You can do this at any time?" Remus asked amazed.

"No, it is not that simple. You need the right conditions. I often need to use incense and a circle of fire to create what we call a vision quest. There are also various plants such as Velada mushrooms and San Pedro Cactus to make the Peyote, a powerful potion to enhance my visions.

"I know of the potion to which you refer. I understand the shamans are frequently healers too," Severus considered thoughtfully, "are you one as well?"

"Among my people I am a healer. I understand Harry is one as well?"

"Yes. She has a natural talent. She has healed both of us," Snape replied.

"Did Harry really leave her body?" Remus questioned in disbelief. "Or was it just her connection with Voldemort that caused her to see what was happening?"

"I believe she had what is commonly called an out of body experience. Her spirit guide led her to the Dark One who is her enemy. Remember, the Dark One was not yet resurrected, when she began her quest. His spirit was still among those that dwell in the house of shadows," Arsinoe explained. "She is a complex young woman with much to learn."

"I understand that among your people everyone has a spirit guide. How do you know what it is?"

"We go into a meditative state; much like Professor McGonagall told me is used in your culture to determine if one can become an animagus. We discussed the principles yesterday over lunch. A person can have more than one spirit guide and will often assume that animal shape as an animagus."

"But not everyone is an animagus," Snape reflected aloud.

"And what about persons with the rare ability of having more than one animagus form or the ability to produce a Patronus?" Remus chimed in with fascination.

"They are powerful individuals and need the guidance of more than one spirit. A Patronus is also another form of spirit guide," Arsinoe stated as they approached the two girls who were waiting at the castle steps. "I think we should continue this topic later on. I would really like

to get to know Harry better over the next few days," Arsinoe whispered, and the two men understood that she did not want to upset Harry now that she had started to make an attempt to accept Arsinoe's presence.

"Uncle Severus, Miss Harry cheated. She can fly," Phaedra pouted, running up to them.

"I believe you did too. You didn't wait until the count of three. Harry told you she would give you a head start," Snape looked down his nose in amusement.

"But I wanted to win," she protested.

"Ah...the Slytherin influence is beginning to raise its sneaky head," Harry sneered, as they entered the castle and began to climb the stairs to the upper portions of the old building.

"As is yours," Severus countered.

"You're wrong. I merely showed her that if you cheat it doesn't necessarily guarantee you will come out on top. Somewhere along the line, there will be a price to pay and justice will prevail. In the end you will get your just desserts."

"Miss Harry," Phaedra looked confused, "cheating means you are getting dessert?"

"No, Phaedra, it is just an expression. It means you will be caught and punished for not playing fairly," Remus winked, ruffling Phaedra's blond curls.

Suddenly they were all jolted as the stairs started to move. Phaedra almost fell and Harry and Severus had to catch her. Remus grabbed Arsinoe around the waist, and they both blushed as he helped to steady her.

"I take it Albus didn't mention that stair cases can move?" Remus smiled, releasing her.

"No...No he didn't."

"Wheeeee....This is fun!" Do they do anything else?"

"There are several trick steps that you can sink into and get stuck," Harry laughed. "We will point them out as we go along and some of the enchanted rooms can be a bit unpleasant, so you need to be careful."

"I like the paintings on the walls," Phaedra giggled, "they make funny faces and talk to you."

"Are all of the portraits imprinted with the personalities of the person they represent?" Arsinoe inquired.

"Most of them," Harry answered. "The ones in the Headmaster's office are all former Headmaster's themselves. It is their job to help the current person in that position to make difficult decisions."

"Ah, here we are," Severus stated as they reached the uppermost floors. "I think we should start on the roof so Arsinoe can see the view, and then work our way down."

"I think I would like that," the elder witch agreed.

They all headed up into the tower and onto the roof with the missing gargoyle. Arsinoe caught her breath as she looked around. The view encompassed the entire area for miles.

"Miss Harry, what happened to the missing gargoyle?" Phaedra asked pausing at the empty pedestal.

"I once heard a story that a young wizard cast a spell and he flew away," she teased, green eyes dancing.

"Where did it go?"

"To the Forbidden Forest," her uncle responded, dark eyes glinting with amusement.

"Are you both teasing me?"

"Who us? Why would we do such a thing?" Severus asked straight-faced, but his eyes continued to belie his words.

"You are teasing me!" Phaedra stamped her foot getting red in the face. "Come on...what really happened to it?"

"Nobody knows," Harry shrugged, "maybe you should ask some of the portraits and let us know."

"Some of the ghosts might know too. You could ask them," Remus pointed out.

"I will. It will be my new game. I think it will be fun." Phaedra pursed her lips with a toss of her head.

"And what will you do with the gargoyle if you should find it?" Arsinoe questioned with interest.

"I will put it back where it belongs. Maybe it is enchanted too and will be able to tell me what happened," she told Arsinoe wide-eyed.

"In this castle anything is likely," her uncle agreed dryly.

"Maybe he flew away like Miss Harry can," Phaedra remarked playfully flapping her arms and pretending to fly around the roof.

"Mind the edge Phaedra," her uncle warned.

"I will Uncle...Arrrggghhh...." Phaedra screamed, tripping, and tumbled off the edge of the roof.

"Phaedra!" Severus yelled, running to the edge, followed by Remus, wands drawn in an attempt to levitate her before she hit the courtyard below.

Harry transformed in an instant and swooped past them, diving after the little girl. She caught up with her about halfway down and grasped her in her talons. Phaedra was crying and shaking with terror, as the Phoenix trilled a song to calm her while she flew back up to the roof. Once there, Severus gratefully accepted the bundle into his arms. Harry noted that his normally pale complexion had turned a ghastly shade of gray.

"She's okay, Sev," Remus stated quietly placing a hand on the other man's shoulder. "She's just scared."

"Phaedra, you are never to come up here again. Do you understand me?" Severus chided his niece, eyes moist with unshed tears.

'He really loves her,' Harry thought, moved by his show of emotion, as she resumed her human shape. "Sev, she'll be fine. Let's take her down stairs and show her how to raid the kitchen," Harry said aloud, trying to calm both the man and child.

"I think I should take her back to Circe," Severus countered sternly, covering up his feelings.

"No Uncle Sev, I want to see the castle some more. I promise to be good. Please?"

"Are you sure you're all right? Maybe we should take her to Madame Pomfrey just to make sure."

"No, I want Miss Harry," Phaedra demanded holding her arms out to the young witch.

"You Little Miss certainly know how to scare all of us," Harry smiled, running her hands along the child's form, which remained cradled in her uncle's arms.

Arsinoe watched intently as Harry used her healing powers to make certain that Phaedra was uninjured. At the same time, Harry could sense the older witch's admiration and growing respect. While still somewhat distrustful, she felt that Arsinoe posed no threat to her safety. She was also beginning to sense a special closeness to Professor Dumbledore. Maybe she and the old man really were attracted to one another. Harry immediately shrugged off the idea. However, she knew there was something between them, and felt a pang of jealousy. She too adored him, and did not want to share their special intimacy.

"Phaedra I pronounce you fit as a fiddle, and if you don't behave I will turn you into one!" Harry teased, and Phaedra giggled.

"Are you going to take formal medical training?" Arsinoe asked after Harry had finished scanning Phaedra.

"I don't plan on advanced medical training at this time, but will go to St. Mungo's to be licensed as a natural healer as soon as it is convenient. I may go for more formal studies in order to prescribe later on."

"I think you should consider it. Your talent is rare, and would be welcomed in any community."

"Right now, I have other things on my mind. I am about to start teaching, and have to do my independent study for the Potions Master exam, not to mention whatever else I need to learn

right now," Harry replied, locking eyes with her, indicating she would be willing work with her while being careful not to let Phaedra know about Voldemort.

"I understand," Arsinoe nodded.

"Well Sev, shall we continue? I think Phaedra will be very unhappy if we stop now," Remus winked at the little girl.

"Please Uncle Sev? Miss Harry said I'm fine. I want to see more. I promise to hold your hand," she begged, batting her eyes at Severus.

"All right," he conceded, "but you are to stay with me at all times. Do you understand?"

"Yes, uncle," she beamed hugging him before he set her down. Taking his hand, she also reached out for Harry, who smiled and took the other hand as they all departed the roof.

Harry also noted that Remus was looking like an awe struck schoolboy at Arsinoe, and wondered what he saw in her. 'Just because she's beautiful is no reason to go ogling at her. I spent five years in the boy's dorm, and for the life of me, I will never understand the way the male mind thinks. Hermione would say they think with their penises, and she's probably right," Harry thought rolling her eyes. "If I didn't distrust her, I might just consider it a good match. I swear if she hurts Remus I'll..."

"Miss Harry can we see the room of requirement?"

"Phaedra, how did you learn about the room of requirement?" Snape asked curiously looking down at his niece.

"I heard Mummy and Uncle Tiberius talking about it. Mummy said she had wanted to find a place to go over some important notes without being interrupted and used the room of requirement."

"Now that makes perfect sense," Harry agreed shaking her head affirmatively. "If the room pops up we will show it to you. It is charmed and only appears when you need it."

"Oh," Phaedra's voice echoed her disappointment.

"But we can show you the tapestry of Barnabus the Barmy which is opposite the room, then if the room appears we can go inside."

"Goody! I hope it appears."

Phaedra got her wish and got to see the room of requirement. Unfortunately, she was a bit disappointed since it was simply an empty room with a desk. The room appeared only because she had wanted it to. However, she perked up when they went into the Astronomy Tower. She was more than impressed with Professor Sinistra's telescope and wished she could look through it some night. Her uncle assured her he would speak with the Astronomy Professor to get permission.

They then worked their way around the other towers, and Arsinoe was very interested in the old Divination Tower. Remus explained that the class was now taught by Firenze, a centaur, so it was downstairs, and the tower was no longer in use.

"Do you think Dumbledore will allow me to use it for my classes? I would much prefer it since I deal with ancient magic and will often incorporate mediation techniques."

"I don't see why not," Remus smiled. "I am sure it would be most appropriate for your needs."

Moving through the castle they touched on the offices of their co-workers and introduced other staff members who had started to arrive to prepare for the start of the new school year. She also met Madam Pomfrey and took a keen interest in the infirmary. Phaedra merely wrinkled her nose and dragged them away as swiftly as possible. As they moved down the fourth floor corridor Harry noted that a door swung open, and looking inside she froze. The Mirror of Erised was standing in the corner, its glass shimmering in the reflected sunlight off the windows.

"Look at the pretty mirror!" Phaedra yelled excitedly, running into the room.

"I want to see how I look."

"Phaedra, wait," Harry and Severus called in unison, but it was too late. Phaedra was standing and looking at her reflection, a puzzled expression on her face.

"What do you see, Phaedra?" Severus asked quietly.

"You are standing next to me with Miss Harry and we're all dressed up in wedding clothes. Miss Harry is a pretty bride," she said looking back over her shoulder at her uncle. Her expression was mystified. "I don't understand. You aren't even standing with me, and we're not all dressed like that."

"This is the Mirror of Erised, Phaedra. It shows you your secret desires," Dumbledore's quiet voice came from behind them in the hall.

"Headmaster, we didn't realize the mirror was here..." Harry started apologetically.

"It is all right Harry. I had Hagrid move the mirror here this morning."

"Headmaster, Phaedra obviously desires that Harry and I marry," Severus remarked amused.

"It is always a possibility, Phaedra," Dumbledore beamed.

"I have never heard of this mirror, Albus," Arsinoe spoke up softly. "You said it shows your desires?"

"Yes, Arsinoe, it shows us what we are secretly wishing for. Would you like to look into it?"

"Yes, I would," the witch smiled and moved towards the mirror.

"Come, Phaedra, allow Miss Darkmoon to look into the mirror," Severus instructed and the child reluctantly moved away.

Arsinoe stood looking at herself for a few minutes, a small smile playing about the corners of her mouth.

"What is it you see?" Dumbledore queried.

"I see myself," she smiled dreamily.

"Is that all, Arsinoe?"

"No, but since it is my innermost desire I will continue to keep it to myself," she grinned, winking at the old man.

"Harry, do you want to look in the mirror?" Arsinoe questioned.

"I have no need to do so and in fact have promised Professor Dumbledore that I would not do so ever again."

"Harry, if you wish to use the mirror I will not object," Dumbledore remarked eyes twinkling.

"No thank you Headmaster. I think I will pass, but Remus or Severus may want to look."

"No," they chorused.

"Then I will leave you all to finish your tour. I will also remind you that tonight's meeting will take place at seven o'clock."

They nodded in understanding as Dumbledore locked the door, and moved off in the opposite direction. They then continued the tour. Harry was hoping that Hermione had arrived and would be in the library, but that was not the case. She would just have to wait until later to speak with her.

Phaedra and Arsinoe both had a good time. Phaedra loved it when Harry showed her how to get into the kitchen by tickling the pear in the picture of fruit. Arsinoe was impressed with the efficiency of the house elves, and thought that Dobby was adorable. She also commended him for his loyalty. The elf blushed and hid behind his ears. Finally, they toured the dungeons, and Arsinoe was very interested in the Potions classroom.

"Miss Darkmoon, if you wish I can make the work area available should you need to mix any potions you may require in your work," Severus offered.

"That would be ideal, Professor Snape. I can tell you are interested in some of the mixtures my people prepare for our ceremony and would be happy to share them with you."

"I would be most grateful. I am always interested in learning new techniques. Would you mind if my uncle also looked in?"

"Not at all. I understand you are both highly adept in your craft."

"It is a specialty in our family."

"Perhaps Harry and Remus would also like to learn something about our potions?" she invited.

"Unfortunately I am not adept at potions. Defense Against the Dark Arts is my specialty as is Care of Magical Creatures, being one myself," Remus smiled.

"Then if you wish I can get you some information on our protection wards and other spells you might be interested in. I also have some information on some of our American cousins to the Dugbog and Clabbert which you might wish to share with your magical creatures classes."

"I would like that very much. I would also be interested in your customs pertaining to werewolves."

"Of course," she smiled warmly, "I know that it must be difficult for you. Maybe our views and customs will help those of you here in Europe that are brothers to the wolf to be better accepted and less feared."

"I hope so, although I don't foresee any miracles," Remus sighed.

"Harry would you like to learn some new potions?" Arsinoe questioned turning her attention back to the younger witch.

"I would be more interested in some of your defense techniques," Harry remarked casually so as not to alert Phaedra. It is one of my specialties along with Transfiguration."

"Then I will be happy to share what I have," Arsinoe agreed, pleased by Harry's agreeing to work with her. "Now if you will all excuse me I would like to go and freshen up before dinner."

"I need to get Phaedra back to her mother, and want to speak with the Headmaster," Snape remarked, "so we may as well all go back upstairs together."

"I agree," Remus nodded. "Come on Harry, let's go and see what Padfoot has been up to this afternoon. Didn't he promise you a ride on his motorcycle?"

"As a matter of fact, he did, Harry grinned.

They all left the dungeons together. While she was not looking forward to the meeting of the Order, she was excited to be seeing Hermione and Ron. She wished she could fill them in ahead of time about Voldemort but knew Dumbledore would be angry with her if she did so. Making a mental note to speak with them after the meeting she determined to have them help her put a plan of action into place. It was only a matter of time until Voldemort once again made his presence known.

Part 14 - A Matter of Trust

"Hermione! Ron!" Harry called, coming into the main hall after dinner, on the way back to her room. Her two friends had just entered the castle through the massive front doors.

"Harry, it's so good to see you again," Hermione beamed, hugging her. "I came a little early so I could have some time to get myself settled in. I'm so glad we will be working together."

"She's just happy to be buried in the library, mate," Ron quipped, giving his fiancé a quick squeeze, before patting Harry on the back affectionately. "How does it feel to be back at Hogwarts?"

"A lot has happened since I got here," Harry stated, "but I had better wait for the meeting before going into it. I can fill in the details afterwards."

"Nw that sounds ominous." Ron studied Harry with interest. "What's up that's so important?"

"Nothing that can't wait," Hermione remarked, looking sternly at Ron. "I'm sure Dumbledore wouldn't want Harry to tell us anything now, even if we are both in the Order, and you're in Auror training."

"That's our Hermione, still going by the book," Ron sighed, but his grin belied his words.

"Have you guys eaten yet?" Harry inquired, smiling at her two friends.

"Yeah, we stopped at the Three Broomsticks when we got to Hogsmeade," Ron replied. "We figured we wouldn't be getting too much time alone once Hermione started working, and I had to patrol."

"Probably not," Harry agreed. "Come on, let me bring you guys upstairs and show Hermione where her rooms are."

"What about Ron? Where are the Aurors staying?" Hermione asked, following Harry up the stairs, while Ron levitated their trunks behind them.

"Tonks will be on the staff wing, but the men will all be sharing Trelawney's old tower."

"Oh great," Ron groaned. "Does that mean we'll have to write down our dreams like we did in fifth year?"

"You never know," Harry laughed, "just don't have too many erotic dreams about Hermione."

"Harry!" Hermione blushed, lowering her eyes demurely.

"But those are the best kinds," Ron teased, ginning at Harry. "Makes me want to get to the honeymoon all the more."

"Ronald Weasley," Hermione scolded, pretending to be shocked, "we haven't even had time to discuss our wedding, much less our honeymoon."

"I told you that what ever you want is fine with me," he smiled affectionately. "Mum and Dad are looking forward to the whole affair," Ron affirmed, as they reached the door to Hermione's rooms, located on the opposite end of the hall from Harry's.

"Here you are, Hermione. Your password is *Hogwarts, A History*," Harry opened the door, standing aside for them to enter. "You should have plenty of good dreams here."

"Harry, what's wrong mate? You sound positively done in. Have you been having nightmares again?"

"Don't worry about it," Harry said forcing a grin.

"Oh, Ron, can't you see? Harry must be dreaming about Voldemort. Something must have happened. That's why she doesn't want to discuss whatever is going on."

"You bloody well know Voldemort has been dead for over four months now, so stop making bad jokes!" Ron reprimanded Hermione, but he knew it was not in her nature to joke about such a thing.

"Stop it both of you!" Harry snapped. "Hermione's right, Ron. In a sense I have been dreaming."

"What kind of dreams?" Hermione questioned, genuinely concerned.

"I can't say before the meeting."

"Harry can't you tell us anything?" Ron demanded.

"I merely said I can't say anything. I never said I couldn't show you," she replied, pushing her hair away from the scar on her forehead.

"Bloody Hell!" Ron gasped. "Harry what's going on? Does Dumbledore know about this?"

"Of course he knows," Hermione hissed. "That must be why he called this meeting."

"Then what is he doing to find out what is happening?"

"Ron..." Harry began uncertainly, "the Headmaster has the situation well in hand."

"What situation? Why does Hogwarts have a team of Aurors assigned to it?"

"I believe it is part of the training program Moody has implemented," Harry responded, refusing to divulge any further information.

"Like hell! We've been put here for a reason, and I for one would like to know what it is. Haven't we all been through more than enough all ready?"

"You are quite right, Mr. Weasley," Dumbledore's voice came from the door. The group all turned to look at him, and he smiled reassuringly at Harry. "You have all seen and been through more than your share of pain and loss because of the war. Unfortunately, you will be asked to face even more in the weeks ahead."

"Professor Dumbledore," Hermione said slowly, "you told us at the last meeting that Voldemort's followers were trying to find a way to bring him back from the dead. They've succeeded, haven't they?"

"Yes, Hermione," he answered, blue eyes studying her intently, "they have. Voldemort has arisen from the grave."

Hermione gasped in dismay, and Ron snapped to attention. Both had gone pale, and just gaped at Harry and Dumbledore in shock. Ron found his voice first.

"Professor...Dumbledore...are you...sure? This isn't just some kind of test for the Order is it?" he asked in a rush.

"Ron," Hermione scolded, "Professor Dumbledore would never make up something like this. That's why Harry's scar looks so new. She is aware of his presence."

"Is that why the Aurors have been assigned here? The only time Aurors were here when we were in school was when they were watching the grounds."

"Partly, Ron," Dumbledore answered, "but you are also here since you are the Keeper of the Goblet. Hermione is here for her new job and to keep her safe at the same time."

"Blimey, Harry, could things get any worse? I thought you had killed the bugger. How much more can they ask from you?"

"Harry, what about the prophecy? I thought it had been fulfilled," Hermione questioned.

"Only the Mathias Prophecy or at least that is what Dumbledore believes."

"I think Sybil's prophecy, the one that was destroyed in the Department of Mysteries, was a second prophecy. Harry has yet to fully vanquish the Dark Lord," Dumbledore explained with quiet sincerity. "We all will need to be strong in the upcoming weeks. For the time being the general public must not know."

"Does my dad know yet?" Ron asked. His father was now the Minister of Magic and a member of the Order of the Phoenix.

"He and Alastor both are aware of the situation," Dumbledore affirmed, referring to Alastor Moody, head Auror. "Now I suggest you get ready for the meeting. Harry, why don't you walk with Ron up to the tower while Hermione settles in? Then come to my office. The meeting will be in a hidden chamber in the dungeons within the hour. You will be directed where to go when you get to the lower level." They all nodded in agreement and Dumbledore left to see to some Hogwarts business.

"Come on, mate. Lead the way. I hope I get a bed with a view," he laughed, but Harry could tell it was forced. "I'll pick you up on my way back downstairs love." Ron turned, giving Hermione a quick peck on the lips.

"I'll be waiting."

"Just make sure you two make it down there. I wouldn't want to have to explain your absence," Harry teased, wiggling her brows.

"Oh Harry... would we do anything that could be deemed improper?" Ron grinned, scarlet flush creeping up his cheeks.

"Well, I hate to put a damper on any ideas you may both have in that direction, but I think Professor McGonagall may have put some kind of a charm on Hermione's bed to make sure you both behave."

"She didn't! She wouldn't!" Ron exclaimed in dismay.

"If I know Professor McGonagall she would and did," Hermione laughed. "I'll see you two later." Hermione kissed Ron one more time, and then he retreated, levitating his trunk between himself and Harry.

They made their way through the halls in silence, each contemplating their own thoughts. Harry knew Ron was worried. She wanted to tell him things would be all right, but she wasn't even sure herself, and didn't want him to know how worried she really was. She wished she had someone to hold her and tell her it would be fine, and she was suddenly overcome by a feeling of melancholy. Harry wanted to know the pleasure of lying in the arms of someone she loved, knowing he loved her back. In that moment, she felt that she actually hated her two best friends in the world. They had one another to share this crisis. She had no one. Harry felt utterly alone.

"Knut for your thoughts mate," Ron's voice interrupted her reverie.

"Nothing, I was just thinking about what to get you and Hermione for a wedding present."

"Harry, did I ever tell you that you're a lousy liar?"

"Am I?" she replied noncommittally.

"Yeah, but if you would rather not talk about what's on your mind, then just say so."

"I would rather not talk about it." Harry felt ashamed about feeling jealous of Ron and Hermione's relationship. She loved them too much to be so resentful.

"Well then, whenever you're ready you know where to find me," he remarked seriously, setting his trunk down as they reached the tower.

"Ron, it's good to know you're here." Harry smiled, taking comfort in his presence.

"It's good to be here where I know I can help, Harry." Ron stared at her for a few seconds, and then opened his arms, taking her into a bear hug. He loved his best friend; not the same way he loved Hermione of course, but he instinctively knew she needed his reassurance and comfort. "It's all going to work out, mate. You're the strongest witch I have ever known. Even stronger than my Mum," Ron teased, eliciting a grin from Harry, as she released herself from his embrace. Mrs. Weasley was a very loving mother, but a strong disciplinarian. All the children, including Harry, knew when to keep out of her way.

"Well if your Mum had raised Tom Riddle, he would never have become Lord Voldemort. Molly would have put him into his place right off," Harry laughed. "Forget the Muggles; he would have gotten all his anger and aggression out blasting the garden gnomes."

"Yeah, I could just see him in his own business, Lord Voldemort's Garden Gnomes and Pest Control. Our Death eaters will make short work of your gnomes and household pests. One sweep with our wands and Avadra Kedavra! Your pests are gone forever." Harry and Ron burst out laughing.

"Oh Ron," Harry gasped clutching at the stitch in her side, "I could almost see it actually happening. Do you think he might be interested in changing his line of work?"

"I wish," he winked. "Feeling better now?"

"Yeah," she smiled, "you always did know how to make me look at the bright side of things. You really do follow the butterflies," Harry joked, remembering their second year. They had followed the spiders into the forest to find Aragog, learning about Hagrid's role in opening the Chamber of Secrets. Ron's phobia of spiders had prompted him to ask why it had to be spiders and not butterflies.

"There's something to be said for butterflies," he smirked contritely. "Now let me go and get unpacked. I will catch you at the meeting."

"I have to go and see the Headmaster now anyway. I don't like to keep him waiting." Harry turned, heading back in the direction of Dumbledore's office. Reaching it, she uttered the password, "sugar quills," and mounted the moving stairs.

"Come in, Harry," Dumbledore called, as she knocked on the door at the top of the stairs.

"You wanted to see me, Professor?"

"Yes, Child, take a seat and have some tea with me."

"Yes, Sir," she sighed.

"Would you like a lemon drop?"

"No thank you, Headmaster."

"Then how about some of these chocolate biscuits? I know how much you enjoy them."

"Thank you," Harry smiled, taking one from the plate he offered. "Now I'm sure you didn't ask me up here just to have tea and biscuits. What's up?" she questioned, green eyes bright with curiosity.

"I have something serious I wish to discuss with you. I have asked your protectors to be here too. They should arrive shortly."

"Now that sounds ominous. Obviously our Trust Keeper has something important to impart."

"I am merely fulfilling my role in the Protectorship, to maintain the safety of all four of you, by instilling trust in the judgment of others, when it comes to serious and complex matters of magic. That is why the trust keeper is always a wizard over a certain age."

"In other words, you've been down that road before." Harry grinned at him over the desk.

"So to speak," he replied, blue eyes sparkling with their familiar twinkle.

"Well you must be concerned about something to call us all up here prior to a meeting of the Order."

"I am," he responded, as a knock came from the door. "Enter," Dumbledore called. Sirius, Severus, and Remus all entered together. "Sit down, gentlemen. Would you like some tea and biscuits?"

"Yes, please," Sirius replied, taking a chair beside Harry.

"I would like a cup of tea," Remus added as he sat down on the sofa.

"What about you, Severus?" Dumbledore queried. The tall lanky wizard had taken up his usual position, leaning up against the hearth.

"No thank you, Headmaster. I am not hungry; however I am curious as to why you wished to speak with all of us prior to the meeting."

"I was wondering myself," Sirius added, while Remus nodded in agreement.

"I see I have piqued all of your curiosity." Dumbledore studied them all shrewdly. "Then I shall get right to the point. Severus, how has Harry been doing with her Occlumency?"

"Quite well. She has also demonstrated an aptitude for Legilimency. Once she has fully mastered the Occlumency I think she will be able to pick up the other without any problems."

"Harry, have you made any kind of schedule to work with Arsinoe?"

"We have agreed to meet in the evenings during the week, why?"

"You need to be ready should something happen. I fear our time will be short, and I am sure that Voldemort will make some kind of move shortly. We need to be prepared."

"Headmaster, did Severus tell you about Phaedra's dream?"

"I am aware of the child's nightmare. She has a highly telepathic mind, and I find it interesting that she was able to pick up on what is going on."

"Is it possible that the Dark Lord is using her to get information about us?" Severus asked. His back was straight and his face stony, but his mind was racing worriedly, 'If that bastard even tries to hurt my niece...'

Dumbledore interrupted his thoughts. Studying his friend silently, his blue eyes reflected his concern for the little girl as well. "I believe it is entirely possible, Severus. You will need to be very alert to the child's moods, especially where they concern Harry."

"Is that why you have asked us up here, Headmaster? Because of Phaedra?"

"In part, but mostly because of my concern for your welfare Harry, as well as the welfare of others."

"I don't understand," she replied, puzzled, looking from one to the other. "Is there something you aren't telling me?"

"I have already spoken with your protectors individually before making a very important decision. That is why I wanted to know about your progress with the Occlumency."

"Oh, and what else did you talk to them about?"

"I was more than interested with your progress over the summer. I know you wished to become an animagimultiplico and have been working hard on your transfiguration. This will help you in your work with Arsinoe. She tells me you have the ability."

"Yeah, if you like snakes and feathered dragons," Harry remarked sarcastically.

"Harry, you need not sound so angry. There is nothing wrong with snakes and dragons. You may also be able to accomplish other animals as well."

"I want to be something fluffy, not some scaly old snake," she smirked. Fawkes let out a squawk and flew over to her, landing on her shoulder.

"It seems Fawkes is in agreement with you." Sirius grinned, petting the large red bird.

"Maybe we'll go for some flying later, pretty bird," Harry crooned. "I haven't flown with you for awhile. It would be nice." Fawkes blinked and trilled, then drifted slowly back to his perch.

"Headmaster, I want Harry to know that you spoke to us first about what you have in mind because you didn't want to worry her," Remus said. He sat watching her intently from the sofa. "I also want her to know that Sirius and I disagreed with you."

"Disagreed with what?" Harry asked warily.

"Now Harry," Dumbledore began, looking at her kindly, "I don't want you to get upset."

"What is it that you are afraid will upset me?"

"I think it would be wise if you did not attend any meetings of the Order until we can determine if Voldemort is able to see or act through you. He may try to possess your mind like he did in the Department of Mysteries," Dumbledore answered, blue eyes boring into her.

"I see...and Severus agrees with this?"

"Yes, Harry he does."

"Yet, Sirius and Remus don't?"

"Harry we think you are quite capable of making this decision for yourself. Remus and I do not believe you would allow Voldemort to jeopardize the safety of any of us. We feel that you would resist such an attempt," Sirius explained, putting his arm around her shoulders.

Harry sat looking from one to the other of the four men, saying nothing. Inside her emotions were reeling. She did not know if she was more angry or hurt. She did know that she felt Dumbledore did not trust her again. What's more, she felt betrayed by Severus.

"What about Phaedra's dreams? Don't you think she will put you at risk?"

"Phaedra knows only that the Order exists. She doesn't know my role and only a few of the members, and those are already known by the Dark Lord," Severus remarked coolly. "I will be able to track any nightmares she may have for information as to his whereabouts."

"I see," Harry replied, her voice unnaturally soft. She sat very quietly for a few minutes; the only sound was the ticking of Dumbledore's clock. Then she rose from her seat and walked over to Fawkes, her mind whirling. Harry waited for a few moments petting the bird, who sat watching her without a sound. She then moved to the door and let herself out without a word.

"Harry!" Sirius called after her as she descended the moving stairs, but she ignored him.

As she exited the tower, she moved swiftly down the hallway towards her room, head down, and careened into Arsinoe, who was just leaving her room.

"Oh, Harry, I'm sorry."

"No, It's my fault I wasn't paying attention to where I was going," Harry responded curtly, moving aside.

"I am on my way to the dungeon to meet the others for the meeting. I understand we will be directed where to go by Professor Snape."

"Yes." Harry was suddenly seething inside. Arsinoe was going to be allowed into the meeting, while she had been ostracized. Angrily brushing past Arsinoe, she was about to enter her room when Hermione came down the hall.

"Harry, wait! We can go together," she called.

"I'm sorry Hermione, but the Headmaster has asked me to do something. Why don't you walk with Arsinoe?" Harry nodded towards the other woman.

"Arsinoe Darkmoon?" Hermione questioned excitedly. "Are you the new teacher who will be doing the classes on Ancient Egyptian and Native American Mysticism?"

"Yes, I am." Arsinoe nodded with a smile. "You must be Hermione Granger. Albus has told me about you. Would you like to study some of my books?"

"Oh that would be wonderful," Hermione bubbled enthusiastically. "I'm sure Harry will be interested too."

"Arsinoe and I have already made some arrangements for me to study her texts," Harry said quietly, but her green eyes were boring into Arsinoe in a manner that would have frightened Hermione if she hadn't known Harry so well. "Now if you will both excuse me, I have something to attend to."

"Of course," Hermione answered, studying her friend uncomfortably. "We will see you later."

Harry nodded and spun on her heel, opening the door to her room. She was greeted affectionately by Snuffles, her Newfoundland dog. Petting her, she sat down on her bed, to think. As she did so, the medallion Dumbledore had given her moved beneath her robes. She had been so proud and honored when he had given it to her. Now all she felt was disillusionment. 'The Headmaster doesn't have any confidence in my ability to keep Voldemort from learning what the order is planning. He believes my presence at the meeting will be detrimental and therefore I'm not to be trusted,' she reflected bitterly. 'I am still nothing but a weapon to be primed when not in use, and then hidden away till I'm needed again.' She was so absorbed in her thoughts that she was startled by a knock on her door.

"Who is it?" she asked gruffly.

"Princess, it's me and Sirius. Can we come in?" Remus soft voice called.

"No, I prefer to be alone right now."

"Honey, for what it's worth we really do think Albus is wrong about this," Sirius answered worriedly.

"What do you care? You are never around these days anyway. Go and find your friend Circe. I'm sure she wouldn't mind a midnight motorcycle ride," Harry spat angrily through the door. She could hear Remus whispering softly to Sirius on the other side.

"Princess, how about if I skip the meeting and stay with you?" Remus queried.

"Don't waste your time. I am sure Arsinoe will enjoy your company," she yelled back at him, no longer trying to control her anger. "Now get the hell out of here. I want to be alone."

"All right, Love, we'll go, but I promise we will be back as soon as the meeting is over," Sirius placated her through the door.

Harry heard them move off, and then sat back down on her bed. She didn't move for a few minutes, and could feel the lump forming in her throat. Snuffles nudged her hand, giving a low whine. Absently she scratched the dog behind her ears, and then came to a decision. 'Severus would say that this is another impulsive Gryffindor action, but it is obvious that even he doesn't trust me. My presence here puts them in danger, so it would be best if I left,' she told herself. Sitting down at her desk, she took out some parchment and a quill and began to write.

Dear Headmaster,

I regret to inform you that I must resign my new teaching position here at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, as well as my role in the Order of the Phoenix. It is obvious that you do not feel I can be trusted and that I am a threat to the security of the faculty, students, and the Order itself. Therefore, I feel it is best if I leave the school. Too many people have died already trying to protect me. You granted me an honor, which you obviously no longer feel I am not worthy to fulfill, so I am returning my medallion.

Regretfully,

Harry James Potter

Harry then folded the letter, and placed it in an envelope. Removing the medallion from around her neck, she hurriedly packed her trunk. Using a reducing charm, she shrank it to the size of a small wallet before changing into Muggle clothes. She then put the small trunk into her pocket. Putting Snuffles on her leash, she took up the medallion and the letter and headed out the door. Hurrying quietly, Harry made her way to the gargoyle guarding the entrance to Dumbledore's office. Placing the letter and the medallion on the gargoyle where they would be seen, she then looked down at the dog. "Come on Snuffles, we're going someplace safe, where they won't find us," Harry said, giving the dog a final pat. "I just hope that I don't screw up when we apparate. I would hate myself if I left a piece of you behind..."

Sirius was barely paying attention to Dumbledore as he related the news about Voldemort. He was worried about Harry's reaction to Dumbledore's decision. He had expected her to be upset, but she had grown silent and cold. 'Tears I could have dealt with...but anger? I have never seen her so furious...and then there was that bit about Circe and me. Oh Merlin, I wish I could tell her about our relationship, but I just can't, not now anyway. There is too much riding on the outcome. I wish this meeting would be over with so I could at least try to reason with her. I know Albus was wrong. He should put more faith in her abilities, and Snivellus...What an ass! She cares about the greasy git and he made her feel inferior! I should hex him from here to Azkaban for doing that to her...and he has the nerve to claim he loves her. Ha! He doesn't know the meaning of the word...' Shifting uncomfortably in his seat he glanced over at Remus. He was sitting with a scowl on his face, and Sirius knew he was softly growling, deep in his throat....

Anyone who didn't know Remus was a werewolf would have thought that the scowl on his face had to do with Voldemort's resurrection, and this new threat to Wizarding and Muggle society. That was not the case. He was worried and anxious about his Princess, as he liked to call Harry. His wolf senses had detected her icy control over her anger and hurt in Albus' office, and her unexpected departure from the office had alarmed him. 'Why the hell didn't I try and stop her? I told her Sirius and I disagreed with Albus. The way she looked...it was as if her whole world had just been ripped out from under her. She had been so happy that he had trusted her with that much authority, now she may never trust anyone of us ever again. As for Severus, he really let her down. Bad enough he didn't give her the Potions award at graduation. Now he's wounded her so deeply that whatever feelings she had for him may have been permanently destroyed. Then there were her remarks about Arsinoe...I don't know how to explain our relationship. Oh, Merlin I wish Albus would just hurry up with this damned meeting so I could try to talk to her again...

Severus sat with his back rigid, unmoving. Outwardly, he appeared to be absorbed in Albus' report of the events of the previous night and Voldemort's return. Nothing was further from the truth. His dark eyes were like liquid ink, and somewhere inside of him, a warning note had

sounded. 'Damn Potter...doesn't she realize how vulnerable her presence would make the rest of these people. I only told Albus what I believed to be the truth...she isn't ready to successfully block out the Dark Lord. We have no way of knowing what kinds of powers he has now. Damn...why do I feel so bad? Because you hurt her you bloody fool,' the little voice inside of him argued. 'You took the one person in this world who truly understood what you feel and made sure to push her away. Why, Severus? Is it because you are still afraid to love her, despite telling her you intend to marry her? Or is it because you wanted for once to make sure a member of the Potter family was not given the benefit of the doubt by the Headmaster? You wanted to beat that Gryffindor pride and bravery down to a pulp and didn't care what it would cost? You betrayed her faith in you, just like when you failed to give her the award she so rightly deserved, merely because her father embarrassed you in public,' his conscience nagged. 'If you're smart you will get down on your knees to her and beg her forgiveness...tell her the truth you cowardly bastard. Tell her you're in love with her...'

Ron shifted in his seat, putting his arm around Hermione. He had wanted to save a seat for Harry, but Hermione had told him Dumbledore had given Harry something else to do. 'What on earth could she be doing? This is too important for her not to be here. She should be telling us everything that happened from the time she fell asleep till the time she encountered Voldemort in her dreams. This just doesn't make any sense,' he reasoned, deep in thought. 'Harry is Dumbledore's successor, and needs to be at these meetings. She is the only one of us who can truly stop this horror. No, something is going on. Sirius and Remus have been behaving strangely from the time they came in, and Professor Snape is acting just like he did when we were in school.' Shifting again, he glanced down at Hermione, who looked confused and frightened.

"Hermione, did Harry say what she had to do for Dumbledore?" he whispered.

"Sh...No, Ron, she didn't, but she was acting strangely. It was almost as if I didn't know her," she whispered with concern.

"What do you mean?"

"She seemed to be acting like a different person."

"You don't think Voldemort had anything to do with it?"

"No, this was something different, and it scared me. I could feel her power, and I think she was angry about something."

"Didn't she say anything to you?"

"I already told you she didn't," Hermione countered, keeping her eyes on the front of the room.

Moody was staring at the ceiling with his magical eye, and he seemed absorbed in watching something. Suddenly Fawkes appeared in a shower of sparks, emitting a shrill squawk, startling them all. Moody stood up and whispered something to Dumbledore, who nodded silently.

"That will conclude our meeting for this evening. If I might have a moment with the Protectors in my office, and you too Ron, I have something to discuss with all of you,"

Dumbledore said soberly. Alastor it would be a good idea if you were to join us also. There are refreshments set out for everyone, and I am sure you could all do with a cup of tea right now. Hermione, if you would stay with Professor Darkmoon and introduce her to the other members I would appreciate it."

"Yes, Sir," Hermione agreed, looking nervously at Ron.

"I'll fill you in as soon as I know something," he whispered, giving her a peck on the cheek. "Introduce her to Mum and Dad and keep your eyes and ears open."

"I will, and Ron, be careful."

He winked at Hermione, and followed the others from the room. Dumbledore moved swiftly through the corridors, and Ron had to admit that he was having difficulty keeping pace with the older wizards. When they had reached the gargoyle, Ron saw that there was a letter resting on its feet and Harry's medallion was hanging above it. The Headmaster quickly retrieved them, and read the letter as they ascended the moving stairs.

"Come in gentlemen," Dumbledore invited opening the doors to his office. A pot of tea appeared on his coffee table, along with some cakes. "I see the house elves have anticipated our meeting." Dumbledore indicated they were to be seated, and once they were comfortable, he took an odd looking device from one of his shelves and began to study it, just as Dobby popped in.

"Headmaster Dumbledore," the elf cried hopping from one leg to the other. "Harry Potter has left Hogwarts."

Ron visibly jumped, Sirius head jerked up, eyes wide with worry, and Remus emitted a loud growl. Moody looked at Albus, flashing him a look of disapproval before masking his features, letting his magical eye rove over towards the windows. Fawkes merely blinked from his perch, ruffling his feathers.

"I am aware that Harry has left Dobby. Did she say anything to you before leaving the building?"

"No, Professor. Dobby thought she was only walking the dog. Dobby should have realized something was wrong though Sir."

"Why Dobby?"

"Harry Potter was wearing Muggle clothes Sir. She only wears them now when she is going someplace where she will be seen by Muggles," Dobby replied anxiously. "Dobby would have known Sir if she were doing something for the Order. Dobby should have realized that something was not right. She had on those clothes and no one was with her," the elf explained eyes wide with fear. "Headmaster, you asked me to make sure Harry Potter was well cared for. Dobby has failed."

"No, Dobby, Harry has a mind of her own. You did well to come to me," Dumbledore responded, reassuring him. "Now if you would go and speak with the Watcher Elves they may have seen where she has gone. Then report back to me."

"Yes, Headmaster. Dobby will go right away." He snapped his fingers and disappeared with a pop.

Dumbledore turned his attention back to the strange whirring object, which was still on his desk, studying it closely. "Ron do you have the goblet with you?" he asked.

"Yes, Sir," Ron answered. He had reduced the goblet in size and pulled it out of his robe pocket along with his wand. Returning it to normal size with a swift swish of his wand, he studied it briefly. "There has been no change, but I would have known immediately if there were. The flames would have lit my robes."

"Obviously," Moody remarked, his gravelly voice annoyed. "Weasley you need to secure the goblet in a safer manner. I will show you a spell to keep you from burning yourself up should it ignite."

"Albus we are wasting time. We need to find Harry." Sirius was doing his best to contain his anger. "Is it possible she just went to the cemetery? She does that when she's upset."

"No she did not. In fact, I believe she is no longer on Hogwarts property. She has resigned her teaching position and her place in the Order," Dumbledore stated flatly.

"This is your doing, Albus! You were the one who kept her from the meeting. You as much as told her she couldn't be trusted!" Remus shouted, leaping up in a rare display of anger, his growling turning into a vicious snarl.

"Headmaster, we need to act immediately," Snape interrupted, watching the werewolf warily. He knew that while Remus was usually reserved and in control, his anger could bring forth the traits of the wolf he harbored within.

"Why would you care, Snivellus? If I recall correctly you agreed with the Headmaster about Harry's not attending the meeting. You probably did more damage to her emotionally than Albus." Sirius yelled turning on his old rival.

"Enough!" Dumbledore shouted angrily. "The important thing is to get Harry back here to safety. We will discuss who is responsible for her anger at a later time."

"Excuse me, Professor," Ron interrupted, unnerved by the anger being displayed by the older wizards, "but I would like to know why Harry left. She loves Hogwarts, and cares about every one of us. Why wasn't she at the meeting?"

"Ron is right, Albus," Remus said, regaining his composure. "As Keeper of the Goblet and as an Auror assigned to protect her he deserves an explanation."

"Not to mention that he is her best friend, as well as a member of the Order," Sirius added coolly.

"You are both correct." Dumbledore studied Ron closely, blue eyes boring into him. "I want you to understand that sometimes I have to make decisions that are for the good of everyone involved, Mr. Weasley. This was one of them. Unfortunately, in making this decision I failed to account for Harry's genuine concern and for all of us, as well as her pride."

"Headmaster, what is it that you did that caused her to walk away, because that is what it seems she has done," Ron questioned, confused by the old Wizard's admission of having made a grievous error.

"I told Harry she could not attend any meetings of the Order until she had mastered her Occlumency. I was afraid that Voldemort would be able to possess her mind and learn about our activities."

"You what! Headmaster...how could you?" Ron sputtered in disbelief, amazed he was speaking to Dumbledore in this manner. "Harry was so proud of her role in the Order and your confidence in her abilities. She must feel as if you stabbed her in the heart. Harry herself would have refused to attend the meetings if she thought for one minute Voldemort was gaining control over her!" Ron defended his friend, red faced with anger and disappointment in the old wizard.

"Mr. Weasley, the Headmaster does not need your criticism of his motives," Snape's icy tone warned, "what he does need is your support in locating Miss Potter."

The whirring object on Dumbledore's desk came to a sudden halt, and he again studied it closely. He was just putting it back when Dobby reappeared.

"Headmaster Dumbledore, I have spoken with Artemis. She did not hear where Harry went, but she did see her apparate with her dog."

"She was able to apparate with the dog?" The old wizard questioned, a light of pride flaring in his blue eyes.

"Yes, they disappeared about twenty minutes ago. Just before you all came upstairs from the dungeons," Dobby affirmed. "Do you want Dobby to ask any of the others if they know where Harry Potter went to?"

"No, Dobby. I have already located Harry. She is in a safe place. You can return to your work now."

"Yes, Dobby will go back to work. Dobby believes you when you say Harry Potter is safe." He snapped his fingers and disappeared.

"Albus where is my goddaughter?" Sirius questioned worriedly. "You said you located her."

"I have, and she is quite secure of the moment. Mr. Weasley if you would go back and see to your fiancé and the others I would appreciate it. I believe you will be on duty this evening?"

"Yes Sir. I will be patrolling with Tonks," Ron answered. He knew he would learn nothing further, and taking another biscuit from the plate on the table left the office.

"Will you need me to assist you Albus? I can arrange for a security escort if you are planning on going after her."

"That won't be necessary Alastor. I will give Harry sufficient time to collect herself and then we will all go and speak with her," Dumbledore explained, nodding in the direction of the three younger wizards.

"May I ask where the girl has gone?"

"You can ask, but I have no intention of telling you at this time. Believe me when I tell you she is quite safe for the night."

"Then I will go and see to the Aurors." Moody rose, and let himself out.

Turning to the three younger wizards, Dumbledore smiled, blue eyes twinkling. "I think you will all be interested in knowing where she has gone. I am actually quite pleased at her ingenuity..."

Harry had reached the apparition point outside of the Hogwarts gates without incident. Taking care that no one had seen her leave the castle, she checked her watch to make certain that the meetin was in full progress. She was nervous and wanted nothing more than to reach her destination safely. She hoped she would not have any problems disappearing with the dog. She was also concerned with the Deathaters. 'I'm not in the mood for a duel,' she thought. 'Then again, with the mood I'm in I could probably defeat the whole lot of them with one hand tied behind my back.' Harry grinned furiously at the notion. "Come on Snuffles," she spoke quietly, kneeling down and holding onto the dog, "it's time to go." Raising her wand in one hand while holding Snuffles around the chest with her other one, she closed her eyes, and muttering her destination, disappeared into the sunset. She was unaware that the watcher elves had seen her go and would set up a relay system to track her amongst themselves...

Part 15 - Relationships

Harry gently pet Snuffles to calm the frightened dog, checking to make sure she was not splinched. She was afraid of what would happen if a part of the dog had been left behind. She had apparated after leaving the grounds of Hogwarts.

"Easy, Snuffles, I know you don't understand, but I have to make sure you are all in one piece." She examined the dog, which calmed under her gentle touch. "Well we both seem to be fine," Harry grinned, looking around, "Dumbledore would be proud." Harry was grateful that no one was around, but could smell a barbecue in the distance and someone nearby was having a party. The sun was setting and long shadows ran along the ground. "We have to be getting along now," Harry said, leash in hand, walking with the big black dog down the street. "I have no idea what kind of a reception we are going to get, but it should be interesting."

Harry walked swiftly, turning at the corner, knowing she was vulnerable away from Hogwarts. She had to get to safety and hoped the wards had been put back into place. Looking up and down the street for possible danger, she still couldn't help but feel somewhat amused. 'I never thought I would end up back on Privet Drive. I wonder what Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon will say and do?' she considered. 'Well I will soon find out. I know Aunt Petunia will not be happy with my dog, but she will just have to deal with it.' Harry turned up the front walk to number four, smiling. She knew her Aunt was watching from the kitchen window.

"Well, here goes," she muttered under her breath pressing the bell. She stood for a few minutes, and was getting nervous when no one came immediately to the door. 'I wonder if I should just walk in,' she thought anxiously. Just as she was reaching for the knob, the door opened and she was face to face with her aunt.

"What do you want?" Petunia Dursley questioned harshly. Her dark eyes were cold, and Harry could see Uncle Vernon and Dudley in the hall behind her.

"Well, girl, state your business?" Vernon Dursley's gruff voice spoke over his wife's shoulder.

"Why can't I visit my relatives?" Harry asked sweetly. "I haven't seen you all since last year and I thought we should get reacquainted. Aren't you going to invite me in?"

Petunia looked anxiously over at Vernon, who was getting red in the face. Inwardly Harry was enjoying their discomfort, but she did need to get inside. She had felt the wards as she came up the walk, so she knew she would be safe here.

"Why should we invite the likes of you in, cousin?" Dudley demanded from behind his parents. "You're still a freak!"

"You should invite me in as it is a matter of all your safety. I have some important information to tell you. It will not take too long, but I will be staying for a while. At least until I can iron out certain details," Harry responded looking her aunt in the eyes. She did not feel her current affairs were any of their business.

"What could you tell us that would be so important that you dare to show your face here you little freak?" Vernon sputtered.

"The Dark Lord has returned." Harry looked at them all defiantly. Her aunt let out a cry, and Dudley backed up into the living room.

"So your freaky friends have dumped you back on us?" Vernon bellowed angrily.

"Vernon...please..." Petunia Dursley frowned swinging open the door for Harry to enter.

"Thank you, Aunt Petunia. I am glad you at least recognize the severity of the situation."

"What do you plan on doing with that beast?" Petunia inquired pointing at Snuffles.

"Why Aunt, she happens to be my familiar," Harry responded with a wicked grin. "All witches have them. You should know that." Harry was secretly enjoying watching them. She knew it was wrong, but couldn't help but enjoy their discomfiture as she walked towards the living room.

"Don't bring that beast into the living room!" Petunia exclaimed, thinking of her carpet.

"Then I shall put her into the kitchen," Harry replied, leading the dog up the hall. "I think we should all sit and have a cup of tea to get reacquainted anyway."

Her aunt, uncle, and cousin followed her nervously. Reaching the kitchen, she removed Snuffles leash and directed her to lie down over by the back door. She then took out her wand in a show of defiance and tapped the teapot, which immediately started to whistle. Vernon Dursley was gritting his teeth, and turning purple. Pressing her luck, Harry then conjured up four cups on the table and poured the tea.

"You can't do magic!" Dudley yelled. "They said you weren't allowed when you lived here." Harry knew that their memories had been altered after the altercation with Voldemort, just before she had gone to live with Sirius and the other protectors, so they didn't remember ever having seen her willfully perform magic.

"Everyone please sit down," she remarked, ignoring her cousin's outburst and taking a seat at the kitchen table. Her aunt and uncle followed suit, but Dudley remained standing.

"Why should I sit with you....you little freak," Dudley snapped.

"Aunt Petunia, will you explain to Dudley about my being able to do magic now?" Harry asked sweetly, but her eyes were flashing warningly. "I am sure you must know the rules since my mum was a witch too."

"Dudley sit down and shut up," Petunia directed, indicating a seat at the table, pushing Vernon down beside her when he started to rise in anger. Dudley grudgingly sat down opposite Harry, glaring at her suspiciously. Petunia was nervous, and her face looked even more pinched than Harry remembered. Looking anxiously at Dudley, she collected herself and spoke calmly. "Duddrers, Harry has finished school and is able to practice her magic now. It would be wise not to get her angry."

"Yes, cousin, I'm sure you wouldn't like it if I turned you into something...like say...a stuffed turkey?" Harry smirked.

"Now see here girl, you can't come into my home...." Vernon began, only to be interrupted by his wife.

"Vernon now is not the time. Harry has something to tell us," she said tightening her hand on his arm.

"Yes, uncle, now really isn't the time. Nevertheless, I will ask you to refrain from calling me girl ever again. MY NAME IS HARRY," she said forcefully. "While it is somewhat unusual for a girl to have a boy's name, you can always tell your neighbors that it is short for Harriet. Are we agreed?"

"All right, Potter. Now what are you doing here?"

"As I said before, I am here for a visit. I felt you needed to be warned since Lord Voldemort has returned. The wards have been placed around the house, and he cannot break them."

"I was given to understand that the man had been killed," Petunia stated, studying her niece coldly.

"I will not go into how this has occurred; suffice it to say that some very dark and evil magic was used. Both of our worlds are in danger. I will stay here for a while until I can sort some things out. You needn't be concerned about them as you will not be affected."

"Why don't you stay with that good for nothing godfather of yours?" Vernon grumbled uncomfortably.

"Never say anything bad about my godfather. As to why I am not with him at the moment is none of your concern." Harry did not want to tell them she had been living with him at Hogwarts, and felt a stab of pain when she thought of Sirius. 'I wonder if Sirius and the others are worried about me, but I wouldn't be here now if it weren't for their making me feel so unwanted.'

"How long will you be staying here?" Petunia interrupted her thoughts. She was scowling at Harry as she sipped her tea, "and what about that beast?" She glared in the direction of Snuffles, who sensed her annoyance, and gave her a low growl.

"My dog will be no problem. She will stay with me in my room, as will Hedwig," Harry replied. She had shrunk the owl's cage and brought it with her, knowing the bird would find her. "Can I assume my old room is empty, or did Dudley take it over?"

"We decided to use it as a second guest room," Vernon stated coldly.

"Then I shall retire for the evening. It has been a long day, and I would like to rest. Harry then pointed her wand at the now empty teacups. "*Scourgify*," she said, cleaning them. She then levitated them back into the cabinet where her aunt stored them, all the while enjoying the look of horror on their faces. "Good night, Aunt Petunia, Uncle Vernon," Harry nodded, motioning for Snuffles to follow. She blatantly ignored Dudley and left the kitchen, Snuffles following on her heels...

Dumbledore sat in his high backed chair studying the three young wizards. His blue eyes continued to twinkle, now that he knew Harry was safe, and he pursed his lips

contemplatively. Sirius was growing impatient and was frowning back at him, brown eyes fraught with worry. Remus sat quietly studying the Headmaster, with an occasional twitch of his lips as various ideas crept through his head. Severus stood like a statue, straight and stiff, dark eyes unfathomable, but Dumbledore knew he was considering what he had told them before he decided to speak.

"Headmaster, you told us you had located Harry. Are you going to share your information with us or do we have to guess where she has gone off to?"

Dumbledore's eyes showed his amusement. Severus was worried; had he been annoyed or angry he would have called Harry by her surname.

"Albus I demand to know where my goddaughter is," Sirius growled trying to maintain his temper. 'Damn he told us she is safe, but for how long?' he thought anxiously.

"As her protectors we should be informed of her whereabouts," Remus interjected, placing a restraining hand on Sirius arm to keep him calm. "You told us you were pleased with her ingenuity, so she must have considered where to go prior to making her final decision. Is she at the shrieking shack? It would give her a way back to Hogwarts should there be trouble."

"No Remus, she is nowhere near Hogwarts, or Hogsmeade, for that matter," Dumbledore answered, looking at him over his half moon spectacles.

"Then has she gone back to our house in Ottery St. Catchpole?" Sirius asked hopefully. Harry's jealous outrage over his relationship with Circe was still ringing through his ears.

"Or perhaps to the Weasley's, Molly is like a mother to her," Severus offered, studying Dumbledore shrewdly.

"No, she has done neither," Dumbledore responded, looking from one to the other of the three men. "She has gone to the one place outside of this school where she knew she would be absolutely safe," he imparted, with a mischievous smile. "Harry is at number four Privet Drive with the Dursleys."

"What!" Sirius spat. "She hates it there!"

"Albus, are you certain?" Remus' expression was one of shock and doubt.

"You mean to tell us," Severus began, steepling his fingers in front of him as he organized his thoughts, "that Potter apparated all the way to Surrey with the dog by herself, without incident?"

"That is quite correct. She managed a difficult apparition and succeeded in finding a safe haven for herself. I told you that I was quite proud of her ingenuity. Obviously, she is quite angry, but was more than aware of her need for safety, or she would never have gone there. It is also the last place anyone would ever expect to find her," Dumbledore stated evenly. "If it were not for my locating device, we may not have found her for days, unless she was spotted by Arabella Figg, and I believe Harry would have made sure that didn't happen."

"I am going to go and get her," Sirius jumped up, ready for action, shaking off Remus hand. "She is angry and upset with all of us, and we need to explain a few things to her. I also think

she deserves better respect concerning her role within the Order." He glared at Dumbledore, who merely looked at him with a casual smile.

"Sit down, Sirius. Harry is quite safe for the moment and needs time to calm down and think. We shall all go and fetch her in the morning," Dumbledore informed him, unfazed by his emotional display.

"Headmaster, why would Harry choose to go back to a family that obviously does not care for her?" Severus asked in dismay.

"Severus is right," Remus agreed, "her aunt and uncle never wanted her. What would possess her to do something so stupid?"

"The answer is obvious. She believes she is no longer wanted here also," Dumbledore stated matter of factly, blue eyes registering the pain he felt over Harry's feelings of rejection.

"Headmaster, surely Potter is aware of the need for caution when it comes to Order business. She should not have run out on us," Snape grunted. He was both worried about Harry and angry that she had treated Dumbledore so shabbily.

"It isn't just the Order..." Sirius whispered. "She is jealous over my relationship with Circe, and dislikes Arsinoe."

"She's upset that I have been spending so much time with Arsinoe, but we do have some common interests and studies," Remus acknowledged.

"Is she upset with you also, Severus?" Dumbledore questioned.

"I believe she is angry that I agreed with you that she should not be present at the meetings of the Order. It has upset her that as a former Deatheater you trusted me over her."

"Very well, we shall all go to see her in the morning. I want each of you to think about what you are going to say to her. She is very vulnerable right now emotionally. I do not believe any of you meant to hurt her intentionally. Sirius, I am aware of your commitment to Circe. I think you need to reassure Harry about your feelings towards her, and I will speak with Alastor for you regarding Circe," Dumbledore informed him, ignoring the brief startled look from Severus. "Remus, Harry would not want you to feel as if she were trying to tell you whom you should be with. Her dislike of Arsinoe has clouded her judgment. Try to get her to open up to Arsinoe while you make sure she understands that you will be there for her too," Dumbledore directed. "Now as for you Severus...Harry needs to know that you did not agree with me to humiliate her. Remember you and she had a very rocky relationship until these past two years. She knows that while you have tried to put your feelings regarding her father and godfather in their proper perspective, you sometimes fail to do so, and take out your old feelings of frustration on her."

"Yes, Sir," Severus bowed his head, hair falling over his face masking his expression. He knew the Headmaster had hit a nerve and he and Harry could never be happy until Severus mastered his old feelings of hurt and anger. She truly wasn't to blame for what had happened when he was in school.

"We shall leave following breakfast tomorrow morning. We need to be prepared as the students will be returning within the next week. The full moon will also be in two nights time, and Remus has enough on his mind right now," Dumbledore winked at the werewolf, "without his transformation being compounded by the worry over Harry."

The three young wizards rose from their seats, knowing they were being dismissed. Each was lost in his own thoughts, and needed time to consider the best way to approach Harry.

Dumbledore sat back with a sigh, after they had gone. He had hoped he would not have to divulge his relationship to Arsinoe. It amused him that Harry had taken such a dislike to her, but he suspected it was more of a protective reaction to her presence. She knew very little of the wizarding world, and certainly did not understand the complexities of the relationships within it. In a way, he had done her a disservice allowing her Muggle relations to keep her for so long, but at the time, it had seemed the wisest thing for him to do...

Ron reached the dungeons, and let himself into the reception for the Order members. Hermione was in an animated discussion with Arsinoe, and Molly was looking on with a motherly smile. Arthur was talking with Mundungus Fletcher, and Arabella Figg. Professor McGonagall was sitting with Professors Sprout and Dr. McBride. Whatever he was talking about, the two women were blushing profusely. He would have liked to listen in, but he had to talk to Hermione right away. Signaling her with a wave of his hand, he moved off into a corner of the room to wait for her.

"Ron, what is going on?" she questioned softly, reaching the corner where he was waiting rather impatiently.

"Harry has resigned and quit the Order."

"What! I thought Harry had something to do for Dumbledore."

"Dumbledore asked her not to come to the meetings until she mastered her Occlumency. He didn't want Voldemort to get into her mind and learn any information."

"I think that was very sensible on Dumbledore's part."

"Hermione, this is Harry we're talking about, not some ordinary person. She has resisted Voldemort more than any other person has. She would never willingly jeopardize any one of our lives. I think Dumbledore made a big mistake," Ron defended his best friend.

"I don't know, Ron. Dumbledore has a lot of responsibility looking out for the safety of the school and the Order."

"Oh, so that makes it all right to prevent the one person who has ever been able to stop Voldemort from coming to the meetings?" Ron countered angrily.

"Of course not, but we should go and talk to her. She is probably hurt and upset, but I am sure once she calms down she will listen to reason."

"We can't talk to her. She has left Hogwarts," Ron said flatly.

"Where has she gone?" Hermione asked wide-eyed.

"I don't know. The Headmaster used one of his magical devices to find her, but he wouldn't say where she was; only that she was safe."

"Oh Ron, this is dreadful. Harry must be really angry with him to have left Hogwarts. This is the one place she has always felt accepted and at home."

"That's what I have been trying to tell you," Ron stated in annoyance. "Harry feels like she has been betrayed by all of us. I don't know if she will ever be able to trust Dumbledore again."

"Of course she will. Harry is just being emotional. She loves Dumbledore," Hermione reassured him.

"Now if it isn't Weasley and Granger...and without Potter. I wonder where she is hiding." Draco's sly tone interrupted their conversation.

"Obviously she is not here," Hermione countered annoyed by his interruption. "Dumbledore gave her something to do for the Order."

"Now that is interesting, it's a wonder he is not concerned about her safety now that Voldemort has come back," he sneered.

"If you are so concerned about Voldemort maybe we should suggest you be given some Veritaserum to make sure you have no desires to join the Death eaters," Ron threatened. "I certainly wouldn't want Ginny to be any more exposed to the Dark Arts than she has already been."

Draco squared his shoulders and deliberately pushed Ron back towards the wall, moving to draw his wand.

"I wouldno' try it Laddie. I expect my partners to iron out their differences without coming to blows with improper conduct. If that is not possible, I will arrange a formal training duel," Moody's soft growl came from behind Hermione. His magical eye was fixed on the two young men. "Now I think it is time Mr. Weasley and Tonks went on duty." He signaled Tonks from the far side of the room where she had been talking with Shacklebolt. She hurried in his direction, upsetting a tray of sandwiches when she tripped over a table leg.

"Lass, I still don't know how you managed stealth training," Moody shook his head amazed, and Tonks just grinned up at him. "I want you to take Mr. Weasley and get him started with his duties. Then meet with Shacklebolt. I am assigning you both to keep these two in line."

"Yes, Sir," Tonks grinned, eyeing the two younger wizards, who continued to glare at one another. "Come on Weasley, let's go," she pulled Ron away from the wall and herded him out of the dungeon.

"Come with me, Mr. Malfoy," Moody said taking Malfoy by the collar, "it's time you got better acquainted with Kingsley. He and Tonks will be supervising you and Weasley. Good day Lassie," he nodded towards Hermione, before steering Draco across the room.

Hermione nodded, amused at the look on Shacklebolt's face. He obviously was not going to take any nonsense from two junior aurors. She wished she had been able to question Moody

about Harry, and wondered if he knew where she was. Sighing, she went back over to where Molly and Arsinoe were engaged in conversation, but her mind was whirling with concern for Harry...

Harry awoke just as the sun was poking its rays of light through her window. She was confused for a moment, before remembering that she had returned to Privet Drive. 'I must be mad to have come here, but at least I will be safe,' she considered with a sigh. Throwing off the covers, she dressed quickly, and put the leash on Snuffles. She knew the dog needed to go out. Moving softly down the stairs, she went out into the back garden, avoiding the street since she wasn't sure if Arabella Figg was home yet from the meeting. She was certain her cats, which were actually kneazles, would let Mrs. Figg know she was back soon enough. Using her wand to clean up after the dog, she went back inside to the kitchen. Glancing at the clock on the wall, Harry noted it was almost seven. "I may as well start breakfast," Harry muttered, looking at Snuffles, who was lying down by the door. "It's Friday, so Uncle Vernon will be up shortly to get ready for work." The dog merely stretched, and giving her a big yawn, put her head down on her paws and fell back to sleep.

Opening the refrigerator, Harry set about making some bacon and eggs. She then set some bread in the toaster, and put on a pot of water for tea. She did not use magic, having made her point last night. She did not want to antagonize her Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon any further than she already had. Dudley was another matter all together. Harry had just finished setting the table, when her aunt entered the kitchen.

"I see you haven't forgotten how to cook," she jibed.

"No, aunt, it is one of the few things I actually like to do without magic. I find it very relaxing," Harry replied, surprised to realize this was true.

"Humph..." Petunia grunted, "mind you don't burn the toast, and make sure the eggs are not runny. Your uncle likes them well done."

"Yes, aunt, I remember," Harry nodded. Her relatives had not changed. They were as cold and distrustful of her more now than they had been before.

Vernon Dursley entered the kitchen a few minutes later and surveyed the table. Harry handed him his morning paper as she put the eggs on his plate. She also served her aunt, before pouring herself a cup of tea. Dudley did not appear, and Harry suspected that he was sleeping in. She wondered idly if he had a job or was attending University, but dared not ask her aunt and uncle.

"At least you seem to have finally remembered your place in this house," Vernon muttered from behind his paper.

"Yeah, no better than a house elf," she answered flippantly.

"Girl, I would mind my manners if I were you." Vernon glared putting down his paper.

"I told you not to call me girl," Harry challenged. "Should you continue to do so, I will have no alternative than to use a silencing charm on you. Since today is Friday I am sure you have at least one business lunch to attend and it would be most inconvenient if you were unable to speak."

"You are still an ungrateful wretch," Petunia stated, sipping her tea nonchalantly. "Your mother would never have spoken to our parents in that manner."

"My mother had family who cared about her, at least her parents did," Harry responded icily, throwing her aunt's spiteful attitude up in her face.

"My sister was nothing but an arrogant little show off. Witches and wizards are nothing but freaks of nature..."

"Perhaps Muggles are the freaks," Harry interrupted, "after all, we of the magical community are able to control nature to suit our needs." Harry glared, deliberately pushing her chair back from the table to scrape against her aunt's nice shiny floor.

"Get out!" Petunia shouted. "Get out of this house and never come back, you filthy little freak! You're just like the rest of them, always gloating and showing off. Your father was like that and so were his nasty friends."

"Aunt Petunia, if you weren't a muggle I would see that you were taught a lesson. However, you are helpless against my magic, so I will give you a warning. Never say anything ever again about my parents. They were good people, and suffered tragic deaths at the hand of an evil man. I came back here to warn you, since I am sure you will be a target now that he has returned from the dead," Harry explained through gritted teeth, and Snuffles sensing the tension in the room, growled and stood up.

"What do you mean, back from the dead?" Vernon interrupted. "No one can come back from the dead."

"Voldemort did. I told you there was ancient and dark magic involved. It would be wise if you all left the country for awhile," Harry warned. "I don't believe his factions in other parts of the world will bother with you then."

Petunia looked at Vernon, who nodded his assent. They knew their niece was not lying. They were in mortal danger and should go into hiding somewhere. The fiend had killed off the Evans and Potter families one by one. They were the last.

"Petunia dear," Vernon placed his hand on her shoulder to calm her down, pretending to change the subject, "did I tell you that I was offered a job over in New Zealand? They want me to head up the training of their new sales division. There is also a large raise involved."

"Is it permanent?" Petunia did not want to leave England.

"Only lasts a year, then I would have to come back here, but I would be put in charge of the London division since old Klegg will be retiring."

"Then I think we should do it," Petunia stated, pretending to keep her voice light and unconcerned. Harry could sense her fear over what she had told them. "Will you be able to get Dudley into the company?"

"Certainly, he is a born salesman. It will be no problem," Vernon responded, talking to his wife as if Harry were not in the room.

"How soon will we have to leave by?"

"The sooner the better. I told Connelly that I would let him know my decision by Monday, since I wanted to talk to you first, but I will see him this morning."

"Then let's go and tell Dudley together. I can hear him getting up now." Petunia looked up at the ceiling as she pushed back her chair, still ignoring Harry.

"Clean up this kitchen, Potter, and see that you make a good breakfast for Dudley," her uncle instructed her coldly.

"Yes, Uncle Vernon," she replied. Harry knew she had at least gotten through to them about the gravity of the situation. She hoped that Dumbledore wouldn't be too angry with her for telling them about Voldemort, but she did not want to see them killed, however much they hated her. With a wave of her wand, she cleared the dishes, and made an omelet for her cousin, along with some toast and potatoes. He entered the kitchen just as she finished putting his food on the table.

"Have you heard cousin? We are going to New Zealand for at least a year, and you are not coming with us."

"Actually I plan on keeping an eye on your house, while you are gone," Harry replied looking over to where her aunt and uncle were standing in the hallway. Petunia had just given her husband a kiss goodbye and he was picking up his briefcase to leave for work. They both stiffened at her remark.

"What are you getting at, gir...er Potter?" Vernon questioned suspiciously.

"I am merely saying that it would be a wise decision if you left your home in the care of Professor Dumbledore and me while you are away. You know the building will be kept up and we will see to it that it is not vandalized. I will see that the mortgage payments remain up to date too. This way you won't have to worry about sending the money from another country and its getting lost."

"Hmm...You'll pay the mortgage while we are gone?"

"For the year, yes. I will see that the house is well cared for also," Harry agreed, her heart beating fast. She could see her uncle's mind working.

"What about the utilities?"

"I will see that they are paid too. This way you need not turn them off."

"Will any of your freaky friends have access to the house?" he questioned suspiciously.

"It will be used by Dumbledore to meet with those wizards who are fighting against Voldemort. None of your neighbors will see anything out of the ordinary," Harry affirmed. "Let me know when you come home from work whether you are agreeable."

Vernon nodded, considering what she had just told him. Opening the door, he went out to his car and left for work. Harry knew how frugal he was with money and believed he would agree to her idea. Maybe this would help to keep Dumbledore from being too angry with her for leaving. Already she was beginning to regret her decision. Snapping her fingers for Snuffles

to follow, she left the kitchen to her aunt and cousin, who was eating greedily, and returned upstairs to her room. Hedwig was at the window, and Harry let her in and gave her an owl treat before flopping down on the bed. She wondered what was going on at Hogwarts...

"Excuse me Headmaster," Hermione approached Dumbledore cautiously as he and the protectors were leaving the Great Hall following breakfast, "but will Harry be back soon?"

"I see Mr. Weasley has apprised you of the situation." He looked at her, blue eyes amused, no sign of being upset over her knowledge of the happenings from the previous night.

Hermione flushed, looking down at the floor, "Yes, he told me she had left. He also told me why."

"Hermione," Dumbledore cupped her chin up to look at him, "I sense you are disappointed with her conduct?"

"Um...well sir...I understand why you did what you did, but I also feel that Harry should have been consulted. It was wrong of you to make such an important decision without her, but she should not have left."

"Miss Granger, Harry left for a variety of reasons," Snape advised, "not just the Headmaster's."

"Oh...Ron said she is in a safe place, but I have been worried sick all night."

"It is all right, Hermione. We are on our way to talk with her now," Remus assured her.

"You know I would never leave her alone if she were in any danger." Sirius smiled at the young witch.

Hermione nodded, feeling a little better. "Do you think she will come back?"

"I hope so," Dumbledore's soft voice responded gently, "but that will be entirely up to her. I can't force her to come back."

"Please try and talk some sense into her thick skull. She can be very stubborn at times...almost as bad as Ron," she blushed.

"I will certainly do my best. Now if you will excuse us, we must be getting on," Dumbledore told her patiently.

"I need to be getting up to the library anyway. I want to make a few changes in the filing system," she replied, hurrying up the main stairs.

Dumbledore pushed open the great doors and stepped out into the early morning sunshine. The air was warm, and there wasn't a cloud in the sky. He only hoped Harry was in a good mood. They four men walked quietly, lost in their own thoughts, until they reached the gates, they then apparated into Little Whinging.

They appeared around the corner from Privet Drive, and looking about, Dumbledore gave a flick of his wand, to alter the memory of an old man who had seen them appear. He was taken by surprise while walking his dog.

"I think we should change our clothes," Sirius remarked with amusement, pointing his wand at his robes. They were immediately changed into black jeans and a tee shirt.

Remus followed suit and conjured up beige slacks and a short-sleeved cotton shirt. He resembled any young man on his way to work. Dumbledore studied their outfits and nodded his approval before altering his attire to a three-piece pin striped suit, which was a vivid blue. He then turned his attention towards Severus, who was scowling his disapproval.

"Is there a problem with my clothes, Severus?"

"No, Headmaster. You look like an ordinary Muggle businessman."

"Then once you have modified your clothing we will head over to the Dursley home."

"Yes, Sir," Severus agreed half-heartedly. Pointing his wand at his robes, he changed them into a black suit and tie.

Dumbledore beamed with approval and the four of them moved up the street and around the corner. As they approached the walk, he checked the wards, pleased that they were holding. He couldn't help but notice the slight shift of the kitchen curtain. Petunia was as nosy as ever. Ringing the bell, he waited patiently.

"I was wondering when you would be here," Petunia stated as she swung open the door for them to enter.

"Good morning, Petunia. May we speak with Harry?" Dumbledore queried politely. "I know she is here."

"Upstairs. She is in her room," Petunia responded acidly, moving back towards the kitchen just as Dudley poked his head round the door. Seeing the four wizards, he jumped back inside without a word.

The four men walked up the stairs, and knocked on Harry's door. Snuffles gave a short bark, and they could hear Harry moving around. She opened the door, and stood quietly, surveying them for any signs of displeasure.

"May we come in honey?" Sirius asked, giving her his best smile.

Harry stood aside without a word, allowing them to enter. Closing the door behind her, she sat down on the bed beside Sirius, who had stretched out, making himself at home. Remus took a seat at her desk, and Dumbledore conjured chairs for himself and Severus.

"That's better," the old man smiled, blue eyes twinkling.

Harry merely nodded, studying the old man intently. She knew he was using his Legilimency on her, and made sure to occlude her mind. "Are you satisfied?" she asked.

"Not yet," he beamed, clearly amused by her defiance. He continued to stare at her for several minutes, trying to break her will, the others watching intently. "Will you tell me if you feel he is too strong for you?"

"I won't have too. I would stop attending the meetings voluntarily and put false information into my mind," Harry told him bluntly, breaking away from Dumbledore's intense gaze.

"Will you continue to study Occlumency with Severus?"

"If he chooses to teach me," Harry replied, resting her eyes on Snape.

"I will do so if you agree not to pry into my memories of your father."

"Why not just put them back into the pensieve?"

"I will, but I must remind you not to go looking again, or the lessons will be over permanently," he sneered.

"Fair enough, so long as you answer any questions I may have truthfully."

"I will unless I feel they should be left in the past, where they belong."

"I can live with that," Harry nodded with a brief smile.

"Does this mean you will come back to Hogwarts, Princess?" Remus questioned, eyes alight with delight.

"That depends on the two of you," Harry told him, looking from Remus to Sirius, who was eyeing his goddaughter mischievously. She was hard pressed not to smile at her godfather.

"I think we need to talk to Harry alone for a few minutes, Albus," Sirius remarked, brown eyes meeting her green ones.

"I agree. Severus and I will be downstairs enjoying a cup of tea with Petunia."

"Headmaster, wait. I have something important to tell you. I may have a new headquarters for the Order."

"Indeed and where might that be?" His interest was immediately piqued.

"Right here, I warned my aunt and uncle that they were not safe here."

"Did you tell them about Voldemort?"

"Only that he was back due to some very dark magic."

"I see, and what did they say?"

"They didn't say much of anything, but I could tell they were frightened. As luck would have it my uncle has been offered a position in New Zealand by his company which will last for a year."

"Does he plan on accepting it?"

"Yes. I told him I would pay his mortgage for the year and keep up with the utilities if we could use the house."

"What explanation did you use?"

"I said we would hold some meetings from time to time to plan how to best deal with the situation to stop Voldemort permanently."

"Was he agreeable?"

"I think so. I assured him that none of the neighbors would see anything unusual and we would maintain the property for when they return next year."

"Interesting proposition," Dumbledore replied studying the ceiling. "Severus let us adjourn to the kitchen and speak with Petunia. I think I can persuade her to fully convince her husband."

"Harry, I believe the Headmaster likes your idea," Snape remarked, arching his brow in amusement as they rose to leave.

"Oh, wait a minute you two," she said stopping them. "I like your outfits. You both have excellent taste in Muggle clothes." Harry grinned.

Snape shook his head, rolling his eyes, while Dumbledore winked, beaming with pleasure at her approval.

"So, Princess, I guess you want to talk with us about Arsinoe and Circe."

"How ever did you guess, Remus," Harry teased, curling up beside Sirius. She could never stay angry with either of them for long.

"I want you to know that Arsinoe and I have a lot in common. She is a very interesting person. I am not romantically involved with her. We are merely friends."

"Remus, even if you and Arsinoe were involved it would be none of my business. I don't own you."

"This is true, but should I decide to take a mate you will have to approve, since we are bound by the Protectorship."

"So I guess it's okay if I'm a little jealous of her? You and I rarely ever get to discuss things other than the situation with Voldemort. I miss our walks in the evening."

"Me too, as soon as the full moon passes how about if we go back to them?"

"Why wait till the full moon passes. You have the potion and I can always transform with Sirius. You both always promised me a night out with the Marauders. Who better to stand in for my dad?"

"What do you think, Remus? Should we let her come with us and go for a run tomorrow night? I don't think Dumbledore will object."

"I'll tell you what, Princess; you can come with us if you will try to make friends with Arsinoe. She really wants to help, and I believe Dumbledore knows more about her than he is telling us at the moment."

"I'll try, but I still don't want to turn into a snake. Severus would like it too much," she laughed. "Now what is your excuse, Padfoot?"

"I can only ask you to trust me when it comes to Circe. I have made a commitment to her, but I can't go into details at this time. There are others involved, and it could jeopardize their safety."

"Are you in love with her?" Harry asked bluntly.

"Now Miss Wings, you should know better than that. There is only one girl in my life and that is you," Sirius teased, brown eyes laughing. "You need to trust me once in awhile. I promise that when the time comes you will know who my true love is."

"What kind of an answer is that?" Harry demanded, annoyed with his joking.

"The best one I can give you at this time," he replied, sitting up and giving her a quick peck on the cheek. "Besides, I rather fancy seeing the jealous fire in those green eyes of yours."

"You're impossible, Sirius Black!" Harry exclaimed blushing.

"I know," he grinned, "but that's what makes me so lovable."

"I'll give you lovable," she laughed, picking up her pillow and swatting him with it.

"So... you want to play rough, eh?" he winked at Remus and grabbed Harry, tickling her. "Are you ready to give up?"

"Never!" she cried, laughing so hard tears were running down her face. "Remus...don't just...sit...there...with that...wolfish...grin...help me," Harry begged.

"Will you promise not to fly off the handle again and come to us with your problems like a rational adult?"

"I am...still...only...eighteen!" Harry gasped, struggling as Sirius pinned her down and continued to tickle her stomach.

"Old enough to know better than to throw tantrums," Sirius laughed.

"Well Princess, do you promise or do I have to sit here and let Sirius tickle you into exhaustion?" Remus remarked with a wicked grin.

"I...promise," she sighed as Sirius released her.

"Good," Sirius announced, scooping up her limp form and giving her a tender kiss. "Now be a good little Phoenix and get packed. You belong with us back at Hogwarts."

"Sirius, I just remembered. I quit my job and gave up the Order."

"Well I happen to know that Albus has your medallion and he probably tore up your resignation."

"Are you sure?"

"There is only one way to find out. Let's go downstairs and ask him."

"All right," Harry agreed.

"By the way Princess, I understand you accomplished a rather difficult apparition last night. We are all proud of you," Remus remarked as they descended the stairs.

"How did you move your trunk?" Sirius questioned.

"I shrank it to the size of a wallet and put it in my pocket."

"Very nice," Sirius approved.

When they reached the lower floor, they found Harry's Aunt Petunia sitting in the kitchen with Dumbledore and Professor Snape. Dudley was nowhere to be seen. Harry's aunt was just finishing her tea, and speaking nervously to Dumbledore. Snape was sitting beside her, with a sour expression. His dislike of Harry's aunt was evident.

"I will let Mrs. Figg know of our answer tonight," Petunia was saying as they entered, "but I am sure Vernon will probably agree. He seemed quite interested when Harry expressed the idea."

"In that case, Petunia, I will await word from Arabella," Dumbledore said rising. "It is time we were getting back to Hogwarts. The new term will be starting next week, and we need to be prepared."

"Thank you for the tea, Mrs. Dursley," Snape remarked. Harry knew he was grateful their stay was at an end.

"Harry, will you be coming with us?" Dumbledore asked. "If you would like to spend some time with your relatives you need not report back for work until after the weekend."

Harry smiled, meeting his vibrant blue eyes. "No, I think they will be fine without me here. Let me just go and get my things."

"I shall go with you, Child, as I would like a few words in private."

"Okay," Harry agreed, but her stomach was in knots. Neither spoke until they reached her room and she had closed the door.

"I believe this belongs to you?" Dumbledore queried, pulling her medallion from his pocket.

"If you still want me to have it," Harry responded, flustered and ashamed by her behavior.

"If I didn't I wouldn't have brought it here with me. I also meant what I said about visiting your relatives. I can give you a few days with them until the term starts. All of your lesson plans have been approved," Dumbledore explained slipping the medallion back around her neck.

"Even the ones I gave to Severus?"

"Don't tell him I let you know, but he was very pleased with them," Dumbledore whispered with a wink.

Harry beamed and hugged the old man fiercely. "I think it's time to go back to the school. Besides, my godfather and his best friend are going to take me marauding so long as you say it's okay."

"I have no objection. Remus needs to run once in awhile and the potion will keep him from causing any harm. Now do you need any help?"

"No. I can do this by myself." Harry turned to her trunk. "*Reducio!*" She uttered the spell and then pocketed her trunk. Taking Hedwig from her cage, she let her out the window telling her she would meet her back at Hogwarts. Harry then reduced her cage, putting it in her other pocket before she put Snuffles on her leash.

"Will we be apparating back?"

"No, I have made a portkey. It will be easier on the dog," Dumbledore stated knowingly. "I am proud of you though. Many experienced wizards are not able to apparate an animal."

"Truthfully, I was relieved that she wasn't splinched, but don't tell the others," she whispered conspiratorially.

"I won't," he whispered back.

They found the three wizards waiting for them in the hall, and stating their goodbyes, they stepped out the front door. Dumbledore pulled a map out of his pocket, and they all placed their hands on it and disappeared. Petunia, who had been watching from the widow, let out a small cry, and then went and lay down. She had a splitting headache.

Harry went and found Ron and Hermione as soon as she unpacked her things. Ron was sitting in the library helping Hermione to get the books sorted for the coming term. Both of her friends were glad she had returned and were amazed that the Dursley house was probably going to be used as the new headquarters for the Order of the Phoenix.

Following her visit to the library, she went to see Arsinoe, and invited her to dine with her that evening in her room along with Sirius and Remus. Arsinoe was thrilled that Harry was trying to be more friendly and readily agreed, offering her some books dealing with animagimultiplico, promising to bring them when she came to dinner. Harry accepted them graciously.

She then hurried off to the dungeon for her first scheduled potions lesson. Even after what had happened, she knew Snape would not have forgotten, nor would he tolerate her being late. Spending a quiet afternoon down in the dungeon, working with Professor Snape and his uncle in preparation for her Potions Master exam in May, Harry knew she still had a good deal to learn. Determined that the situation with Voldemort would not interfere with her studies she did her best to mix a difficult potion used to heal third degree burns. Harry beamed with delight when Tiberius and Severus both informed her she had mixed the potion to their satisfaction.

Chapter 16 - Day of the Serpent

Harry spent the next morning entertaining Phaedra in the Great Hall doing tricks with her telekinesis. She had enjoyed doing so and it gave her a chance to practice her skills as Professor Dumbledore had instructed. The little girl had laughed with delight when Harry made her stuffed rabbit, Mr. Hoppity Hop, jump across the tables, always keeping it just out of Phaedra's reach. They were playing together when Severus came in. His face was set in his customary scowl, warning Harry that he was not in the best of moods.

"Uh, oh...I think Uncle Sev is mad about something," Phaedra announced as he came towards them, fixing his dark eyes on Harry.

"Oh shi...sugar," Harry corrected herself swiftly to avoid swearing in front of Phaedra. "I forgot I have an Occlumency lesson and then was supposed to work on my potions today."

"Miss Potter, I do not appreciate being kept waiting. I believe you were due in the dungeon twenty minutes ago," Snape sneered, his scowl deepening.

"Uncle Sev, you aren't going to expel Miss Harry, are you?" Phaedra asked nervously. "She didn't mean to miss her lesson. She was just playing with me while she practiced her kinesis for Headmaster Mr. Dumbledore."

"You mean telekinesis, Phaedra," he corrected his niece, softening under her warm brown eyes. "I can't have her expelled since she is no longer a student here."

"But if she is finished school how come you are still her teacher?"

"I am tutoring her so she can perfect her Occlumency skills and possibly pass her Potion Master's exam," he explained patiently, but Harry did not miss the cold glare he cast in her direction. "If she does not get down to the dungeon in two minutes I will be forced to discontinue her lessons."

"I'm on my way." Harry jumped up, swiftly heading towards the door. "You will have to see that Phaedra gets back upstairs safely," she called over her shoulder, speeding out of the Great Hall.

"Uncle Sev, please don't be mad at Miss Harry. I had no one to play with. Mummy is with Headmaster Mr. Dumbledore and Uncle Tiberius is asleep," Phaedra informed him while they climbed up the stairs.

"Is Uncle Tiberius unwell?" It was not like the elder Snape to sleep this late in the day.

"No, but he didn't come home till real early this morning. We were eating dinner when all of a sudden he got up and said he had a pointment."

"You mean an appointment."

"Yes, anyway he said he had to leave right away and didn't know when he would be back. He kept rubbing his arm like it hurt. I didn't see him again until real early this morning when I got up to go potty."

"Phaedra, which arm was he rubbing?" Severus asked, trying to sound casual.

The little girl cocked her head thoughtfully. "This one, I think," she replied, rubbing her left arm to demonstrate. "Did he hurt himself?"

"What? Oh no, I think he was just nervous," Snape replied steeling himself to keep his voice calm. "If he is still asleep I will see if one of the other Professors will look after you for awhile until he wakes," Severus told her reaching the rooms she shared with her mother and uncle.

Tiberius Snape was awake when they entered and Severus looked at him with open curiosity. His uncle looked back, his face neutral, as their eyes met. Both men were skilled with Legilimency and Occlumency and had strong telepathic abilities.

It was a battle of wills, but Severus was finally forced to lower his eyes when Tiberius spoke.

"I will speak with you later, Severus, in Professor Dumbledore's office. I will have him summon you there after we have spoken."

"Yes, uncle, I shall be most interested in meeting with you at that time."

"Is something the matter?" Phaedra questioned anxiously, looking from one to the other.

"No, little one," Tiberius smiled fondly. "Severus and I were just playing a little game. He likes to practice his mental skills with me."

"Like the game I was just playing with Miss Harry?"

"She was watching Harry do her telekinesis," Severus replied to his questioning glance.

"Ah...I see. Yes, Phaedra, something of that nature," he answered dismissively. "Now I suppose your mother is busy with the Headmaster so you will need some one to watch you?"

"Yes, uncle, can we go outside? Maybe we could go flying?" she asked hopefully.

"Hmm...Flying...I think that could be arranged."

"Yippee...Uncle Sev I am going to go flying!" Phaedra beamed. Severus arched his brow in amusement.

"Phaedra, I expect you to behave. It is time you practiced some of those flying lessons Severus and Harry showed you."

"Yes, Sir, can you show me some new moves too?"

"We will see how you do first." He smiled, patting her head affectionately. "Now go and get your broom."

Phaedra darted out of the sitting room and Tiberius turned to Severus. "I will expect you as soon as Dumbledore is ready. Your questions will be answered then," the elder Snape informed him coolly, "and Severus your skills are quite good, but I think you and I will need

to practice now. The situation with the Dark Lord may warrant you needing to use them more often."

"Yes, Uncle, it will be good exercise. Perhaps after dinner in the evenings would be a good time?"

"As you wish, now I suggest you get back to work with Harry. I believe she has a lesson this morning?"

"She was late, but she was babysitting for Phaedra, so I will let it go," he responded. Turning on his heel, he left his uncle with Phaedra, who had just returned.

Reaching the dungeon Snape found Harry chopping the ingredients for Lupin's Wolfbane Potion. She did not hear him come in so he stood watching her for a few moments. 'She doesn't realize how much she has come to like our time together doing the potions lessons. I was hard on her too often, but the situation at the time warranted it. I needed to make her dislike me or the Dark Lord would have been suspicious. If what I suspect is true, she will need to be careful around Tiberius. If he is spying for Albus, Harry will need her Occlumency more than ever. Uncle will not have a problem blocking his mind, but Harry...well...it would be best if she didn't get too close. My uncle could be placing them both in grave jeopardy, the wily old scoundrel,' he sneered to himself. 'Albus is a shrewd one...I couldn't go back to the Death-eaters for him so he got Tiberius to do it. I wonder what my uncle promised the Dark Lord, and visa versa.'

"Oh...Severus, I didn't hear you come in. You're as silent as ever. Have you been here long?" Harry questioned looking up from her work.

"I only just arrived," he replied coolly. "I believe we were to do Occlumency first?"

"We were. I didn't know how long you would be so I started Remus' potion. I know we are supposed to do the Dreamless Sleeping Potion but I figured I could get this done in the meantime."

"Very well, proceed with what you are doing," he sneered, closing her book. "Let's see how good your memory is, shall we?"

"You want me to make the Wolfbane Potion from memory?" she asked aghast.

"I believe that is what I just said. You will be asked to make at least two potions from memory at your exam. This one is on it quite frequently." He smiled slyly, taking a seat nearby to watch.

Harry continued with her work, and could feel her palms starting to sweat. She knew Severus was watching her intently. Harry kept trying to picture him sitting there in his underwear, to alleviate her tension, as she had taught Neville to do. The only problem was that she was having some other very embarrassing thoughts, and kept having to stop because they were so distracting. Finally, she finished getting her ingredients in order, set the cauldron to boil, and reviewed her work before she began to add each item in the order she felt they belonged. Thirty minutes later, she sighed, poured the completed potion into a large glass beaker, and turned to look at Severus. He was sitting quietly, a satisfied smile on his face.

"Judging by your expression I guess I did it right?"

"There were a few tense moments, especially when you were measuring out the blood and the amount of the Wolfsbane, but yes...you did well. I am more than a little pleased. It helps to make up for your earlier tardiness."

Harry was so happy she didn't stop to think about her actions. Throwing her arms around him, she gave him a big hug. What was more disconcerting was that he hugged her back, creating an odd thrill all through her body. Suddenly she realized what was happening, and pulled herself free, trying to collect her thoughts.

"Ah...I think we...should have some...lunch," she stammered embarrassed, heart racing.

"Would you like to eat down here? I will have the house elves bring us something."

"No...No, let's go up to the Great Hall. It will help me to relax before you start trying to invade my mind," she offered, nervously. 'God if he ever sees what I have been thinking...'

"As you wish," he agreed, moving off towards the door. "Bring Lupin's potion with you too. He will be happy to get it now, rather than later. It will help to alleviate his symptoms and will remain effective for the duration of the full moon."

Harry did as she was instructed, following Severus from the dungeons. She was relieved that they were not going to be eating alone and was very disturbed by the thoughts she had been having towards him.

Reaching the Great Hall, Harry noted that all of the teachers had arrived for the upcoming term, but the Snapes were absent. Sirius was sitting with Remus. The werewolf looked tired, his face etched with signs of discomfort, as he pushed his food around his plate. Dumbledore was patting him on the back, and Madame Pomfrey looked on comfortingly. She was glad she had done the potion early. She approached them quickly, and Remus looked up trying to disguise his pain.

"Hello, Princess. How was your lesson?"

"It isn't over yet," she said glancing over at Snape. He had seated himself beside Professor McGonagall. Harry hoped she wasn't blushing. "I made your potion up early today. Severus had me do it from memory while he watched," she explained setting it down beside him.

"I guess you did alright," Sirius remarked, amused by her discomfiture, "otherwise he never would have let you give it to him."

"He said he was more than a little pleased," Harry beamed, chuckling. She was relieved that Sirius thought her blush was due to his rival's praise.

"Thank you, Harry. This is going to be a rough one," Remus sighed, drinking his potion with a grimace. "I really wish he could make it taste better though."

"He's working on it," Harry assured him.

"Sit down, Love, and have some lunch with us," Sirius remarked.

"No thanks. I think I will spend some time with Hermione. I see she is sitting with Arsinoe. Where is Ron?"

"He had night duty again," Dumbledore answered. "He is probably still asleep."

"That's not hard for Ron. Other than Hermione his two main things in life are food and sleep," she quipped, and they all chuckled.

"I understand you dined in your quarters last night with Arsinoe, Remus, and Sirius."

"Yes Headmaster, I hope you don't mind."

"Of course not; I am actually rather pleased. All I have ever asked is that you give her a chance."

"I'm trying. Would you like to come to dinner tonight?"

"Unfortunately, I have made other commitments for this evening. Perhaps another time when things have settled down, after start of term?"

"I would be delighted. You know I always like our quiet time together," she beamed fondly.

"Then we will make it a point to do it at least once a month," Dumbledore responded, blue eyes twinkling with delight.

"You're on," she winked, "besides I know the elves will serve us the best desserts on those nights." Harry teased the old wizard.

"Go on and enjoy some time with Hermione. She has been reviewing all the books in the library and I gave her permission to order some new ones."

"She's probably ecstatic," Harry chuckled. "I'll see you two later," Harry said, glancing at her two protectors. "I am looking forward to a little flying time tonight."

"We aim to please," Sirius replied, brown eyes mischievous. "Meet us outside in front of the castle at ten. The moon will be up and Remus will have transformed."

"I'll be there," she promised, hurrying off to sit with Hermione.

"Harry, Arsinoe was just telling me about some ancient runes used to cast spells to ward off evil spirits."

"Maybe we should use one on Peeves," Harry joked playfully.

"Your playful poltergeist doesn't exactly fit the category," Arsinoe smiled, amused, "but I can understand why you would want to do something about him."

"Has he caused you many problems?" Hermione questioned.

"A few but it was nothing I couldn't handle."

"Just watch out for the water balloons. He likes to sneak up when you aren't looking. Peeves has caught just about everyone in the castle at one time or another except for the Headmaster," Hermione explained.

"I have already had the pleasure of being soaked," Arsinoe grinned, showing even white teeth. "Harry I would like to thank you for having me dine with you and the others last night. I had a really nice time. Would you and Hermione like to have lunch with me in Hogsmeade? Minerva tells me the Three Broomsticks is nice."

"That would be nice," Harry agreed. The dinner party had been pleasant, Harry admitted to herself, and the books that Arsinoe had given her had been quite interesting at first glance. "When would you like to go?"

"How about if we go after classes start one weekend? I am still making some modifications to the lesson plans, and am not sure how many students will be taking my class."

"You can count on all the sixth and seventh year Ravenclaws," Harry responded.

"Ron told me that Ginny was interested too, and so was Colin," Hermione added. "I'm not sure about the Hufflepuffs. The Slytherins might be interested depending on the magic involved."

"If it is something that will be of benefit to them you can expect them to sign up," Harry added disdainfully.

"You are not fond of the students in the house of the serpent?"

"Not especially," Harry remarked. "Many of their families were followers of Lord Voldemort. The ones who haven't been sent to Azkaban probably still are," she snorted with disgust.

"Do not judge the students too harshly. They've been taught their prejudices by their parents," Arsinoe chided.

"We know. The Dark Lord's first in command was Lucius Malfoy, and as you know from the meeting, we believe he has resurrected him as well," Hermione stated frowning.

"Is he related to the young Auror who is partnered with your fiancé?"

"Draco is Lucius son. He and Ron have never really gotten along and now it is even worse since Draco is going with Ron's sister, Ginny."

"Is that the girl you said wanted to take my class?" Arsinoe asked with interest.

"Yes," Harry answered. "She will be in her seventh year. She is the youngest in the family and the only girl."

"How many brothers does she have?"

"She used to have six, but Percy was killed in the war. You met Fred and George at the meeting the other night. There are also two older brothers who are somewhere in Mexico or South America right now."

"Ah...we have met. Bill and Charley Weasley are working with my people to ensure that the spell Harry will need to use arrives here safely."

Harry and Hermione looked at one another in surprise. They hadn't realized that the two Weasley's were in the Aztec Wizarding community.

"Do you know when they will be coming back to England?" Harry questioned with interest.

"I'm not certain," Arsinoe replied, her expression unreadable. Harry sensed that she was holding something back, but decided not to pry, suspecting that this knowledge was something she had in confidence with Dumbledore for the safety of the persons involved. "How are your lessons coming with Professor Snape?" Arsinoe questioned, changing the subject.

"I have some more this afternoon. We are going to work on my Occlumency and then do another potion."

"How soon do you think you could begin working with me? I know you will be spending time tonight in your animagus form, going out with your godfather and Professor Lupin."

"We can start tomorrow night if you like," Harry told her, watching as Professor Snape rose from his seat. He strode over to speak with Dumbledore who had signaled him from across the room.

"Now I wonder what that is all about," Hermione mused, following her gaze.

"Yeah, me too, any idea what is going on Arsinoe?" Harry asked the older witch.

"I'm not sure," she said studying the interaction of the two wizards. "Despite what you may believe, Dumbledore does not tell me everything."

Harry wondered that since Tiberius, Circe, and Phaedra were not present for lunch if their whispered conversation had to do with them. While she sat studying them, Dumbledore glanced in her direction. He had a calculating look on his face, but his blue eyes were soft and reassuring. He said something to Severus, who nodded, and headed towards where they were sitting.

"Is everything all right, Severus?" Harry inquired curiously.

"I have to have a meeting with the Headmaster in his office. It may take some time. Perhaps you would like to work with Miss Darkmoon this afternoon instead, provided she has the time of course," Snape remarked, looking in Arsinoe's direction.

"I will be happy to rearrange my schedule to work with Harry, provided she has no objections," Arsinoe answered.

"What about my Occlumency lesson?"

"We can do it later this afternoon. I know you will be running wild with the canines later, so I won't even bother to try and ask you to mix a potion," he sneered. "You seem to take a great deal of pleasure in their juvenile cavorting under the moon."

"Maybe a little cavorting beneath the moon is what I need to feel like myself again, Severus," she sneered back. "It's good to let oneself go once in awhile."

"I thought you had already done that with your visit to Privet Drive?" he countered levelly.

"What time do you want me for the Occlumency lesson?" Harry asked, refusing to rise to his baiting about her leaving Hogwarts two nights ago.

"Be there promptly by three. We will work through until dinner," he replied. Not waiting for her answer, he spun on his heel and moved swiftly out of the Great Hall.

"Perhaps we should get started then," Arsinoe remarked rising. "Please excuse us, Hermione."

"Of course; Harry I will speak with you later. Ron will be here for dinner so we can all sit together."

"You're on," Harry agreed, rising. "I will see you later then." She followed Arsinoe from the hall.

She led Harry to a previously unused classroom on the third floor, which had been set up especially for her. There were pictures on the walls painted in ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs and hieratic. A replica of the Aztec pyramid complex stood on a table nearby and there was a display case filled with carved stone tablets depicting the serpent god of Quetzcoatl along with various other deities from both cultures. Harry looked around in fascination. Under other circumstances, she would have been tempted to question Arsinoe about the various objects but felt uncomfortable doing so since she had been so resistant to her help.

"I see you are interested in the displays I have set up showing the pyramids of Teotihuacán, in Mexico," the older witch stated coming over to where Harry was examining the pyramid complex. "This is the Pyramid of the Sun," she pointed to a large pyramid dominating the center of the religious complex. If you face west from the top of the pyramid, you will be overlooking the Avenue of the Dead. The temple at the south end is the Temple of the Plumed Serpent, Quetzcoatl. The Quetzalpapalotl Place is Southwest of Moon Plaza. The Pyramid of the Moon is at the North end of the Avenue of the Dead and it faces south. Hence, the ancient wizards who guarded the Sun Temple could see in both directions. The Temple of the Sun was originally painted bright red and plastered. The color most often associated with the Temple of the Feathered Serpent is green obsidian, much like the color of your eyes."

"You almost make me sorry I didn't study ancient runes," Harry remarked, mesmerized by the slow steady rhythm of her speech. It was almost hypnotic and Harry had to shake her head to make sure she was not dreaming. Arsinoe's golden eyes were glowing oddly, just as when she had met her.

"Perhaps you would like to audit one of my lectures with the seventh year students?" Arsinoe queried, breaking the spell.

"If I get the time I would like to hear about Quetzcoatl and his twin sister, Quetzalpetzatl."

"I will let you know when I speak on the legends. Are you interested in Egyptian lore at all?"

"Yes...Ron visited Egypt when we were going into our third year. He said some of the curses the ancient wizards used were awesome."

"The ancient magic used on the tombs and temples in both cultures is quite extensive. Unfortunately, with the fall of the ancient civilizations through war and disease, we have lost much of this knowledge. We believe the Aztec wizards had more than a rudimentary knowledge of blood magic."

"Blood magic is what Dumbledore used to protect me as a child. It was also used during the Rites of Protection."

"The magic he used was purely rudimentary to the ancients. It is one of the reasons blood sacrifice was so important to them. They believed that the blood of their enemies would reinforce their victories over them."

"Yech," Harry grimaced. "The idea of having one's heart ripped from their chest while still alive is rather unappealing if you ask me. Not to mention being decapitated."

"We may never know why they believed that such brutality was necessary other than their belief that it was needed to appease the gods."

"More likely that was just an excuse and was politically motivated. It would have been a great way to get rid of anyone they thought was a threat to their position and power."

"You may be correct," Arsinoe agreed. "It may also have been a way to control the Muggles."

"They almost make the Death Eaters look tame," Harry remarked with a shudder.

"Yes, the Egyptians were almost as bad though. They had one ceremony where they would throw a young maiden into the Nile for the Crocodile god."

"How did they execute their enemies?"

"In various ways, some were beheaded, while others had their arms and legs tied to two horses and were pulled apart. Sacrilege was punished by being buried alive, but that was usually reserved for the nobles."

"Okay, now that my lunch is about to come up, how about we change the subject and work on my becoming an animagus?"

"All right," Arsinoe agreed, smiling with amusement. "First I want to see your phoenix. This way I can see how long it takes you to transform. One of the things a multiplico can do is change from one animal to another without going back to their human form."

"Really, I didn't know that. It wasn't in my reading."

"That's because it is such a rare ability. There are wizards who can do more than one animal, but they still have to go back to their human form first, and even that skill is quite rare."

"I have never met anyone who can do more than one animal, let alone without changing back to their human form."

"Actually, you have," Arsinoe grinned mischievously. "He is someone very close to you. At least he used to do it."

"Dumbledore!?"

"I have said too much already," she answered noncommittally. "Now let's get started or we will use up all of our time talking and you will have to leave to meet with Professor Snape." Arsinoe reached into her desk and withdrew what appeared to be a stopwatch. "When ever you're ready..."

"I need some space," Harry stated, moving to the center of the room. She then looked at Arsinoe, and winked, transforming in the blink of an eye.

Arsinoe gasped in surprise. She had barely had time to set the stopwatch. Glancing at it, she was amazed. Harry had transformed in only one second. It took most witches and wizards who were capable of the animagus transformation at least three to five to complete the change. Moving over to the beautiful phoenix that was sitting quietly, watching her intently, she gently stroked the soft scarlet feathers. Harry trilled softly.

"Harry, go ahead and transform back to your..." Arsinoe never completed the sentence. Harry was standing in front of her, a wide grin on her face, green eyes dancing with mirth. Clearing her throat, Arsinoe collected herself. "You did that in record time. It is most unusual. Can you do it again?"

"Sure." Harry's laughter was still ringing in the air, as the beautiful bird appeared once again. Arsinoe shook her head in disbelief, turning to put the watch back on her desk. "I guess I did alright, then?" Harry asked over her shoulder, as the older witch turned to face her startled.

"It's not wise to sneak up on your instructors," Arsinoe teased, but Harry could tell she was still in shock.

"Sorry, but I like to transform. It's fun."

"I suppose you enjoy flying too?"

"With or without my broom?"

"I would hazard a guess that it is both."

"You're right," Harry chuckled. "I fell free when I fly...like I'm one with the wind."

"That is good. You are identifying with the forces of nature. It will help you when you need to cast your spell, since you will be calling on the ancient magic to reverse an act against nature."

"Arsinoe, why do I have to transform into a feathered serpent to reverse the spell anyway? Voldemort's people were able to do it with just a regular snake."

"You do not have to transform to do the spell. The evil wizards who practiced necromancy were all parselmouths and it is believed they could transform into serpents as well."

"Like Lord Voldemort."

"Exactly, but the wizards who fought against them were also able to do so and wanted to prove to the people that they were not all evil. Therefore, they cast a spell to merge with the birds, hence the feathered serpents. You will not be able to speak Parseltongue when you are in your phoenix form. If he transforms to fight you, as he did previously, then you will have to do so too. In the event this should occur, we wish to give you an edge on him. You will be able to fly out of his reach and still speak the words that will send his soul back to whatever dark pit it had come from," Arsinoe explained, placing her hands on Harry's shoulders.

"Harry, what you need to understand is that your heart is pure and your love gives you the ability to become the phoenix. Yet, you are also a parselmouth, which means the serpent also rests inside of you, waiting to strike out at your enemies. If you can merge these two concepts into the form of the feathered serpent, as those ancient wizards did, you will prove that you can rise above the evil that is associated with such magic."

"I see... but what if I can't merge them?"

"You will. You have no idea the power you possess. I can sense it in you. I have seen you in a vision, and you will be revered among wizards through out the world."

"Excuse me, but I'm just Harry. There is nothing unusual about me," she remarked skeptically, shaking her head.

"You're wrong. Everything about you is special. You are destined for greatness, just as Dumbledore was. We have all seen that. Why do you resist it so much?"

"Why does everyone think I am so special?"

"I believe you have been through this same conversation a number of times already with the Headmaster."

"Then humor me. What is so different about me that makes me unique as a witch?"

"Your name alone makes you unique," Arsinoe smiled, shaking her head to keep Harry from opening her mouth to speak. "Then there are your accomplishments. Think of what you have done in your life. You have stopped this dark wizard every time he has tried to parlay the balance of power to his way of thinking. He is a great wizard, but he has misused his gifts for his own designs. You have not. This alone is what makes you great. Tell me, has he ever tried to get you to come over to his side?"

"Yes, a few times, starting with my first year at Hogwarts."

"Then why didn't you accept his offers?"

"Because it was wrong! He is an evil man, and takes his pleasure from the pain and suffering of others."

"Exactly, where as you take yours from their love and happiness. You alone have stopped him, because you are his direct opposite. You have known this for a long time, yet you still resist."

"What makes you all so certain I will be able to do it again?"

"Were you not paid a visit by a certain old woman last spring?"

"What? You mean when I saw my future self. Who told you about that?"

"Dumbledore told me, and obviously, she was here to tell you how to succeed."

"I did everything she said."

"What were the first words she said to you?" Arsinoe asked, golden eyes glowing with that eerie light.

"She said the prophecies were correct...both of them...Oh Merlin...it was also a warning that the battle at Hogwarts wasn't going to be the end. Why didn't I see it before?"

"No one did, but Albus was suspicious when Voldemort was killed. He knew something was not as it should be. The Death Eaters continued to remain too active instead of disappearing back into the facade of respectability."

"Why didn't he tell me this himself?"

"He does not like to worry you. Dumbledore knows you have been through more in your eighteen years than most have in their entire lifetimes. Besides, what could you have done?"

"Nothing," Harry replied flatly. "Absolutely nothing."

"Nevertheless, you can now. You need to be prepared, Harry. Your actions now will determine your own future."

"I don't understand. I saw myself. I spoke with her, and she was quite old...at least as old as Dumbledore."

"You saw what should be, not necessarily what will be," Arsinoe explained gently.

"What do you mean?"

"Do you know why time travel is among some of the most restricted magic of the wizarding world?"

"I always thought it was so people would not use it to further their own ends."

"Exactly. As I understand it, you have always liked to bend the rules," she said amused. "It would seem that you will continue to do so through out your life."

"What are you getting at?"

"By traveling back in time your adult self showed you what was to come, but it will not happen unless you make the right choices now. One wrong decision...or one changed action on your part can alter that outcome. The future is not set in stone Harry."

"So what you're telling me is that if I do one thing wrong I may not live to become that old woman?"

"Yes...and no. You may survive but things might be changed that would otherwise have been different."

"For instance?"

"Both you and Voldemort may survive...and others may die who did not die before," Arsinoe told her quietly. "I believe your old self told you to think before you act?"

"Yes," Harry answered with a whisper.

"Then now is the time to do so. Learn, Harry...learn all you can as quickly as you can. Do not let this evil prevail. Give yourself the knowledge to become that old woman you met last spring and give the rest of us a chance for peace."

Harry's mind was racing and her stomach was in knots. 'How will I know what is right and what isn't? I don't know what to do. What if I cause the deaths of the people I love? I could never live with myself,' she worried inwardly. Her green eyes shown with worry as she looked at Arsinoe. 'I have been acting like a childish fool! Instead of doing the responsible thing, I just got stubborn and refused to listen to what they were all saying. I hold their lives and the lives of their loved ones in my hands, and by god, I am going to do everything in my power to keep them all safe. Even if it means I don't live to become that wise old woman.' Slowly, she found her voice, and with a quiet dignity, Harry swallowed her pride as she spoke aloud, "Teach me what I have to learn. Too many have died at the hands of that mad man."

"Then come, open your mind to the serpent within you, just as you opened it to the phoenix."

Harry nodded. Closing her eyes, she began to concentrate on picturing the snake in her mind. It was a soft green, with fine white stripes circling its body. However, unlike Voldemort's cobra, this snake was not poisonous. She had seen it in the zoo last year with Phaedra, when she had gone to stay with Severus and his sister on the weekends. It reminded her of the Slytherin colors of green and silver. The sign had said it was an Emerald Tree Boa. Once she had the image firmly fixed in her mind, she began the spells for transformation. Slowly, she felt her arms become limp and they seemed to be disappearing into her body. Her legs felt as if they were being fused together, and she had all she could do to keep from panicking. Her jaw hurt, and her tongue felt as if it was being sliced with a razor. Her hearing dulled, along with her sense of smell. She was cold, and longed for something warm as she felt herself being lowered to the floor.

Harry could hear Arsinoe calling her name, but it sounded as if it came from underwater. Opening her eyes, she found she was lying on the floor, and called to Arsinoe for help. It was then she realized that she was sticking out her tongue, and she could sense something warm in front of her as she crawled along the floor. It was Arsinoe, and Harry picked up her head to try to see her better. The older witch was smiling in triumph. Harry realized she had accomplished her feat. She was a snake! Commanding her body to move, she slithered over to the window to get a look at herself in the glass, before turning to look at Arsinoe once again.

"I did it! I did it!" she cried out in amazement, but Arsinoe did not answer her. 'Of course,' Harry thought, 'she can't understand me. I am speaking in Parseltongue!' Her body felt odd as

it moved along the floor back towards the grinning witch, and a draft from behind alerted her that the door had been opened. Coiling herself about her body to keep warm, she looked to see who had come in. It was the Headmaster and Professor Snape. 'Ah...now for some fun,' she told herself, gleefully slithering over to Severus.

"Miss Darkmoon, I must say you have a very nice pet," Severus remarked. "However I would appreciate it if you would let Harry know it is time for our Occlumency lesson," he told the witch, glancing around, wondering where Harry was.

"I don't believe Harry is in any shape to do Occlumency, Severus." Dumbledore's blue eyes twinkled, as the snake wound its way up Severus leg, and around his body.

"Headmaster, we both agreed she should begin immediately," Severus answered, trying to keep from becoming annoyed. "Miss Darkmoon, do you usually allow your snake to run free? It might become lost in a castle of this size."

"I would say that she is in quite good hands at the moment," Arsinoe chuckled. "After all, you are the head of Slytherin House."

"Nevertheless, I need to get started. Where is Miss Potter?"

"Why don't you ask the snake Severus?" Dumbledore teased, blue eyes laughing, surveying Harry over his glasses. She didn't know how Dumbledore knew it was her, but apparently, he was enjoying her mischief.

"Headmaster, I am not a Parselmouth, or I would!" Severus snorted, trying to maintain his demeanor, as the snake draped itself about his body.

"Then I shall ask the snake for you," Dumbledore chuckled. "Pretty serpent, have you seen our Harry anywhere?"

Harry flicked her tongue and hissed in response. She knew this was her cue. Looking at Severus, she began the sequence of spells to transform back to her human self. It took a few seconds, and Severus gasped in surprise. His face lost its cool facade as he realized he was holding Harry in his arms.

"Hello, Professor," she laughed boldly. "You can put me down now." Severus immediately regained his composure, and set Harry down on her feet. Harry couldn't help but notice the slight tinge of color that had been added to his cheeks.

"I see you have been able to transform yourself into a serpent. I find it interesting that the one you chose is green and white. It closely resembles the Slytherin house colors of green and silver," he remarked, black eyes glittering.

"It was the closest I could find. If I have to become a snake, I figured it might just as well be something pretty. After all, my phoenix has the colors of Gryffindor. You all keep telling me that I am both, so..." Harry shrugged, with a coy smile.

"Child, I am more than a little pleased that you have accomplished this task so easily," Dumbledore beamed, blue eyes twinkling. "How long did it take for her to accomplish this new animagus form?" he questioned Arsinoe.

"She did it on her first try, but the transformation takes her longer than when she does the phoenix. Harry, will need time to perfect this new form, so that she can do it as easily as the Phoenix. Then she can start to try and combine them into the winged serpent."

"I see," Dumbledore mused. "And then?"

"Then she must learn how to transform from one animal to the other without changing to her human form. That is the most difficult. It is also the most dangerous," Arsinoe warned.

"Now that sounds ominous," Harry remarked.

"I don't wish to frighten you, Harry, but it is very difficult to do. It can also go terribly wrong, but I believe you have the ability." Arsinoe looked very serious. "Practice the snake for a few days until you can do it as easily as the phoenix, and then we will begin on the next step. The animagus spell involved is slightly different as you will need to think of both animals at once."

"I understand," Harry nodded. "Now I suppose I belong to Severus for the next two hours until dinner?"

"Indeed," Snape sneered arching his brow. "I shall escort you to the dungeon for your Occlumency lesson, and if we have time afterwards I have decided you will mix the Dreamless Sleeping Potion."

"Then let's get going. I have an evening out tonight and could use some relaxation. I have a feeling I am going to need it."

"Humph," Snape grunted leading the way. He stopped at the door when he realized she wasn't following. "Well Potter, what is the matter?"

"I think I will just practice my new animagus form on the way," she grinned slyly, beginning the spells in her head. This time it came a little easier since she knew what to expect. She slithered over to him and out the door.

"Harry," Dumbledore called after her laughing, "just don't let him put you in a tank as the new house mascot."

"Ssss..." she hissed in Parselmouth. She knew he didn't understand that she was telling him that would never happen.

Severus moved swiftly down the corridors and stairs to the dungeons, the beautiful green serpent slithering behind. Harry could feel the animal form taking a stronger hold, and had the desire to find something warm and furry to eat. "Too bad Wormtail is dead. I could make a nice meal out of that traitor and then bask in the afternoon sun. I will have to control this urge for warm-blooded food, or I may really start hunting. These floors are cold, even though it is the end of August," she hissed as she felt the muscles of her soft underbelly moving her forward.

Reaching the darkness of the lower levels Severus opened the door to his office. Harry glided in crawling up onto his favorite chair by the hearth. He then turned and studied her, arms crossed, his jaw set firmly. He was in no mood for games and his body heat and language told

Harry he was worried about something. She transformed back to her human form and sat studying him.

"Sev... what's wrong?" she asked timidly.

"Nothing you need to worry about. Are you ready for your lesson, or are you planning on becoming the house mascot as the Headmaster suggested?"

"Actually, that might be a rather interesting idea. If there are Slytherin students, as well as some in the other houses who are thinking of becoming Death Eaters and joining Voldemort I could learn what they are up to. I could just hang out in the Potions Lab or the common room. They would never suspect my animagus form of a snake. I could also pose as Fawkes again like I did before the Protectorship and infiltrate the other common rooms as well."

"Harry," Severus began, slowly pursing his lips, "I do not believe it would be wise of you to act as a spy."

"Why not?"

"Many of the older students are your friends. It would not be right to invade their privacy in such a manner," he remarked, raising his hand to stop her from protesting. "I know you're eager to stop the Dark Lord but I do not feel that any students who may be involved have enough knowledge to warrant such actions. There is also the need for you to prepare yourself fully for the events you are going to have to face."

"But Severus, if the students have overheard anything from their parents..."

"No Harry!" he exclaimed sharply. Anything they may know would be minimal, and the Order would already have learned of it. The Dark Lord's followers, however dimwitted a few of them are, know better than to discuss his plans. His retribution would be swift and painful, if not lethal."

"I see," Harry responded, feeling useless. She wanted so badly to help before things got anymore out of hand.

"Don't worry," Severus voice softened, understanding her desire to help. "Your time to act against him will come."

"And how many more people will have to die before that happens?" she questioned bitterly, jumping up from her seat and pacing the floor.

"I can't answer that. Unfortunately, there are always innocent casualties in war."

"Well there shouldn't be." Harry was shaking with anger. "Families shouldn't be torn apart. Why do parents have to watch as their children are tortured and die and how many more children will have to endure growing up alone?"

Severus didn't answer. He couldn't, because the questions she asked had no answers. They had been asked for thousands of years but the result was always the same. The loss of innocent lives would always be the cost for peace.

Taking two swift strides across the room, he stood over Harry, studying the face he knew so well. 'James' face with Lily's eyes,' he thought. 'The only difference is that James' arrogant smirk has been replaced with a serious frown, and instead of Lily's laughing green eyes Harry's hold a deep sadness.'

They stood looking at one another, eyes locked. Severus softly traced her jaw line with his index finger. Slowly, he lowered his head and chastely brushed his lips against hers. Harry relaxed in his arms as his tongue gently sought hers, responding to his embrace. When they finally parted, she rested her head on his chest, while he stroked her hair. Neither of them spoke right away. There was no need for words. It was Severus who finally broke the silence.

"It's time we started your lessons," he whispered, nuzzling her ear.

"I don't suppose we could put it off until tomorrow?" she said looking up into his dark eyes.

"No...It would be better if we proceed," he told her, gradually resuming his usual demeanor. "You have to master your mind or the Dark Lord will use it to his own advantage."

"All right," she sighed, "just give me a minute to prepare."

"Very well, but only a minute," he answered, glancing at his watch.

"You're timing me?!"

"You asked for a minute so that is what you shall receive." He arched his brow amused. "Thirty seconds...fifteen...seven...*Legilimens!*"

His assault on Harry's mind was swift and immediate, as memories flew instantly through her mind. Crying when she was four and Aunt Petunia threw away her stuffed dog. Dudley pushing her down in the flowerbed and telling his mother she had trampled it deliberately. Harry shopping in Diagon Alley with Hagrid, still disguised as a boy. Sitting with her Protectors in Dumbledore's office in her sixth year. Snape deliberately throwing away her potion with a sneer while Draco laughed. Kissing Mad Eye Moody after swallowing the love potion. The battle with Voldemort in Grimmauld Place.

"NO!" she cried aloud, fighting to close her mind, while pushing into his. She could see the image of Severus in his Death eater robes kneeling in front of Voldemort. His duel with Lucius Malfoy in the Great Hall; and flying at the Weasleys with Sirius and Phaedra. One by one, the doors to her mind and emotions swung shut, as she forced herself further into his mind to stop his assault. She could feel his withdrawal. Harry finally jerked back, shaking, as their minds separated. Snape stood watching, stiff and tall, expression unreadable.

"You reacted well, but are still too slow. You need to concentrate harder."

"I am concentrating!"

"It is not good enough. You need to close me out before I can get inside. As soon as you feel me starting to probe your thoughts and feelings you need to retaliate," Severus instructed forcefully. "Now let's start again, *Legilimens!*"

This continued for almost an hour, but Harry grew stronger with each assault on her mind. As Severus tried to enter for what seemed like the hundredth time, Harry was exhausted and becoming angry at his insistent probing. Mustering the last of her strength, she slammed her conscious mind shut, and flung him across the room. *Smack!* He fell back against the wall, stunned.

"Severus!" Harry cried running over to where he had slid down onto the floor. "Are you hurt?"

He looked at her, gingerly testing his limbs, and began to laugh. "I am uninjured. You have successfully fought me off and were able to stop me physically as well. If you can do that to the Dark Lord you will be one-step ahead of him. I could feel the force of your power and was helpless against it," he explained, rising from where he had fallen. "I think you have practiced enough for today. Come along, we still have time so we will work on your potion. Do you think you can do it from memory?"

"The Dreamless Sleeping Potion?"

"I believe that is what I told you earlier."

"Do I have a choice?"

"No."

"I didn't think so." She grinned up at him playfully.

"Then I would suggest you get started or we will be late for dinner. I would hate to see you have to rush to get ready to meet your godfather and his canine cohort," he sneered.

"Severus...be nice. You know very well that you and I can spend some fun time together too. All you have to do is to ask me."

"I thought that is what we were doing," he replied sardonically.

"Arrrggghhh," she shook her head, gathering the ingredients for the potion.

She worked quietly for the next forty minutes, mixing and setting things to boil. She watched the cauldron closely, her jaw set into a deep frown when the potion turned a lovely shade of fuchsia, instead of the dark purple it was supposed to be. Severus just shook his head, and indicated she was to dump the cauldron.

"I will not tell you what you did wrong. Look it up and write me a full parchment on the proper mixture and its components. I will expect you to have it ready by tomorrow afternoon when we meet again."

"Yes, Sir," Harry answered. "Although I have an idea where I went wrong already."

"This is a tricky potion, Harry. Your mixture could have been lethal."

"Why didn't you stop me when you knew I had done it wrong?" she questioned, curiously.

"I wanted to see if you would catch the mistake on your own. You will be allowed to dump one cauldron during the practical exam, but only one. There are many more difficult potions you may be asked to perform. It would be a waste if you had to dump one of the easier potions since you will be graded on each one individually. You will also be timed."

"I understand. Will we do this one again?"

"Tomorrow. Once you have it perfected and I see that you can mix some of the other potions from memory I will teach you the Draught of Living Death. It is dangerous and complicated."

"Would they ask for such a potion on the exam?" she asked startled.

"Occasionally, since it is used by healers when someone is extremely close to death and they need to slow their body functions to save them."

"I didn't know that," Harry answered thoughtfully.

"Now let's go up to dinner. I know you would like to relax over your meal and visit with your friends." Severus muttered a spell lowering the lamps, and they left the dungeon together. It had been a grueling afternoon, but Harry was inwardly pleased with her progress. She was determined to stop Lord Voldemort, no matter the cost to herself.

Part 17 - Night of the Wolf

Harry, Ron and Hermione were sitting at dinner on the far end of the table. Tonks, Draco and Neville had joined them. They were all relaxing over dessert following a meal of barbecued chicken, potato salad and cole slaw. Ron was reaching for his third treacle tart as Hermione rolled her eyes at his seemingly insatiable sweet tooth.

"With that sweet tooth you're lucky that my Mum and Dad haven't inspected your teeth," she chided, reminding him that both her Muggle parents were dentists.

"There's nothing wrong with my teeth," he grinned wiping the corner of his mouth where the fruit had dripped down.

"I wouldn't worry so much about his teeth, Hermione, as I would about his middle," Tonks commented in amusement. "He needs to stay in shape to pass his Auror training," she teased metamorphing herself to look like she had gained forty pounds and turning her hair bright red.

"I am in shape," Ron retorted, "and that isn't funny Tonks." He was trying to sound mad. However, his huge grin betrayed him, while he watched her morph back to a normal weight and turn her hair an odd shade of purple.

"Keep eating tarts, Weasley, and you won't be," Draco sneered. "I don't want to have to try carrying a three hundred pound tomato out of a tight situation."

"Who are you calling a tomato?" Ron glared.

"Draco, I wouldn't let Ginny hear you're making fun of Ron's hair," Harry warned, "not to mention the rest of the Weasley clan."

"I am not making fun of his hair. I am merely stating a point."

"Well you had better not tease Ron too much," Tonks grin grew even wider, "or Ginny may just use that Bat-bogey hex again."

"Cousin," Draco began, gray eyes studying Tonks odd shade of hair, "I might remind you that you were the one who warned him about too many sweets. I am merely pointing out that he needs to control himself."

"Somehow I don't think Ron will ever be fat. He is always moving and doing something," Harry remarked casually. "Bald someday, maybe...but never fat," she teased, giving Ron a pat.

"I wouldn't worry about that Potter. Granger has enough hair for them both," Draco sneered.

"Hey, I will have you know that no one in my family has gone bald yet," Ron protested, "and I like Hermione's hair." He leaned over to give her a quick peck on the lips.

"So Harry, how did your lessons go today with Snape and Arsinoe?" Tonks asked changing the subject, while she morphed her hair to shiny silver.

"Quite well actually, but I do have some homework to do for Severus."

"Geeze Harry," Ron interjected, "you've graduated for Merlin's sake. Why in bloody hell is he still giving you homework?"

"I have to do the potions from memory and I got the Dreamless Sleeping Potion wrong. He wants a full parchment on the ingredients and the reasons why I screwed up."

"Very astute of him," Tonks agreed. "I understand that the Potion Master's exam is brutal."

"What else will you be doing?" Hermione questioned.

"I'm not entirely sure." Harry didn't want to let them know about the Draught of Living Death. "How about you, Neville, how is the apprenticeship going with Professor Sprout?" she inquired looking over at the young wizard.

"Great!" he beamed. "We're going to be doing all sorts of things. She is going to have me work with the more delicate plants and train me on their medicinal uses."

"Will you be doing any teaching?"

"Not until next semester. She wants me to do some more theory first and I will be working in the greenhouses growing some of the more difficult plants from scratch."

"That's good. This way you will get to see how much you really know about each one," Hermione nodded.

"How is the library coming Hermione?" Neville asked with interest.

"Oh, it's just great. I have reorganized most of the books and ordered some new ones on Transfiguration, Potions and Herbology."

"What, nothing on the Dark Arts?" Draco leered evilly.

"Well...not just yet," she hesitated, "I have to speak with Dumbledore first since those will be in the restricted section. I do have one or two in mind though."

"What about charms and spells?" Tonks queried.

"They seem to be pretty up to date. Apparently Madam Pince updated them at the end of last year."

"Hermione, what about Quidditch? You have to get some books on that. No library would be complete without them!" Ron exclaimed.

"I will look into it, Ron, but the textbooks really should come first."

"But, Mione...Quidditch is the heart of the competitive spirit. It is the one thing all the houses really have in common."

"Weasley's right," Draco agreed. "Even the teachers are avid fans. I'm sure some books or magazines on the sport and the new brooms or techniques would be a big hit with everyone."

"Merlin be praised," Harry rolled her eyes, "Draco actually agrees with Ron on something." The entire group laughed aloud while Ron and Draco blushed with embarrassment. Dumbledore looked down the table, blue eyes twinkling. Harry was sure the old man knew what was going on.

"Harry are you still going out tonight with Sirius and Remus?" Hermione questioned when the laughter died down.

"Yeah...you really don't think I would miss this opportunity for some good fun do you?" Harry smirked, trying to look innocent.

"Well be careful. Try not to let them get you into the forest. It's too dangerous in there."

"Oh Hermione," Ron shook his head, "Harry can take care of anything she comes across. Besides, she will have two of her protectors with her."

"Just the same, Ron," Tonks nodded, "Hermione is right. Harry needs to be extra careful. It would be prudent if you keep the goblet with you tonight as an added precaution."

"You don't think the Deathaters would really try something this close to Hogwarts again do you?" Draco asked nervously. Harry knew he was thinking about Lucius.

"I don't know. I'm surprised that Dumbledore is allowing any of them to go out but I suppose it will be good for Remus. His wolf needs to run once in awhile."

"Tonks I'll be fine. It's really unlikely that anything will happen," Harry frowned.

"Promise us you will be extra careful, Harry," Hermione begged worriedly.

"All right; if it makes you feel better, Hermione, I promise."

"Harry do you think that there will be another attempt on the school?" Neville's serious expression indicated his concern. "I could make sure we have a few more Whomping Willows ready and some Devil's Snare if you think we may need it."

"Hmm...I really don't think Voldemort will be that foolish a second time. He's not about to take on all of us again. What do you think, Draco?"

"The Dark Lord will wait until he feels he has the advantage. It would be too risky to try to get to you here. Nevertheless, you really should watch yourself while you're out, Potter. Don't let your Gryffindor bravado make you reckless."

"Humph..." Ron snorted, "even if Harry runs into trouble I bet Professor Lupin will tear them to pieces. It pays to know a friendly werewolf."

"Ron! You shouldn't say such things. Professor Lupin wouldn't like it! You know how he worries about harming anyone."

"Hermione has a good point. Even the night when the Death eaters trapped Sirius and cornered me in the forest Remus didn't bite or maul anyone. It would take a lot for him to do it. Even in wolf form he has amazing control," Harry remarked, remembering the night she had been sent back in time and Remus almost died from a silver bullet.

"You should still be careful." Hermione tossed her head.

"I said I would!" Harry exclaimed growing annoyed. Their concern for her safety, while well meaning, had put a damper on her mood.

"Harry, we don't mean to get you upset. If anyone needs some relaxation it's you," Hermione apologized.

"I know, I just don't want to think about it right now. I have enough on my plate to handle."

"Hey mate, is Dumbledore having the student teacher Quidditch match this year?" Ron inquired trying to lighten her mood.

"He didn't mention it, but I will bring it up at the staff meeting tomorrow. We are having some other activities though."

"Like what," Ron asked with interest.

"Another Yule Ball and a Valentine's Day dance, along with the regular feasts."

"I didn't know about the dances," Hermione commented, "but he did ask me to work on the Leaving Feast with Arsinoe."

"Well I'm on the Yule committee with Harry and Professors Lupin and Sprout," Neville chimed in.

"Who is going to be doing the Valentine's preparations, Harry? Do you have any information on it?"

"Actually, Dumbledore assigned Severus and Sirius," she giggled.

"You have got to be kidding!" Ron gasped. "That's like mixing armadillo bile and powdered dragon teeth!"

"I tried to talk him out of it," Harry chuckled. "If nothing else it should be interesting."

"I was considering setting our wedding date around then, but now I don't know," Hermione commented nervously.

"Mione, we could get married for the dance," Ron offered brightly. "It would be really neat. The whole school could attend along with all of our families."

"I don't know, Ron..."

"Come on...just think about it for awhile. It would be great."

"Well...I hate to take away from the student's dance," she replied slowly, considering the possibilities.

"I think it's a lovely idea," Tonks beamed. "Why don't the two of you think about it and talk with Dumbledore? He will probably do the ceremony."

"I really wanted to have a church wedding. My parents are Muggles and it would mean so much to them."

"Then why not do both?" Harry suggested.

"What do you mean?" Ron queried.

"Have a private wedding ceremony in the church for Hermione and then come back here. The Valentine's dance could also be your wedding reception."

"That's a great idea, Harry!" Neville chimed in. "I could do some of the flower arrangements for the tables. I bet Snape will be relieved not to have to see to that little chore."

"It will also be a safe place for your guests, Granger, should the situation with the Dark Lord still be unresolved as many will be Muggles."

"I think Draco is right, Hermione. Then you two could honeymoon somewhere tropical," Tonks commented with a grin.

Harry knew Tonks didn't want Hermione to worry over Draco's statement. She also could sense that her friend had been thinking this over in her mind.

"I don't know," Harry mused aloud, "I think Ron would rather be somewhere where the weather is chilly. It makes for good cuddling, not to mention foreplay."

"Harry!" Hermione's cheeks turned scarlet.

"You may just have something there," Ron laughed, hugging his fiancé.

"All right, we can do it for Valentine's Day so long as Harry agrees to be my Maid of Honor," Hermione conceded.

"What am I supposed to do for my best mate? I thought Harry would do both."

"If it will make Hermione happy I will only do the one. You can have one of your brothers as best man."

"No, too much competition," Ron considered thoughtfully. "Neville, would you do me the honor of being my best man?"

"Who me? You want me for your best man?"

"Yup, next to Harry you are one of my closest friends. I was going to ask you to be a groomsman anyway."

"I will be honored, then...and Ron...thanks for asking." Neville's brown eyes were bright with enthusiasm. "I promise to make sure everything goes off okay."

"Draco, since you're my partner, my sister's boyfriend, and a member of the Order, would you be one of the groomsmen?" Harry knew Ron was suppressing a grimace but his genuine affection for his sister had won out over his dislike of Draco.

"You flatter me Weasley. I will be honored," Draco replied with dignity. Harry's empathic senses told her he was genuinely surprised and flattered that he had been asked.

"Yeah and it's a good way to get to know each other better," Tonks laughed. "I'm sure Ginny will be delighted."

"Who else are you going to ask, Mione?" Harry inquired curiously.

"Ginny, of course," she smiled at Ron, "Luna, and Tonks." She grinned wickedly at the now purple haired witch.

"Really, you're asking me? But I am liable to trip walking up the aisle." Tonks looked ecstatic and amazed at the same time.

"Yes, will you be one of the bridesmaids? I think you will do splendidly."

"Then I'll do it!" Tonks exclaimed delightedly. "I even promise not to morph and turn my hair all kinds of colors."

"Um...Tonks what do you really look like?" Neville asked timidly. "I have only seen you when you have odd colored hair, and you always seem to be changing your features."

"Oh, that," she flushed. "I am just in the habit of experimenting. I often need to morph in a dangerous situation on the spur of the moment."

"So what do you look like?" Draco wondered with interest.

"Cousin, I tend to favor the Black side of the family," she laughed, changing her features into their natural state.

Harry realized she was not kidding. Her hair was a deep chocolate brown and her face was heart shaped, as Draco's mother's had been, but her eyes belonged to Sirius. They were the same deep brown, with a hint of amusement behind them, off set by fine dark brows and thick lashes. Her mouth had full lips though, and Harry knew Tonks had inherited that from her father. Her nose didn't seem to belong to either side of the family. It was long and aquiline, but not large. Overall, Harry found her to be quite attractive.

"Tonks, you should be yourself more often. You're really quite pretty," Ron remarked. "My brothers will be impressed."

"Thanks." She flushed at the compliment, quickly changing her face again to hide her embarrassment.

"Have you given any thought to who else you will have for groomsmen?" Harry asked, rescuing Tonks.

"I think I will have my brother, Charlie, and if Harry thinks he would accept, I would like to ask Remus," Ron remarked trying to sound casual. Harry noted he was sneaking a surreptitious glance in Tonks direction.

"Why don't you ask him? I think he would be flattered, Ron," Harry said, amused. "Hmm...Ron wants to play cupid. It would be an interesting match. I wonder if he realizes Remus is interested in Arsinoe. Then again, I could see Tonks with Sirius. I wish I didn't love him so much. Damn...why can't I make up my mind? I know he loves me too, but something isn't right. Well...I guess I will just have to wait and see. I know Sirius wouldn't have a problem dating Tonks though...all the Purebloods intermarry with their cousins and it's not like she's his first cousin after all..."

"Harry! Harry snap out of it!" Ron was shaking her arm.

"Oh...Sorry Ron. I was just thinking about something," Harry apologized. "What did you say?"

"I asked if you think I should go over and ask him now."

"I think he would like that. Just make sure you guys aren't getting married during a full moon."

"No. It will actually be during the new moon if we do it for Valentine's Day," Hermione put in knowledgably.

"How do you know that?" Ron questioned wonderingly.

"I checked all the phases of the full and new moons for the upcoming year so we could plan around Professor Lupin. It wouldn't be fair to him if he couldn't attend or was feeling unwell."

"That's our Hermione." Harry beamed.

"I think you should also check with Dumbledore to make certain that he doesn't mind your combining your wedding reception with the dance," Draco suggested.

"I don't think he will, but you do make a valid point Draco," Tonks agreed.

"Then we should go over and talk to them both right now," Hermione remarked, rising. "Oh and Harry, do you think I should have a flower girl? Phaedra has been helping me in the library and she is adorable. Do you think the Snapes would mind if she were in the wedding too? My family is really small and I don't have any little cousins."

"I don't think they will mind at all. I know Phaedra will be thrilled. Just hope she doesn't get herself into too much mischief. She is very precocious," Harry smirked, noting that Tiberius and Circe had entered the Great Hall. Phaedra looked a bit downcast and Harry knew she must have gotten into some kind of trouble.

"Humph," Ron grunted. "I am sure Fred and George will provide more than enough entertainment!"

"You don't think they will cause any trouble with their tricks do you?" Hermione looked nervous at the prospect.

"If they do I will hex them from here to Jupiter, love," Ron laughed, giving her a reassuring hug.

"Then let's go and talk with them now. Once everything is settled, we should owl our parents and let them know our plans. I will need to start planning." Hermione pulled Ron after her, heading over to where the Headmaster and Professor Lupin were sitting.

Harry watched the scene unfold with interest. Dumbledore was listening to them intently, blue eyes twinkling merrily, as he glanced over at Harry. She saw him make a few comments and nod happily. Professor Lupin looked uncomfortable, but she could tell they were assuring him that there would be no full moon. He seemed to consider their proposal for a few moments. Harry noted that Sirius was resting his hand on top of Remus' from across the table. Remus caught her gaze and deftly withdrew his hand. He said a few more words to Ron. Glancing back at Harry with a nod, a faint smile played about his lips as he shook Ron's hand in acceptance. Ron was grinning from ear to ear. Sirius whispered something to him while Hermione moved off to speak with the Snapes, who had joined Severus and Professor McGonagall. Whatever Sirius had said Ron's, face was bright red. Harry thought his face would crack if his smile got any bigger. Her attention was suddenly interrupted by a loud whoop from Phaedra. The child was bouncing up and down with excitement, hugging her mother. Leaping up from the table, she ran over to Harry.

"Miss Harry, Miss Harry!" she squealed. "I am going to be a flower girl in Miss Hermione and Mr. Ron's wedding. Are you in it too?"

"Yes, Phaedra, I am the maid of honor," Harry answered warmly.

"That sounds very important. What do you do?"

"I make sure all of the bride's needs are taken care of and help her get ready for the ceremony."

"Oh...that is a very special job," Phaedra replied, shaking her head.

"When you marry Uncle Sev will I be in your wedding?"

"Ahem..." Harry cleared her throat, "what makes you think I will marry your Uncle Severus?"

"This should be quite interesting, Potter," Draco chimed in from where he was sitting beside Tonks.

"I just know Miss Harry is going to marry him. I dreamed about it."

"Phaedra, just because you dream about something doesn't mean it is going to happen. It is just your hidden desire that it will happen," Harry explained, trying not to upset the little girl. Her heart was racing in her chest as she remembered the scene in the dungeons that afternoon.

"No, Miss Harry, it is going to happen but not for awhile yet. I know it will." Phaedra was looking at Harry with an odd expression in her eyes. It reminded her of Luna...or maybe Trelawney...far away and spooky. Harry suppressed a shudder, and smiled at the little girl.

"They say if you want something bad enough it will happen," she told Phaedra.

"They also say be careful what you wish for," Draco sneered.

"It isn't my wish, Draco. It's Phaedra's."

"Don't believe me!" Phaedra pouted stamping her foot. "But I know it will happen."

Severus had been sitting watching the exchange and noticed his niece becoming angry. He silently rose, walking over to where Harry and Draco were sitting with Tonks and Neville. Seeing Severus approach, Neville hurriedly excused himself, stating he needed to speak with Professor Sprout. He still had an irrational fear of Snape.

"Phaedra, what is the problem? I believe you were told earlier about your behavior?"

"Uncle Sev... Miss Harry and Draco were making fun of me! They don't believe that she is going to marry you just because I dreamed it!" She tossed her head in frustration.

"That will be enough, Phaedra. A dream does not mean that something you saw is real. All people dream about things they would like," he said annoyed. Harry didn't fail to notice the edge to his voice as he glanced swiftly over at her, eyes unreadable.

"Uncle Sev, I dreamed it. I know it is going to happen!"

"I said that is enough and I meant it," he warned his niece sternly. "Very few dreams foretell the future."

"Then why do I have to tell everyone when I dream about the bad wizard?" she protested defiantly.

"The Dark Lord is able to get into people's minds and make them do things. We are merely making sure he is not doing this to you."

"Oh...could he make me hurt someone?"

"Phaedra why would you ask that?" Harry questioned.

"Because I want to know. I know he is a bad man and I am afraid he will make me do something bad to you."

"Phaedra, he can't make you do anything bad to me," Harry responded, giving her a gentle hug, "but he may try to find out what I am doing so you need to be careful. If you dream about him you're to yell at him and tell him to go away."

"I will, Miss Harry, and if he says bad things I will tell my Mummy right away."

"Good girl. Now go on and eat your dinner. I know you must be hungry."

"I am. What is for dessert?"

"Treacle tarts, pudding, or ice cream."

"Yummy," she giggled patting her stomach. "I am going to eat all my dinner and maybe Mummy will let me have an extra dessert." The adults all smiled at the child's fondness for sweets.

"Go on then, Phaedra. I see your mother is waiting for you," Severus directed. The child scampered off and Severus turned his attention back to Harry. "Harry, I need not remind you that you have a lesson in the morning following the staff meeting. I will expect you to be on time and have that parchment done."

"Yes, Professor Snape," she laughed, pretending to cower under his gaze. Harry didn't miss the slight smile that passed his lips.

"Good night then. Enjoy your evening with Lupin and Black," he said nodding. Harry watched him leave before turning to her friends. Ron and Hermione had just returned.

"Well, mate, everything is all set. We will be married on Valentine's Day and the reception will be here in the Great Hall. We're off now to the owlery to let our parents know the good news."

"Molly will be delighted, as well as your folks, Hermione."

"I can't wait to tell them," she beamed. "Harry, we need to start looking at dresses. Do you think I should go with robes or the traditional Muggle wedding dress?"

"Do both, you can wear a white robe over the gown or since it will be winter you might want a long cloak."

"Hmm...That might be a good idea."

"Come on, Mione, lets get on up to the owlery and get our letters off.. You and Harry will have lots of time to talk over the next couple of weeks."

"All right, Ron. Harry we will see you tomorrow. Have fun and be careful."

"Yes, Mummy," she answered sarcastically. Ron laughed and Hermione just shook her head as they moved off.

"We have to get going too," Tonks informed her. "Draco is on night duty with Kingsley Shacklebolt. He could do with a nap before he has to report and I have a volume of paperwork to catch up on."

"I will walk out with you then. I still have to do Severus little homework assignment before I go out and would like to take a fast shower."

Harry, Tonks, and Draco left the Great Hall together. On the way out Harry noticed that Sirius and Remus had already gone up. The moon would be rising soon and she knew that Remus needed to rest for the transformation.

Reaching her room, she was greeted by Snuffles. Harry was happy to see that Dobby had fed her. The house elf had taken it as his solemn duty to take care of Harry's dog. He saw to it that she was fed and walked several times a day. He was also helping Phaedra with her dog, Hannibal. The two pets would soon be sent down to Hagrid though, as Dumbledore felt it would be better once the school term started. The Headmaster had assured Phaedra that she could visit Hannibal whenever she wished.

Harry decided to get her homework over with first. Sitting down at her desk, she pulled out some parchment and her Potions books. It didn't take her long to find what she had done wrong. 'What a stupid mistake. I put the two main ingredients in backwards,' she muttered to herself ruefully. 'At least I had them all correct, even if they were in the wrong order.' It took her about an hour to write them out correctly and explain how the potion had been affected by her error. She also discovered that she had inadvertently created a slow acting poison. Shuddering, Harry realized why Severus was so particular. She could have killed someone if they had drunk it.

Satisfied with her work, she sighed, and put her books away. Taking a good stretch, she checked her watch. It was nine thirty and she would have to hurry to be downstairs by ten. Following a quick shower, she put on clean robes and put her hair up in a ponytail. Satisfied with her appearance, she gave Snuffles a quick pet and a dog treat before leaving the room.

Reaching the main doors Harry went outside and looked around. The moon was casting its silvery light over the landscape. She spotted Padfoot waiting patiently with Moony, or as she had come to call Remus' wolf form, Captain. Harry did not transform immediately. Instead, she walked slowly over to where they were both sitting beneath the large Oak tree, not far from the Whomping willow. Padfoot wagged his tail in greeting. Moony looked on warily and Harry approached him slowly with a soft greeting.

"Hello, Captain Moony." She cautiously extended her hand, while his sensitive nose identified her scent. He wagged his tail in greeting, yellow eyes reflecting the moonlight. "You are one beautiful wolf," she told him, running her hands over his thick coat. Padfoot gently nudged her from behind, playfully poking his nose to her rear, in a doggy style greeting. "Hey, that isn't funny Padfoot," she flushed. She could see he was grinning wickedly. "Who ever thinks dogs don't smile needs to have their eyes examined!" she muttered. Moony tilted his head, looking towards where the lawn sloped gently away from the castle. Harry knew he wanted to run and play. "All right you two. I know you want to have some fun. Just give me a second to transform." Stepping back gingerly, she closed her eyes. A split second later, her beautiful phoenix was standing majestically in front of them.

"Very nice, Love," Padfoot's voice came into her mind. Harry knew they could understand one another mentally.

"How do you feel Moony?" she asked the werewolf, ignoring her godfather.

"Fine, but I need to let off some steam." He circled around her, nose twitching as he studied her animagus form and scent. "Obey our leads, my little cub, since you are new to our pack." Harry understood that the wolf part of Moony was putting her into the pecking order of the pack. He would protect her, but would brook no nonsense.

"Now Moony, you know Wings will behave. It is her first time out with us and I think she understands enough to follow our orders." Padfoot touched Moony's nose with his own affectionately.

"So long as I have the room to fly; just don't let me lose sight of you in the underbrush."

"We will make sure you don't become separated from us Wings," Moony nudged her gently with his soft muzzle. "Now let us be on our way," he howled, running in the direction of the Forbidden Forest, Padfoot on his heels.

"Shit! I forgot to ask them to avoid the forest...not that they would have anyway..." Harry muttered flying after them.

Moony and Padfoot were enjoying their run through the forest and Harry could see them romping and growling as they chased some small animal. Remus actually caught a rabbit, but Harry let out a screech of anxiety when she saw it, so Moony released the terrified animal from his jaws, holding it down with one paw. Padfoot was laughing wildly.

"See Moony, I told you she would yell. She just doesn't appreciate a good rabbit."

"Moony is well fed and doesn't need to hunt his food!" Harry protested.

"What about me, love? I could use a snack. Chasing after Moony does cause me to work up an appetite."

"Stop teasing me, both of you!" Harry was growing upset, and she knew it was the Phoenix in her that wanted to make sure the rabbit was truly unscathed. Going over to the small rabbit, she began to trill a Phoenix song, and it immediately calmed down. Seeing a small scratch on its back, Harry noted that it had been injured in the undergrowth and would not last long in the forest. The predators would kill it. She began to cry. Her tears fell on the soft grey fur of the rabbit. Padfoot and Moony could not believe their eyes. Harry's natural healing ability had also manifested itself in the Phoenix tears!

"Miss Wings, did you know your tears had healing powers, just like a real Phoenix?" Padfoot questioned.

"No...This is...the first time that...has ever happened."

"You have saved this little rabbit tonight, Wings. I did not intend to eat him. However, another wolf would have made short work of him with the injury." Moony gently nudged the rabbit and it ran off into the underbrush. He then studied Harry thoughtfully. "Albus will want to know about this newly manifested ability of your bird," he nuzzled her affectionately.

"Perhaps we should make our way back now. I can sleep until the moon sets."

"Just when I was having fun," the Phoenix chirped.

"Me too, Moony, let's stay out a bit longer. We can skirt the edge of the forest and come back by way of the Quidditch pitch."

"Very well, Padfoot. Let's go. Miss Wings, you will need to fly low as the trees are dense and we will be very near to Aragog's nesting sites. It would do you no good to get snared and become a spider snack."

"Yech...I was already nearly a troll's dinner. Must we venture so close to Aragog's territory?"

"What, getting like Ron now?" Padfoot teased, aware of her friend's fear of spiders.

"No, I just don't need the added excitement in my life right now. The Dark Lord is quite enough thank you."

Remus suddenly stopped, lifting one paw as his nose twitched furiously. His hackles were raised on his back, and his golden eyes were wide as his ears pricked. Padfoot too, was sniffing the air, and Harry could sense they were in danger. Something or someone was in the forest with them.. In that moment, she wished the Phoenix had the sense of smell that the canines did.

"Wings, you need to get back to the castle as fast as possible. You are in danger. We all are," Moony growled softly.

"What is it, Moony. What do you and Padfoot smell?"

"There is something unnatural in the forest tonight...and another wolf."

"I don't think it is a werewolf though. It doesn't have the human scent with it," Padfoot commented.

"No, but it is accompanied by the something cold...something inhuman...come on. We need to move with caution. Fly low and stay near us."

Harry did as she was told. Her empathy told her that Remus was nervous. Whatever was in the wind it was ahead of them. It was too far to turn around and go back the way they had come.

"Padfoot, I think there is something else in the forest tonight too. I have the feeling we are being followed."

"I know, Miss Wings, but I do not sense any danger from whoever is following."

"Have they been there long?"

"No," Moony interrupted. "Now both of you keep quiet," he directed, as the baleful howl of another wolf filled the air from up ahead of them...

The silent figure of a canine followed the three Marauders furtively. It had picked up their trail about ten minutes ago, having followed the scent of the werewolf from where they had left the castle. Staying downwind to avoid having its scent picked up, the dark gray of its coat helped to shield it in the darkness. The animal meant merely to follow and watch, but now realized that there was trouble ahead. The scent of evil was in the air, along with that of a wolf. There was also a new and unfamiliar scent, which was reminiscent of dung. Keeping

low to the ground, it slunk in the shadows, muscles taut and ready to attack that which was waiting up ahead....

The tall blond man stood silently, watching the caged wolf pace back and forth. He was awaiting the arrival of his master, who had gone to get one of his favorite toys. Tonight would be the last time that annoying little half-blood Potter would cause them any more trouble. It had been sheer luck that he had seen Potter leave the castle with the werewolf and Black. The Dark Lord had been pleased and immediately went into action. He had sent him on ahead with the wolf he had secured from the Italian Alps. The Dark Lord originally intended to have the wolf maul a few Muggles and Muggle borns, blaming it on Lupin. The werewolf would have been hard pressed to prove otherwise. Even with his friends in control of the Ministry, at the very least he would have been sent to Azkaban.

Black was now an added bonus, as was the Potter brat, herself. Now they could stop her once and for all. There was no way the three of them could stand up to this little trap, and Potter would have to transform back to human form to fight. They would see to it that she could not fly out of the forest this time. She would be outnumbered and away from the castle. There was no way she could get help in time. A soft pop announced the arrival of the Dark Lord.

"Master, I have been awaiting your arrival," he said kneeling and kissing the hem of the taller man's robes. "The wolf is most anxious to go on the hunt." His master made a swift motion indicating he should stand.

"Yes, Lucius, he will be freed soon." Voldemort's red eyes shown with glee. "Blaylock will be here in a minute," he laughed, looking towards the loud rustling coming their way. "I have also summoned several of the Dementors. They are moving through the forest amongst the shadows as we speak. Potter will find herself in quite a little battle. Her weakness is that she will want to protect the werewolf and Black. She will have to transform to fight the Dementors. Blaylock and the wolf will keep the other two more than busy. I promised one of them to Blaylock. He hasn't had fresh meat in awhile..." The Dark Lord laughed maliciously. Suddenly a large troll stepped from the trees. He was close to eight feet in height with gray skin and large yellow eyes. He leered at Lord Voldemort, displaying gaping spaces between his rotting teeth. His breath was fetid and his body smelled of rot and decay, reminiscent of fertilizer. The wolf whined in fear.

"Blaylock has arrived, My Lord," Malfoy addressed his master, wrinkling his nose in disgust.

"I can see that for myself, Lucius. You may release the wolf. Blalock will follow him."

"Yes, My Lord," Malfoy replied opening the cage. The wolf ran as if possessed into the forest, Blaylock charging in after him. He carried a primitive slingshot and spiked club.

"Come Lucius, this should be quite interesting." Voldemort glided into the forest, following in the wake of the troll. Lucius Malfoy dutifully followed two steps behind...

"Harry, I want you to fly out of here as quickly as possible," Moony growled softly. The other wolf is coming towards us."

"Moony, if I am not mistaken a troll is following behind him." Padfoot sniffed the air. The odor of the troll caused him to sneeze violently.

"They aren't alone...I...can feel...Dementors..." Harry gasped, a wave of cold and despair washing over her. "Oh...he's...coming...too..."

"Who?" Moony and Padfoot asked in unison.

"Vol...Voldemort..." Harry managed to utter as a gasp of pain shot through her head and six Dementors materialized amongst the trees.

"Harry, whatever you do, don't transform!" Padfoot hissed. "They can't discern your emotions as an animal."

Harry nodded, as a loud squawk erupted from her throat. "Moony, look out."

The wolf had come through the trees and was circling Remus. Padfoot moved to help just as a huge gray troll erupted from the trees, wielding his club at Padfoot.

"Harry, get out of here now!" Moony yelled as he moved to attack the troll and help his friend just as the wolf leaped onto his back.

Werewolf and wolf were locked in a life or death struggle. Padfoot was growling at the troll, hackles on end, as the mighty creature swung his club, missing as the huge black dog leaped to the left. Harry wanted to help but knew they wanted her to leave, and she would have done so but she was feeling the cold of the Dementors, as they closed in around her. Her animagus form was not helping...Voldemort must have told them to go after the Phoenix! Harry had no choice but to transform, and go for her wand.

"*Expecto Patronus!*" she screamed, thinking about kissing each of her protectors. Immediately the stag appeared. Harry noted that he seemed bigger and stronger than usual as she directed him towards the ring of Dementors closing in on her.

Padfoot suddenly yelped in pain, as the Troll's club connected with his back leg. Crack! His hip was broken and he fell to the ground. The troll moved in for the kill. Harry raised her wand directly at the horrible creature. "*Stupefy,*" she yelled as the red stream hit the troll in the head and he crashed to the ground just as a second onslaught of Dementors arrived. Unfortunately, the troll was only stunned, and sat up groggily just as Harry sent another Patronus out towards the Dementors.

Padfoot was trying to stand, and the troll once again raised his club as a small gray animal the size of a dog raced into the foray and attacked, biting him on the back, but the troll threw him off. Harry vaguely recognized the animal as being a coyote, and not a dog. Somewhere in the back of her mind, she found this rather odd, as coyotes were not native to Britain. In the meantime, Remus was still engaged in battle with the wolf. The werewolf had the wolf by the throat, shaking him vigorously, but the wolf was somehow able to free himself just as the troll made a move towards Harry.

The next thing she knew the coyote was racing back into the foray, and Harry froze in shock. The coyote was changing shape...growing larger and more compact. Its coat was also going from gray to golden with dark spots, and a deep growl came from its throat as long claws erupted from its paws, as the jaguar, for it was now a jaguar, sprang onto the troll's back, slicing it open. The troll howled in pain, and Padfoot took the opportunity to bite his foot, where it was resting beside his injured body on the ground.

Just when Harry thought they were going to win, a sharp pain pierced her scar, tearing it open. She new Voldemort was watching, and looked up to see him gliding towards her through the trees, Lucius Malfoy following. Still she refused to give up, and hit the troll with another stunning spell, while the jaguar joined Moony in the fight with the wolf.

"Don't kill the wolf!" Harry yelled out. "He was merely used by Voldemort."

"Potter! We meet again!" Voldemort's icy voice drifted through the trees. "I see you are as devoted to your friends as ever, but it won't help you this time. I cannot be killed in the conventional manner. For me there will be no more death, nor for my faithful servant, Lucius."

"Incendio!" Harry shouted aiming her wand at the trees separating the two men from them. The forest floor immediately was ignited into a ball of fire. The troll bellowed in anger, as he regained his footing and picked up Padfoot, slinging him over his shoulder. The animagus was helpless and immediately transformed, as the wolf, recognizing defeat, ran off in terror. The jaguar was about to leap onto the Troll when a stream of what appeared to be rope looped itself around the troll's ankles.

"Harry, get out of here, now!" Padfoot screamed. "The spiders are attacking!"

"I will not leave you," she sobbed, just as she saw a green bubble shoot into the sky. Voldemort had sent up his dark mark.

"Good night and farewell Potter," his maniacal laughter filled the forest. I didn't summon the spiders, but they will finish what my servants started. Should they fail to do so, I will stop you with the one thing even you will be unable to resist. Lord Voldemort knows what secrets hide within your soul," Voldemort glared, red eyes glowing against the backdrop of the flames, laughing ominously. This was followed by two pops as Voldemort and Malfoy disappeared.

Harry flicked her wand to put out the fire, and stood at the ready to defend Padfoot. He had fallen back to the ground when the troll was flung off balance. The jaguar and Moony had also positioned themselves in front of Harry and Padfoot. The troll was slowly being dragged away as more spider silk wrapped itself around his struggling body. This was followed by a loud clicking noise. The group was suddenly confronted by Aragog's enormous body.

"Hello friend of Hagrid," he addressed Harry. "You have done well to stand up to the evil one who blamed Hagrid and me for the death of that girl so long ago..."

"Thank you Aragog," Harry replied, glancing around nervously. She knew that his children were somewhere nearby. "I see you have trapped the troll, but what of the wolf?"

"He was an innocent victim. If you wish we will return him to you."

"Please. He was cruelly used."

Aragog said something in an odd clicking tongue that they couldn't understand. Another spider moved forward and dropped a small sack in front of Harry. She could tell the wolf was still alive as it was moving, trying to fight its way out of the spider's silken cocoon.

"What of the troll?" Sirius asked quietly.

"He shall provide fresh meat for my children," Aragog stated matter of factly. "He shall not be returned. He was a follower of the evil one."

Harry thought she would be sick. Moony was sniffing at the silk sack containing the wolf, and the jaguar continued to place its body between where Harry was kneeling beside Sirius and the giant spider.

"This one is new to our forest and comes from a land far away, as I did. You will be welcome here as are the werewolf and the animagi. I know what you are, but take heed...the forest is a dangerous place. While you have my promise of safety, there are other perils for which I cannot guarantee protection."

The large cat growled in understanding as Aragog called the other spiders to return to the nest, just as Dumbledore, Ron, Severus and Hagrid came through the trees.

"Aragog!" Hagrid called. "Aragog...don't hurt my friends."

"Hagrid, I will not cause them any injury. They are welcome here any time."

"What happened?" Dumbledore questioned.

"The evil one was here. He is an abomination of nature and must be stopped," Aragog explained.

"The Dark Lord was here?" Snape narrowed his eyes.

"Bloody Hell, Harry. Can't you even go for a night out without getting into trouble?" Ron grinned.

"It just seems to find me," she shrugged. "Aragog came along just in time," Harry indicated the giant arachnid. Ron gulped, and was noticeably paler. "I guess the goblet fired?" Ron merely nodded, eyeing Aragog warily.

"It was my pleasure to assist. It also provided us with our meal. Now I will leave, friend of Hagrid." The spider disappeared into the darkness of the forest.

"Uh...Harry...did you know that you are standing with a jaguar?"

"Ron, I am aware I have a jaguar standing in front of me. In fact this cat used to be a coyote."

"Potter," Snape drawled, "neither animal lives in this country, and to top it off you appear to be prattling."

"Phoenix's don't either, but I can still become one. I think you will all find that this jaguar is in fact Arsinoe Darkmoon. She is an animagus multiplico." Harry glanced at Dumbledore, who was studying her shrewdly, blue eyes twinkling merrily.

"You are quite correct, Harry," Arsinoe smiled as she transformed.

"I'll be damned," Sirius growled, and Remus wagged his tail.

"Hagrid if you will take that spider sack, I think you will find it contains a wolf. He may be injured and I know he is frightened. Can you help him?" Harry asked solemnly.

"Course I ken," he smiled. "I'll jus' go and see to 'im now." He scooped up the sack, putting a small slit into it for air, and headed off back towards the castle and his cottage.

"Padfoot, let me heal you," Harry said brushing the hair from his face, leaning over to give him a soft kiss on the forehead.

"I'll be all right, love. You need to get back to the castle. Poppy can tend to me there."

"Not until I know you're all right," she argued, running her hands over his injuries. "I will just patch you up quickly so that you can walk. Poppy can do the rest."

Harry was tired, and felt drained, but knew she had enough energy to at least mend some of Sirius injuries. She moved her wand over him along with her hands, and smiled in satisfaction. His hip was healed enough for him to stand, and she helped him up.

"Thanks Honey. Have I told you lately that you are amazing?" Sirius brown eyes were warm with tenderness and affection.

"Not really, but I kind of think you're pretty amazing too," she answered as he balanced himself between Severus and Ron to keep the weight off his partially healed hip.

"Are we going to have another moment of greeting card drivel?" Snape sneered.

"I think it's more of a love scene where the heroine kisses the handsome rogue, Severus," Dumbledore remarked amused. Harry just smiled. Sirius leaned down and tilted her head up, kissing her passionately.

"Ahem...If you two are done giving each other a tongue lashing I have some things which need attending to up at the castle. Headmaster...their behavior is most..."

"I do believe you are jealous, Severus. You didn't seem to mind when you kissed Harry earlier in the day."

Harry pulled away from Sirius, who was looking from her to Severus. The other wizard had drawn himself up to his full height, and Harry was unable to meet either of their eyes. She wondered if there was anything Albus Dumbledore didn't know that went on inside the walls of Hogwarts.

"Love," Sirius soft voice breathed, "you don't have to feel embarrassed or upset over kissing the greasy git." He glared at Severus. "You know we all care for you, and want you to be happy. It will be up to you if it will be with one of us or someone else."

Harry shyly looked up at her godfather, who gave her one of his famous smiles, then kissed her again. "Come on, let's get back up to Hogwarts."

The small group walked through the forest in silence, Moony leading the way, tail wagging. He was followed by Arsinoe, who was walking with Albus. Harry was behind them, and Ron and Severus were helping Sirius.

"Harry, may I inquire as to whether you tried your new animagus form tonight also?" Arsinoe questioned as they left the forest and headed up the lawn.

"What new animagus form?" Sirius questioned. Moony turned his head, ears pricked.

"Harry has discovered her other half," Snape sneered. "The one she generally likes to deny exists."

"Knock it off, Severus," Harry pouted. "I have never denied that I was put into Gryffindor after I told the Sorting Hat not put me into Slytherin."

"Harry, are you telling us you can also change into a serpent?" Sirius questioned with interest.

"Harry, doesn't Vol...Voldemort...well doesn't he turn into a serpent too?" Ron asked nervously, stumbling over the Dark Lord's name.

"Yes to both of your questions, but Voldemort's serpent is a viper. Mine is a constrictor. It happens to be a green tree boa. I think they are from South America."

"You are quite right, Harry," Arsinoe beamed. "They're also among the prettiest snakes in the world."

"Can we see it, love?"

"I already have, along with the Headmaster and Arsinoe."

"You showed Severus and didn't even mention it to Moony and me?" Sirius asked, sounding a bit miffed.

"I would have told you both tonight, but something told me not to do so until later. I think it best if Voldemort does not learn of this either. Not yet, anyway."

"You are quite correct, Harry," Dumbledore agreed. However, I believe it would be safe to transform now. We can circle around you for added security should you be worried someone may be watching."

"I think after that battle in the forest, my two canine protectors would like to see what I look like, but I would prefer to wait until Moony is back to his human self."

"I didn't mean to press you," Sirius apologized. Moony whined softly indicating he understood. "Why don't you come to our room in the morning and have breakfast with me. We can help Moony to recover together. You can show us then."

"My goodness, Mr. Black, are you trying to get me into a compromising position?" Harry teased, and they all laughed.

"Well, Miss Potter, I would never do anything that you didn't agree to. Besides, you have been known to sleep with me in the same bed on occasion." Except for Arsinoe, they all knew he was referring to the times when he would stay with Harry when she was hurt or upset. The older witch merely ducked her head trying not to look shocked.

"Arsinoe, Harry and Sirius are pulling your leg. He stays with Harry when she is upset or injured, and the others will too," Ron laughed as they reached the castle.

"Oh...was my...er...I didn't mean to misconstrue..."she faltered.

"No offense taken, Miss Darkmoon," Sirius smiled. "Harry and I like to tease once in awhile."

Arsinoe nodded, as they made their way to the infirmary, and Dumbledore went to wake Madam Pomfrey. They returned a short while later to find Harry alone with Sirius, helping him off with his robes. Moony was sitting at the bottom of the bed, ears pricked, watching. The moon was low in the sky but would not set for at least two more hours. Harry had not realized they had been roaming the forest for several hours before they were attacked.

"It is good to see that you are uninjured for a change, Harry," Poppy chuckled. "I felt sure that the Headmaster was waking me up to patch you up again."

"Sorry, Poppy. I'll have to remember to keep you busy in the future."

"That won't be necessary. I am busy enough now as it is." Madam Pomfrey turned her attention to Sirius. "Well, Mr. Black," she remarked running her wand over him, "I see Harry partially healed you. What happened, Harry? Did you run out of healing energy?"

"Not completely, but I am exceptionally tired and had to not only transform, but take on a troll, a group of Dementors, and a certain evil wizard."

"So...it's true...the Necromancy worked. He's come back."

"Unfortunately, Poppy. Now that we have all actually seen him I must go and notify Arthur."

"Headmaster," Harry looked up, "I think it would be wise to notify the public that he may be about. Just let them know enough so they can be prepared in the event of an attack."

"What would you have us say, Child?"

"Tell them that the Deathaters have tried a dark spell involving Necromancy in an effort to revive the Dark Lord's body. Let them know that is why it was stolen. Don't tell them he has been seen yet. Just warn them that it is unclear if the spell worked and they should remain on guard."

"I think she's got a great future in politics. She just said everything and nothing," Sirius quipped.

"Indeed, I shall discuss her idea with Arthur. Poppy when can Sirius return to his room?"

"I want him to spend the rest of the night here. I will release him in time for the staff meeting in the morning."

"Now, Madam Pomfrey..."he stared to object.

"You shut up and lay down, Sirius Black," Harry admonished, pointing her wand at him. "You will do as Madam Pomfrey says."

Poppy and Dumbledore both burst out laughing at the exchange, while Moony nudged Sirius gently with his nose, pushing him down on the bed with his front paws.

"I can see that it will do no good to argue," Sirius grumbled good-naturedly. "Harry will you see that Moony gets downstairs okay?"

"Moony and I are both staying here to make sure you don't sneak off."

"Now, Harry, I do not believe that will be necessary," Dumbledore told her quietly.

"No, I am staying, Headmaster. So unless you plan on stunning me and levitating me back to my quarters..."

"No," Dumbledore laughed, "even I know better than to argue with a powerful young witch once her mind has been made up."

"Thank you." Harry beamed happily. "Poppy, why don't you go on back to bed. I think I can manage Sirius for the rest of the night."

"It isn't Sirius I'm concerned about. Professor Lupin will be transforming soon..."

"He will be fine. I can help him once the transformation is completed. Is there anything you usually give him?"

"He likes hot chocolate and I give him a glass of the Pepper-up Potion mixed with healing herbs."

"Do you have the potion ready?"

"I will see that it is left out for you before I retire to my room. You can summon the house elves for his cocoa, and he will need clean robes."

"Right," Harry nodded. "Moony, get up on the other bed on the opposite side of Sirius'. I will rest on this one." Harry indicated the two beds, and watched the wolf do as he was told. She then stretched out on the other bed

"I shall bid you all good night, then," Dumbledore remarked, blue eyes twinkling. "I will send Arthur an owl as soon as I get back to my office and request that he reply by floo first thing in the morning."

"Do we get to hear his answer?"

"I happen to know it will do no good to try and keep it a secret from a certain Little Phoenix."

"I'll take that as a yes," Harry responded, grinning. "Poppy, I promise to call you right away if either of my two charges has a problem."

"See that you do, Miss. I am still waiting for you to do your hospital study for your healing license."

"I fully intend to, but first we have a few more important matters to deal with. In the mean time I think I read that I can do some clinical hours with a licensed healer in a clinic or infirmary type setting?"

"Ah...so she wants to work for me, Albus."

"I think we may be able to work it in from time to time, Poppy," Dumbledore told her as they both left the infirmary. "Although she has quite a bit...." Harry didn't hear the rest of the conversation as the door closed behind them.

"Now let me see..."she considered, then tapped her wand and called Dobby's name.

"Harry Potter, Dobby is happy to see you are unhurt."

"Dobby I am not even going to ask how you know I had an altercation with a certain wizard tonight. Right now I need you to bring Professor Lupin clean robes, and see that we all get some hot cocoa and breakfast at about six in the morning."

"Dobby will take care of Professor Lupin's clothes and see you all get the cocoa and something to eat."

"Thank you, Dobby," she said patting him on the head. The elf blushed and then snapped his fingers, disappearing with a pop.

Rising from the bed, Harry went over to where Remus had stretched out on the other bed. She sat down slowly, and began to pet him gently. She could sense his anxiety, noting he was starting to pant and look out the window at the slowly sinking moon.

"He was right, Honey, it was a rough one this month."

"Is there anything we can do for him?"

"Just what you are doing now. He knows we're here for him, and has told me on more than one occasion how much that means to him. Somehow it makes it more bearable."

"Then I will just stay here and keep petting him till the moon sets and he starts to change."

"Ah...Harry...you know he will be stark naked?"

"That's why I sent for his robes. He has nothing I haven't seen before..."

"Excuse me, Miss Wings?"

"Sirius, you seem to forget I posed as the opposite sex and lived in the boys' dorm for a number of years."

"But there was no way you could go around undressed."

"Only before my breasts developed. I could leave off my shirt and I wore boys underclothes...remember?"

"Still you kept yourself covered down below...Oh..." Sirius eyes widened for a minute as he realized that Harry may have kept herself hidden but her roommates certainly did not.

"Yeah, right..." she blushed. "They got me out of there in the nick of time."

"I should say so," Sirius frowned.

"Especially with Seamus Finnigan. He liked to call himself the Magic Wand of Ireland, and he wasn't speaking about the one he bought at Ollivander's," Harry snickered. "He was...shall we say...quite open and proud of what Mother Nature had given him?"

"Harry!" Sirius exclaimed pretending to be shocked, but he was laughing.

"What? You think it was easy pretending not to notice. Anyway, we all fixed him. Dean put a spell on his privates while he was asleep. He turned them green and put an engorgement charm on him at the same time..." Harry started laughing hysterically at the memory.

"Needless...to ...say...he couldn't...go...to class...that day. He was too...embarrassed to...come to....Madam Pomfrey....too."

"I have a good mind to take you over my knee, young lady," Sirius stated trying to sound firm and parent like, but failing miserably.

"Now don't go getting kinky on me," she teased. Sirius laughed and threw his pillow at her. Moony looked up, and Harry swore he was smiling.

They just rested and dozed for the rest of the night until the moon disappeared below the horizon. Harry tried not to watch as Moony transformed, but could not remove her eyes. She cringed as she heard his bones breaking and reshaping. His face flattened and the hair on his body reminded her of a camera being run in reverse as it disappeared back into his follicles. As soon as the transformation was completed, she pulled the sheet over his body to allow him some privacy, gently kissing his forehead. Sirius had come to stand beside Remus bed.

"He's okay, Honey. He just needs to rest."

"I know. I just hate to seem him hurting like that."

"I hate to have you see me hurting," Remus remarked, opening his eyes, "but I'm glad you're both here with me."

"We aim to please," Sirius answered with a chuckle.

"So are we going to get to see your snake? Or was that Seamus Finnegan's?" Remus quipped.

"I am going to pretend I didn't hear that." Harry blushed rolling her eyes. "I will do a quick transformation before Dobby gets here and brings us our breakfast."

Harry stood back and did the spells in her mind, and while she still was not used to doing the snake, she executed the difficult magic with little effort. Sirius and Remus were both pleased, and she climbed up Remus bedpost and coiled her tail up next to him before changing back. They were both excited over her new animal and remarked that it was in the colors of Slytherin. Harry just grinned and told them Severus needed a little attention too. They talked

for a while and Harry rubbed Remus sore muscles until Dobby came with their food and cocoa. Harry was happy to be with them like this, and relieved that Sirius seemed to be acting like his old self.

Madam Pomfrey came back at about eight and pronounced them free to go, pleased that Harry had taken such good care of them. They all walked back to their quarters together and following a shower, Harry went down to her first staff meeting. It was long and dull. She managed to get through it before going off with Severus for her lesson, which went better now that she knew what she had done wrong with her potion the day before. The new term was going to begin in two days, and she was both excited and apprehensive. Time would tell what kind of a teacher she would be.

Part 18 - Professor Potter

The two days following Harry's encounter with Voldemort in the forest were filled with activity. The Order began to prepare for a renewal of the war, as did the Ministry. All believed that the renewal of hostilities was immanent and did not want to be caught off guard.

Arthur Weasley, now the permanent Minister of Magic, had not taken Harry's suggestions to warn the public lightly. After much conversation with Dumbledore and several closed-door meetings with the Board of Governors, the general consensus was that Harry's ideas were sound, and her suggestions were taken to heart. No one wanted a repeat of the scandals that had occurred while Fudge had been in charge of the government.

A special press conference was called with the Daily Prophet, the Quibbler, and the W. W. N. to announce the strategy and make sure the public was aware of the potential danger. It was not only successful, it was heralded by the populace as Honesty in Government. The Wizarding community was decidedly nervous but they were prepared. Voldemort would not take them by surprise again.

Harry had encountered only two obstacles. The first had been Hermione. She was furious that Harry had once again found herself in danger. She had given Harry a thorough tongue-lashing expostulating on how she had told Harry not to go into the Forbidden Forest in the first place. She had also been upset that Harry didn't come to see her as soon as she had returned to the castle following the fight in the forest. She had been worried sick when the goblet had fired and Ron and the others went to help. Ron had been the one to tell her that they were safe when he had returned to Hogwarts. She had expected Harry to come and reassure her, but when she had not done so, Hermione had spent a sleepless night worrying about her friend. She had finally let it go after hearing that Harry had elected to stay with Sirius and Remus in the infirmary. Harry had apologized for having worried her so much and hugged her friend for showing such concern.

Harry's other problem stemmed from the Wizarding public. Once again, they were looking towards her to be their savior. This was made doubly so since the Ministry had made Trelawney's prophecy public as a part of their strategy. Up to that point, the public had only been aware of Harry's role in the Mathias Prophecy. It had been generally assumed that the prophecy, which had been destroyed during the battle in the Ministry, was the same one. Voldemort too, had not known what Sybil Trelawney had prophesized to Albus Dumbledore. He had never heard the last half of the prophecy. Unfortunately, he would now know its contents. This meant that he would step up his attempts to thwart Harry and turn the tide in his favor. Harry knew that if he couldn't kill her immediately he would find ways to weaken her. She could not help but think about his threat during their encounter in the Forbidden Forest. *'I have a surprise for you, Potter. I know your weakness.'* Harry had no doubt in her mind that he wasn't lying. She had no clue as to what he would do next and feared for the safety of her friends and loved ones. She was considering all of the possibilities as she made her way through the castle for the start of term feast and the sorting ceremony. She was nervous and excited as she took her place at the head table between Sirius and Severus.

Looking out over the Great Hall, she remembered when she had first come to Hogwarts. It seemed so long ago. Harry blinked back tears, as the memories of her years as a student overwhelmed her.

"You never get over it, Princess," Remus whispered from his seat on the other side of Sirius. "No matter how many times I have been here as a teacher I always think back over my years as a student."

"Using *Legilimency* now Lupin?" Snape's sarcastic voice cut across to him.

"Don't have to Severus," Lupin grinned, "you can just look at Harry's face to know what she is thinking. You can't tell me you don't get a wave of nostalgia every time you sit down for the Welcoming Feast."

"Humph, such things are childish nonsense."

"Is that why you feel so nervous, Sev?" Harry smiled. "Your emotions are quite open this evening."

"Are you scanning me?"

"Not intentionally. Sometimes it is harder to block when there are so many people and my own feelings are on edge."

"Can you tell what we are all feeling, love?" Sirius asked, flashing a wide smile.

"Yes. You are as excited as I am. It feels good to feel your happiness. Remus is also feeling nostalgic and Severus is anxious and excited, but he masks it well."

"Tell me, Harry, what is the Headmaster feeling?" Severus looked over towards where Dumbledore was sitting, blue eyes twinkling as he watched over his charges.

"Should I tell them, Albus?"

"Why don't we keep it our secret?"

"All right," Harry laughed. "It's fun to keep them guessing."

"How does it feel to be sitting with the Professors now Harry?" Professor Sinestra questioned from her seat beside Lupin.

"Scary, and kind of...I don't know...exciting," she responded, looking over towards the Gryffindor table. Ginny Weasley had just taken her seat with the other seventh years. She waved hello to Harry, who nodded and smiled back with a wink. Over on the Ravenclaw table Luna smiled up dreamily, nodding to her friend.

"OH...this is just so thrilling," Hermione remarked from further down the table. "I can't wait for the sorting."

"Perhaps we should put the sorting hat on you again Miss Granger and see if you would still be placed in the same house," Snape quipped.

"She was almost placed in Ravenclaw," Harry said.

"Indeed. It is a wonder she was placed in Gryffindor."

"Harry was almost placed in your House, Professor," Hermione replied. "Would you have treated her differently if she had been a Slytherin?"

"Now this is getting interesting. Would you have been nicer to Harry, Severus, if she had been in your house?" Sirius questioned with interest.

"I was unaware that she was treated unfairly," Severus responded curtly.

"He would have been no different," Harry stated flatly. "He hated me because I looked so much like my father." Harry looked sadly at Severus. He studied her calmly, placing a gentle hand on her back in a gesture of fondness and apology. She sensed his remorse, and gave him a wan smile before turning her attention back to the expanse of students.

The doors to the Great Hall had opened and McGonagall had entered carrying the stool with the Sorting Hat, followed by the first years. As soon as she had placed them in front of the staff table, Dumbledore tapped his glass for attention, standing to address the students and staff.

"Welcome back for another year at Hogwarts," he announced. "I am glad to see so many happy faces and wish to welcome the first years. As usual, I have several start of term announcements. Since the nature of some of them is quite delicate, I will wait until after we have all eaten before I burden your minds. However, before we start the sorting I would like to introduce our new staff members. Due to the retirement of Madam Pince, we have a new Librarian. I am sure many of you know Miss Hermione Granger." The older students clapped joyfully, some yelling hello. Hermione stood up and smiled. "Mr. Neville Longbottom will also be doing an apprenticeship with Professor Sprout and will be assisting her with her classes later in the year." The Headmaster continued amid the applause as Neville also rose.

"Next I would like to announce that Professor Lupin will be taking over for Hagrid teaching Care of Magical Creatures and Professor Black will be teaching Charms." He did not mention the death of Professor Flitwick. "We also have some changes in our class schedules. We have a new Professor, Tiberius Snape, who will be teaching NEWT and OWL level Defense Against the Dark Arts." Tiberius stood to limited applause and whispers while the older students wondered if he was related to their Potions instructor. Dumbledore anticipated this with amusement. "Just in case you were wondering he is the uncle to Professor Severus Snape. I am sure you will treat him with the same courtesy as you do his nephew." Harry glanced over at the two Snapes who had arched their brows in amusement at the ripple of sighs and groans that followed. "Professor Severus Snape will be teaching NEWT and OWL level Potions in addition to the first through fourth year Defense Against the Dark Arts." Harry could sense the anxiety this caused in the students and had to suppress a grin, as Dumbledore continued. "In addition, Ms. Circe Snape, Professor Severus Snape's sister, will be working in the capacity as my private secretary." Circe stood briefly to mixed applause and nods. "Should any of the older students be interested in babysitting, her young daughter, Phaedra will also be staying with her in the castle. If you wish to help her out you may leave your name with you Head of House and it will be forwarded to my office. Finally, I wish to introduce Professor Arsinoe Darkmoon. She will be offering special classes to fifth year students and up in Ancient Egyptian and Aztec Mysticism" Arsinoe stood gracefully amid whispers of excitement and applause. "A sign up sheet has been posted in each Common room. I will ask you to have them back to me by Wednesday so that she may start classes next week. Slytherin and Gryffindor will be held on Wednesdays and Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff on Mondays. They will be double period classes and I have made certain the years involved

have free periods at those times for those who wish to attend. I also wish to tell you that due to additional administrative duties our Assistant Head Mistress, Professor McGonagall, will only be teaching the NEWT and OWL level Transfiguration classes. Our other new Professor will take over the first through fourth year Transfiguration and Potions classes. I am sure you will all recognize Miss Harry Potter." Dumbledore beamed in Harry's direction.

Harry was embarrassed, and did not wish to stand up as the cheers and applause rocked the Great Hall. Sirius was grinning from ear to ear, and deftly reached around to pinch her on the buttocks, to make her stand. She smiled at the tumultuous applause, but glared at her godfather as she sat back down.

"I knew I could get you to rise to the occasion," Sirius whispered wickedly. Remus was laughing and Severus maintained his usual scowl.

"Now I will hold the rest of the announcements till after the sorting and we have all eaten. Let the sorting begin," Dumbledore said resuming his seat.

The first years watched in awe as the Sorting Hat twitched, and the tear opened to form its mouth and the hat began to sing:

Welcome to our stately school

Hogwarts is its name

For the past one thousand years

It has gained renown and fame

For here within these walls

Each will learn the crafts

In the art of witching and wizardry

But before I sort you into each house

A warning I would proclaim

For while you will be divided

United you must remain

For evil lurks outside these walls

And will try to take control

So follow the leads of those who know

And have heard the call

To keep each individual house intact

*Yet united one and all
For some will go to Slytherin
If you display the cunning and ambition
While others into Hufflepuff
Those of loyalty and hard work
To Ravenclaw the brightest go
Their minds to overstuff
And finally into Gryffindor
Whose hearts are brave and true
Yet I pray you to remember
How as one you worked before
To keep our Hogwarts free from peril
Lest these hallowed halls should fall
To one whose heart is cold as stone
A soul that's rotten at its core
So heed my warning here today
That we may say with pride
Hogwarts shall forever be
A house of learning and repute
For the good of wizardry*

The Great Hall was silent for a moment as the students looked from one another to the head table before erupting into applause and cheers of Hogwart's forever. McGonagall gave the students a few minutes to calm down, and then unrolled the parchment she had been holding in her hands.

"As I call your name you will sit on the stool and place the Sorting Hat on your head. Once you are sorted, you will go over to sit at your house table. Allen, Tabitha," McGonagall stated crisply.

Tabitha Allen was a short plump girl with mousy brown hair and big brown eyes. She looked terrified as she sat on the stool and placed the hat on her head.

"Ravenclaw!" the hat bellowed. The hall erupted into applause and Tabitha ran over to the Ravenclaw table.

"Blackthorn, Morgan" McGonagall continued.

"Slytherin!" the hat called, even before the boy had placed it fully onto his head. Harry was reminded of when Draco Malfoy had been sorted.

The sorting continued through Brooks, Brownwing, Caldwell, Castlebury, and then came to Chang, Lee. Harry knew this was Cho Chang's cousin and the youngest grandchild of the elderly Mr. Chang, Cho's great grandfather. She watched in anticipation as the small dark haired oriental boy placed the hat on his head.

"Interesting..."the hat muttered. "You have many fine qualities...and a long family line of powerful witches and wizards...Hmm...Gryffindor!" the hat finally yelled.

Harry was delighted that the old Chinese gentleman's youngest grandchild had been sorted into her old house, and applauded merrily. The sorting continued for another half hour with Gryffindor getting twelve new students, Slytherin ten, Ravenclaw twelve, and Hufflepuff fourteen. As soon as the sorting was completed, Dumbledore led everyone in the school song. Harry noted Snape rolling his eyes and his Uncle Tiberius bore the usual family sneer. Circe sang happily, however, eyeing her brother and uncle mischievously. Harry wondered idly where Phaedra was, and as soon as everyone finished singing and the food appeared on the table she turned to ask Severus.

"Severus, where is Phaedra? It just occurred to me she is not at the feast."

"Phaedra is too young to come to the feast. Circe's house elf is minding her and her dinner was sent up. She will start in the school in Hogsmead tomorrow."

"Is she excited?"

"I believe she is rather nervous about making new friends, but her mother has reassured her that she will do fine."

"Honey, how are you feeling about teaching tomorrow?" Sirius inquired from beside her.

"Probably about the same way as Phaedra is about starting a new school," Harry laughed, looking at Sirius with affection.

"You will do fine, Princess," Lupin stated knowingly. "You have a talent for working with young children."

"That in itself is amazing since I never had a proper childhood myself."

"I would think you had an amazing childhood judging by some of the things you have accomplished since you started here at Hogwarts," Severus sneered.

"Oh, Merlin," Harry rolled her eyes, looking at the night sky reflected in the enchanted ceiling, "he's back in the nasty Potion Master Snape mode."

Sirius and Remus both laughed, and Snape scowled down at her, dark eyes glittering.

"If I were you Miss Potter I would remember that the nasty Potion Master is your supervisor and will be keeping a good eye on you," he scowled, giving her his best glare.

"Sorry, Sev, but you can't get to me anymore. I know you too well. Save it for the first years," Harry remarked, grinning.

"I might remind you that I have no first year classes."

"No, but I do. If I read my schedule properly I have a Potions class first thing in the morning and you will be monitoring it since you don't have any class until ten."

"Then perhaps I should give my little speech so they don't give you any trouble."

"I am sure I will not need you to help me control the class. You can just sit there and glare happily," she smirked.

"She told you, Severus," Sirius barking laugh informed him.

"If I were you, Black, I would worry about what Charms you will be teaching rather than something which doesn't concern you."

"Everything Harry does concerns me," Sirius shot back.

"Now both of you behave," Harry interrupted, "or I will just have to tie you both up again. Only this time you will have to sit and listen to one of Albus little speeches on the merits of ten pin bowling and chamber music!"

Sirius groaned and Severus scowl deepened. Dumbledore had overheard the conversation and leaned over watching them with amusement.

"I shall be happy to accommodate you should the need arise, Harry." His blue eyes twinkled merrily.

"I will keep you informed of the situation Headmaster. By the way, I would like to learn how to bowl. Would you like to show me some time?"

"Marvelous!" he beamed. "We shall make a date to go to the bowling alley in Hogsmead."

"I didn't know they had one," Harry commented.

"It is on the far side of the village. The alley is only a small one, but I think you will enjoy it."

"Then why don't we make it a date and bring my protectors along with us. We don't get to have too much fun these days. I could use a break from my worries about what is going on with the war starting up again."

"Excellent idea!" Sirius exclaimed, delighted at the dark look on Severus face. "I would love an afternoon with Harry. We haven't all spent too much time together as a group lately. I would like to see her smiling and relaxed."

"Here! Here," Remus agreed raising his glass in agreement.

"It is settled then. We shall go the first Hogsmead weekend."

"Oh, I am having lunch that day with Hermione and Arsinoe," Harry frowned.

"Then we will all lunch together at the Three Broomsticks and then Hermione and Arsinoe can do some shopping while we all go bowling," Dumbledore commented. He knew Harry wanted some time alone with her three protectors.

"I am afraid, Headmaster, that..."

"No excuses, Severus," Dumbledore said sternly. "This is for Harry. We will all have a grand time."

"Yes, Sir," the younger man acquiesced. Harry noted his scowl deepen as he reached for a piece of baked ham.

"I should think you would enjoy some free time with me?" she whispered.

"I dislike bowling and as for spending free time together I should prefer if it were just the two of us."

"Humph, she may be your soul mate, but she cares about all of us. Did you ever think it makes her happy when we're all together?"

"Eavesdropping again, Black?"

"Not really, since I am sitting right next to her and can hear every word."

"Please...stop...both of you. I don't like it when you both act like this." Harry looked from one to the other frowning.

"I'm sorry, Harry. I was merely trying to tell you that sometimes I prefer to be alone with you. I did not mean to get into it with Sirius." Severus face softened at seeing her becoming distressed.

"Me too. You know I just like to bait Severus." Sirius gave her a quick wink. "I apologize, Severus. I think we should all spend time both as a group and give Harry some individual time too outside of her additional studies."

"I think that is a marvelous idea.," Lupin chimed in. "I would like to take Harry to dinner one night. That is if she would like to go."

"I would love it, but will the Headmaster let me leave the grounds with things so tense?"

"So long as I know where you two are going," Dumbledore answered, looking at Lupin down the table.

"I will let you know. I think an emergency Portkey might be useful for all of us when we are away from Hogwarts," Remus added, smiling at Harry.

"I shall arrange them," Dumbledore agreed.

"You know, Remus, Harry was right," Sirius commented looking at his friend with amusement, "you really are a wolf in sheep's clothing. Severus and I didn't even get a chance to ask her to go anywhere and here you have already made a date for dinner."

"It's hardly a date. We haven't even decided when to go yet." Lupin replied with a boyish smile.

"Then how about this Saturday evening," Harry inquired, green eyes glowing with delight.

"Seven o'clock good for you, Princess?"

"I will be ready."

Sirius growled low in his throat, but his eyes were dancing. Severus merely looked disgruntled, but didn't say a word. Harry could sense he wanted to ask her out, but would not do so in front of the others.

"I think Severus is jealous," Sirius whispered loud enough for his old rival to hear.

"If Harry chooses to go to dinner with Lupin it is her business," he snapped.

"Well then I am going to ask her to go with me too," Sirius replied. "Harry would you like to go with me to dinner on the following Friday evening?"

"It would be my pleasure so long as we go on your motorcycle."

"Ah...an evening out and a wild ride under the stars. I shall pick you up at six."

"Humph...can't you do better than that Black?" Severus scowled, not giving him a chance to reply, turning his attention to Harry as the desserts appeared on the table. "Miss Potter," he addressed her formally, "would you do me the honor of accompanying me to a concert of the London Symphony on the twentieth of September? I believe the moon will be full so your other protectors will be otherwise engaged."

"I would be thrilled, Severus," Harry answered, glancing at Sirius and Remus. Neither seemed to be offended by his remark about the full moon.

"Then I shall arrange for the tickets. It is a Saturday evening."

"Ah...I wish I could accompany you both," Dumbledore interrupted, "but I shall be otherwise occupied with Order business."

"Will you be having a meeting, Headmaster? Severus and I could go another time."

"No, Child, to both your questions. I am expecting some new information to arrive at that time. I shall make sure you both have Portkeys and that the Aurors are notified. I promise they will not get in your way."

"Thank you, Headmaster." Severus nodded knowing the need for additional protection away from Hogwarts.

They finished their desserts and were relaxing when Dumbledore stood up once again.

"Now that we have all eaten I have a few more announcements. First, I need not remind the older students that the Forbidden Forest is just that. It is more dangerous than ever and anyone venturing in will be severely punished. Mr. Filch has also asked me to remind all students that no magic is to be performed in the hallways, ever!" The students snickered quietly, as Dumbledore's eyes twinkled. I would also like to congratulate this year's Head Boy and Girl, Mr. Colin Creevy from Gryffindor and Miss Luna Lovegood from Ravenclaw." The hall erupted into cheers, and Harry noted that Luna was wearing an odd hat with a pelican on top. She had pinned her badge to its huge bill. "Now I have a serious subject which it is my sad duty to discuss. Lord Voldemort has returned once again through the use of some very dark magic in the form of Necromancy." A shudder passed through the Great Hall, all eyes on Dumbledore. "Hogsmead weekends will continue for third years and up, but I reserve the right to cancel them without notice. The war has started anew and it is imperative that we all continue to work together as we did last year. Heed the warning of the Sorting Hat. We only had a short reprieve from the dark times. I urge you all to use caution. Remember, it will be up to you to choose whether to do what is easy or what is right. I fear some of you may still take the wrong path. Think about your actions and their consequences before you decide whether you will stay in the light, for the path to darkness will lead to nothing but misery and heartbreak. That will be all. You are dismissed. Sleep well and try not to let the bed bugs bite."

The students erupted into nervous giggles at his final remark, lightening the somber mood somewhat. Harry was about to rise to go to her room when Ginny and Luna approached the Head table.

"Harry...er...Miss Potter," Ginny grinned, "good luck. Mum says to remind you, Ron, and Hermione not to forget to owl her at least once a week."

"I will, Ginny, don't worry."

"Miss Potter, I know you will overcome the obstacles ahead," Luna remarked dreamily. "The phoenix will burn and the dragon will appear in the night sky when the time is right."

"Luna, what are you talking about?"

"What?" Luna blinked her eyes. "Oh it is good to see you, Harry...er...Professor. Good luck." She smiled walking away with an odd expression as the group stared after her.

"Yes...um...Headmaster did Luna just utter a prophecy?"

"I believe so, Harry, but we should not discuss it here. I think we should all go up to my office. Minerva, you should come too, and bring Arsinoe and Mr. Weasley."

"Of course, Albus," Professor McGonagall replied with a worried frown.

The group left through the side door and headed up the stairs to Dumbledore's office but Harry stopped when she reached the second floor.

"Professor Dumbledore, I will be up in a minute. I wish to use my pensive. I want to store the memory of what Luna said before we go into it further."

"Very well, Harry, but I will expect you in my office within fifteen minutes," he instructed. His tone brooked no argument.

"I'll be there," she said, hurrying off towards her room.

Uttering her password, she let herself in, noticing that Snuffles was no longer there. Harry knew that Dobby had been instructed to take the dog down to Hagrid's so she did not worry about it but missed her dog's usual greeting. 'I'll have to go down and visit her as soon as I get the chance,' she mused going over to her closet taking out the pensive. Pulling out her wand, Harry concentrated on the memory. Pulling the silver thread from her mind, she placed it in the pensive. She then listened to it again, and a chill ran up her spine. '*The phoenix will burn and the dragon will appear in the night sky when the time is right.*' Harry knew this had something to do with Arsinoe and the feathered serpent. She hoped that either Dumbledore or Arsinoe would have some kind of answer to whatever it meant. She didn't take the time to ponder it further though, as she knew the Headmaster was waiting. Locking her room, she hurried off towards the Headmaster's office. She said the password, '*Canary Creams,*' and mounted the spiral stairs.

"Come in, Harry," Dumbledore's voice called before she could knock.

Harry entered the office and took a seat on the sofa beside Remus. He poured her a cup of tea from the service that had been set up on the table. She noted that Ron was already there, along with Arsinoe. They were seated on either side of the fireplace. Snape was sitting on the other side of Remus. Sirius and McGonagall had seated themselves in a set of chairs off to the left. Dumbledore was facing them all in a rather overstuffed chair directly in front of the hearth.

"Harry, what is going on?" Ron mouthed silently. He had been on patrol with Tonks when McGonagall found him and was unaware of the evening's events.

"You will be informed shortly, Mr. Weasley," Dumbledore replied without ever having looked over to where Ron was sitting. Ron visibly jumped since he had not said anything aloud. "Harry may just have encountered another prophecy from Miss Lovegood." Dumbledore quickly brought Ron and Arsinoe up to speed since Arsinoe had not overheard what Luna had said. Ron looked stunned and Arsinoe nodded thoughtfully before she spoke.

"I believe you are right, Albus. I have been having visions with the *Peyote* and keep seeing a Phoenix in the flames, but I do not know what it means."

"Couldn't it just have something to do with Fawkes?" Harry questioned, looking over to where the magnificent Phoenix sat on his perch.

"That doesn't seem likely, Princess, since Luna was speaking directly to you."

"But Remus, Phoenixes burn when they die. If Luna was referring to me, could this be a warning of my death?"

"No!" Sirius shouted. "You mustn't say such things. She also said the dragon would appear in the sky when the time was right."

"Perhaps the dragon she referred to was the constellation, *Draco*?" Snape remarked quietly, dark eyes fixed on Harry.

"I refuse to believe that Snape!" Sirius jumped up from his chair and began pacing nervously. 'Harry can't die...not now,' he thought frantically. 'She's survived Voldemort this long. If this is a true prophecy it must mean something else.'

"Sirius, sit down," McGonagall told him calmly. "You are jumping to conclusions. We all know that Miss Lovegood is often in a daydream, but that does not mean she has the sight." McGonagall's practical logic seemed to calm Sirius somewhat and he resumed his seat.

"Professor, you are logical as always," Harry remarked giving her a small grin.

"I am merely stating a fact. Has Luna ever given you any indication that she has the sight, Harry? You know her better than any of us."

"Well...I have often wondered what she seems tuned into. She really can be quite odd. On the other hand she has never given me any reason to believe that she can see the future."

"Humph..." Ron snorted, "She's always been more than spacey. Reads the damn *Quibbler* upside down."

"Just because she can read upside down doesn't mean she's daft. I think it is a rather unique gift," Harry responded.

"I agree with Harry," Dumbledore said, blue eyes twinkling. "It took me some time to learn to read upside down. Miss Lovegood seems to have achieved the talent naturally."

Ron looked at the Headmaster with an expression of shock and Harry just grinned. Everybody knew that Dumbledore was a genius, but he was also a bit eccentric, much like Luna Lovegood. She wondered idly if he had been nicknamed in school, just like Luna. She had come to be known as Looney Luna. Harry had to suppress a giggle when Daffy Dumbledore popped into her head.

"Headmaster, if I may," Snape addressed the older man, who nodded, "Miss Lovegood also said that the time would be right. We may all be jumping to conclusions. If this is a genuine prophecy, it may just be a portent of something good."

"That is entirely possible, Severus. Prophecies are tricky to interpret. Jumping to conclusions can be detrimental. It will do none of us any good to worry about it. We are not even certain if Miss Lovegood is a genuine seer."

"Just the same, Albus, we shouldn't discount the possibility," Remus remarked.

"I think Remus is right," Sirius agreed. "We need to be prepared. If this is a real prophecy we need to figure it out."

"That could take years!" Harry sputtered. "In case you've all forgotten we don't have that kind of time."

"Harry would you like to use the *Peyote* with me? Perhaps you will be able to see something that I can't. Obviously, Miss Lovegood was imparting something meant for you to know. It is possible you will be able to see it within the flames."

"I...don't know. I don't like the idea of a drug induced vision. It gives me the creeps."

"The choice is yours to make. If you wish to try, we will do so one evening following your lesson. Your protectors can be there if you like."

"I wouldn't mind trying the stuff," Ron remarked. "I wonder if I would see anything."

"If you wish to try I will help you." Arsinoe looked at Ron thoughtfully. "I understand you did well in divination."

"How do you know that?"

"I told her Ron," Dumbledore answered. "When Arsinoe came I needed to fill her in on some of your background and role as Keeper of the Goblet."

"Oh...Why?"

"Because you are able to connect with Harry's mind when she is in trouble. In order to help her I needed to know how that was possible," Arsinoe explained. "It's a different kind of magic than I am used to."

"You know Ron, it might be a good idea for you to try the *Peyote*," Remus remarked thoughtfully. "You are closer to Harry in a different way than the rest of us. You've been with her through out all of her time here at Hogwarts. You may just see something that the rest of us wouldn't understand."

"Then I will try it, so long as Professor Dumbledore says it's safe."

"You will be in no danger, Ron, so long as you do as Arsinoe instructs."

"I would like to observe," Sirius added. "Someone should watch to make sure everything goes all right along with Arsinoe."

"Then if you're going to be drugged, I am going in with you," Harry stated firmly.

"What for Harry?"

"Even in a trance someone has to watch out for you. I know you Ronald Weasley and your visions may just be something...Ah...rated X. Somebody has to keep you on the straight and narrow for Hermione!"

Harry was almost as red as Ron was as they grinned at each other. Sirius and Remus were laughing aloud and Snape had raised his eyebrow in amusement. McGonagall pursed her lips while Arsinoe shook her head. Professor Dumbledore's eyes were twinkling merrily, his lips curled into a bright smile.

"Then I suggest we all retire for the night. Harry you and Ron are to let Arsinoe know when you wish to try the *Peyote*. Sirius you may of course attend to help Arsinoe make sure things go as planned.

"Headmaster...Miss Darkmoon...if you would both allow me to assist with the mixture I would be most grateful." Snape looked from one to the other.

"I have no objection, Albus. Professor Snape is a master at his craft and I understand his desire to learn something new."

"Very well, Severus. You may assist. Remus would you like to write down what happens?"

"Sir? They will be in a trance."

"We need to record what they saw before they have time to forget any of it. Sirius you can help too."

"Albus, are you sure there will be no danger to them?"

"I am certain. I used the *Peyote* many years ago with Arsinoe's grandfather. So long as it is used correctly, they will be in no danger. Arsinoe uses it and is an expert at mixing it and Severus is a master at potions."

"Then it is agreed. Harry let me know when you and Ron wish to try the *Peyote* so we can be ready."

"How about Sunday afternoon?"

"Is Harry's suggestion good for you, Ron?"

"No. I was going to spend Sunday with Hermione. I have the afternoon off. I would rather she didn't know about this," Ron looked uncomfortable.

"Keeping secrets from her already, Ron?" Sirius teased.

"Not really. I just know she will worry about what is going on."

"I agree with Ron. Hermione will go crazy."

"Won't she be more upset that you both kept it from her?" McGonagall questioned.

Harry and Ron both squirmed uncomfortably. Hermione would be furious with them for even doing this.

"I believe she will agree with the need to try," Arsinoe remarked thoughtfully. "She is a very intelligent young woman with a keen desire to learn. I think she should be allowed to watch."

"Who's gonna tell her?" Ron asked nervously. He knew Hermione's wrath when she was angry.

"I will, Mr. Weasley," McGonagall stated. "She will not become as upset if she hears it from me. I will tell her we need to try it in an effort to unravel Miss Lovegood's potential prophecy before the next meeting of the Order."

"Thank you Minerva." Harry beamed at the older witch. She knew that Hermione had been her favorite student while they were in school.

"Then it is all settled. We shall meet here in my office on Sunday at two. Arsinoe if you will stay for a few moments with Minerva I would like to discuss your classes," Dumbledore said to the two older witches. "In the mean time Harry, try not to worry. You have to concentrate on teaching and the extra studies you are pursuing with Severus and Arsinoe." He dismissed them with a wave of his hand.

"I'll try," Harry replied, as the group rose and headed out the door.

Ron turned in the opposite direction after bidding them good night since he had to finish his patrol with Tonks. Harry walked back to her room with Sirius. He had put his arm around her waist protectively and Harry noted that he seemed lost in thought. Remus was following behind them with Severus.

"Harry, are you all right with this?" Sirius questioned.

"You mean trying the *Peyote*?"

"Yes, you don't have to do it if you don't want to."

"I know, but maybe there is something to it. Dumbledore and Arsinoe seem to think so," Harry responded uncertainly.

"Nevertheless, divination is an imprecise form of magic. All those prophecies stored in the Department of Mysteries should tell you that. Many have been studied for years and still people don't understand them."

"Black is right, Harry," Snape remarked from behind them, "and you will be under a drug induced vision. What you see may not be a true vision at all, merely the effects of the narcotic."

"I agree," Remus added, "you may see things you wish to see or things you fear unconsciously."

"Hmm...Almost like a Boggart tapping into my brain."

"Exactly! It may not be a real vision at all, just your own fears and desires manifesting themselves from the drug," Remus answered, grinning as he remembered teaching her during her third year.

"Well it won't hurt to try. I would rather have a drug-induced vision than the ones I have when Voldemort and I link minds. Maybe I can find out what he's up to before it happens."

"Still love, I don't want you to do something just because you may feel pressured to do it. Voldemort has been quiet since the episode in the forest. He may be lying low for awhile," Sirius suggested.

"He's not," she responded flatly. "It's only been a few days and even though I haven't had any more nightmares, my scar has been prickling."

"Harry why didn't you tell us this sooner?" Sirius demanded.

"I don't want you to worry. It's happened before you know."

"Princess, promise us you will tell us immediately if you have any nightmares."

"Remus, you and Sirius are directly across the hall, and I usually wake up screaming anyway. Severus can be here in a matter of minutes via the secret passageway from the dungeon, so the point is moot."

"And if you don't wake up screaming, Potter, what then?"

"Then, Severus, I will wake you all up. I don't like to be alone after I have those dream connections. The last one was the worst one ever. I think it has something to do with his return."

"You did say it was more like you were there. That you actually witnessed his resurrection as it was going on," Snape mused.

"Yeah, that's what was so weird. Arsinoe thinks I may have had some sort of astral projection."

"She may be right, although it is rare," Remus concurred, "unfortunately we may never know for certain unless it happens again."

"Well I for one hope it doesn't," Harry pouted.

"Would you like one of us to stay for awhile while you fall asleep?" Sirius asked when they had reached her door.

"No, I'll be all right. I miss Snuffles though. I sort of got used to her company."

"I could fill in." Sirius grinned, transforming.

"Now Padfoot, any other time I would love for you to stay, but there are students in the building."

"That never seemed to matter before," he replied, taking on his human shape. He met her gaze, brown eyes studying her intently.

"We weren't both teachers then and I was still underage. The godfather keeping an eye on his charge won't work anymore," she laughed, blushing. 'God I wish I weren't such a prude. If Sirius knew how much I wished he would stay and just snog with me...' Harry blushed at the thought. She was happy he was back to paying her so much attention and her heart was

beating fast. 'I wonder if Moony can sense what I am feeling about Sirius, or if he can hear my heart racing?'

"One of us could remain in the hall for awhile," Snape interjected, dark eyes glittering. Harry could sense his was jealous.

"Princess, I would be happy to sit with you too. This way we would all be with you and could say we were just giving you advice on how to conduct your classes."

"Honestly, you three, I will be fine. Now I would like to go to bed," Harry asserted opening her door. "So please don't worry."

"All right then, Honey, just remember to wake us if you need us," Sirius replied.

"I promise I will, and if you hear any moans just ignore them. It will only be me having erotic dreams," she joked.

Ducking into her room with a chuckle, Harry closed the door before they could say anything more, but their expressions had been priceless. Severus had blinked and both eyebrows had shot up, Sirius roared with laughter, and Moony turned red, giving her a low howl. If she hadn't been in such a hurry she would have seen Sirius look at Remus and Severus. Taking a fast shower Harry crawled into bed. She had no idea they were waiting for her to fall asleep. Her protectors would not let her off so easily.

Harry slept fitfully with odd dreams, which she couldn't define. They were full of shadowy figures, and occasional flashes of red light. However she couldn't see what was going on, and they did not turn into full-blown nightmares. She awoke with a start at about three in the morning. Her mouth was dry, and she needed to go to the bathroom. Slipping from the bed she padded towards the loo, when she became aware of another presence in the room. Turning abruptly, she spotted two eyes glowing in the dark, reflected in the dim moonlight light shining through the window. Someone or something was in the chair of her sitting room. Harry froze in her tracks, cursing herself for not having her wand, when she realized the outline was that of a large black dog. He thumped his tail softly in greeting.

"Padfoot! You damn near scared me half to death," she admonished. "I see telling you I didn't need a babysitter didn't faze any of you in the least. Where are the other two?"

"Sleeping, I expect," Sirius informed her transforming. "We took shifts. I will be here for a while, Miss Wings. I only relieved Moony a few minutes ago, and he relieved Severus. I hope we didn't wake you."

"No, I need to use the loo," she answered, turning to go into the bathroom. Harry noted that Sirius had transformed back into Padfoot when she came out. He was lying languidly on her sofa. He cocked his head and appeared to be giving her a sly smile. She just shook her head and climbed back into her bed. She lay awake, with her back towards the sitting room for a few minutes and then gave in. He had to be uncomfortable on the sofa. "Come on, Padfoot," she called softly, patting the bed next to her. "You might as well be comfortable since I know you aren't going to leave." A minute later she felt the big dog climb onto the bed beside her.

"Thanks, love," he whispered, having transformed once again. "You smell nice." He kissed her hair.

"New shampoo," she mumbled sleepily, as he put his arm around her, and molded his body to conform with hers.

Harry was acutely aware of his presence and wanted to turn and look at him, but held back. She knew that if she did she would either make a fool of herself or end up doing more than snogging. She suspected he knew it too, so she took his hand from where it was resting around her, and held onto it affectionately. He kissed her again, and she relaxed beside him, allowing sleep to claim her once again. This time her dreams were filled with Sirius laughing face and she did not wake until her alarm sounded, jarring her back to reality. The bed beside her was cold and she almost believed he had not been there except for a piece of black fur that had stuck to the blanket before he had transformed. Dressing quickly in a set of dark green robes to off set her eyes she pulled her hair up in a chignon and applied some light make up, studying her face in the mirror.

"You look lovely," her mirror remarked, "much nicer than the other teachers."

"Humph, I'll bet Arsinoe looks better."

"Ah...well...Miss Darkmoon is a beautiful woman, but you still outshine her. She does not have the aura of innocence that you do."

"I'll take your word for it," Harry stated turning away from the mirror. "Let's just hope the students don't take innocence for stupidity," Harry called over her shoulder as she left the room. Making her way down to the Great Hall she took her seat at the head table. She noted that none of her protectors were present and concluded that Sirius and Remus were probably sleeping in as they did not have early classes. Severus had probably already eaten since he was an early riser. As she mulled this over, Hagrid came in and took a seat beside her.

"Harry, I 'ave not seen ya too much. I 'ave been busy gettin' the critters ready fer Professor Lupin. How 'ave ya been?"

"Fine, Hagrid." She beamed up at the half giant. "I'm sorry I haven't been down to visit, but I have been really busy myself."

"No problem. I expect we'll be seein' quite a bit o' one another now that yer teaching 'ere."

"Me too. It will be almost as if Hermione, Ron and me had never graduated."

"Yup, and now ye'll be able to come down any ol' time ya want without 'aving to worry 'bout gettin' detention. Not that that ever stopped ya before."

"No, it didn't. That is the advantage of owning an invisibility cloak," she laughed. "Have you spoken with Ron and Hermione yet?"

"I saw Ron with Tonks on patrol and Hermione stopped by with 'im just before I left to come ta the castle. They were out fer an early mornin' walk. She said she was too excited to eat, it bein' 'er first day an' all."

"Well I have an early morning Potions class so I am going to eat something before I have to deal with a group of first years and Severus at the same time. He will be observing."

Hagrid laughed jovially, and they continued to chat for a while over breakfast and he filled her in on what he was up to. Phaedra was starting school in the village and he needed to see Dumbledore for his final instructions. It turned out the Headmaster was taking breakfast with the Snapes this morning to make sure Phaedra was not too nervous before sending her off. Some of the other teachers had come down while she was talking to Hagrid and were engaged in conversations with one another. Hagrid stayed for a little longer before excusing himself to go and see the Headmaster and fetch Phaedra off to school. Harry finished her coffee before deciding it was time to go and meet her first year class. She was just leaving the Great Hall when Professor McGonagall came in, stopping her.

"Harry, I just want to wish you good luck with Severus. I just ran into him coming down from saying good-bye to his niece. He is in one of his moods this morning."

"When is he not?" she laughed.

"I think he didn't sleep too well last night."

"It's possible; he's had a lot on his mind lately." Harry didn't tell her he had stayed up part of the night guarding her. "We all have. Thanks for the warning though."

"I will see you later. You have a third year class this afternoon after lunch."

"Don't remind me. These kids may be even tougher than facing Voldemort," she quipped. McGonagall flinched at the name, but smiled in amusement, as Harry headed off to go to the dungeons.

As she neared the Potions classroom in the dungeons Harry could hear the first years talking animatedly amongst themselves. She had deliberately waited to enter the class until after they had all arrived. She also noted that Severus was waiting in the hall. Her stomach was doing flip-flops and she wasn't certain what made her more nervous, teaching the class of first year Gryffindors and Slytherins, or the fact that Severus would be observing. She nodded as he stepped beside her without saying anything and they entered the classroom together.

"Settle down, class, we aren't here to socialize," Harry stated firmly as she made her way towards the front of the room. Severus had gone into his office but he had kept the door open. "You will not need your wands for this class. Potion making is a subtle science. Whether you become a skilled potion maker or are just limited to basic household and medicinal potions makes no difference. Each of you is here to learn how you will best be able to use this skill later on after you finish school. I will brook no nonsense and expect you all to follow my direction. There is a certain danger involved in potion making and I have no desire to be sending any of you up to the infirmary. A melted down cauldron will cost your house ten points. Is that understood?"

"Yes Miss," the class chorused nervously.

"Good. I will go through the register and then you will be paired with a partner of my choosing. After which, the class rules will be placed on the blackboard. I will expect you to have them memorized by your next class as there will be a quiz." The students audibly groaned but Harry ignored them and continued. "No one will be permitted to mix a single potion until they have attained a minimum grade of "B" on the quiz. At the end of class I will answer any questions you may have."

Harry then sat down and called out the names of the individual students. She gave Lee Chang a brief smile when she called his name. She also noted that there was an Amanda Weasley, whom she knew to be a second cousin of her friends. In the Slytherin group she found a Mariah Flint, who bore a distinct resemblance to the former student, Marcus Flint. There was also a set of twins, Peter and Peregrine Parkinson. She suspected they were related to Pansy. Once she had completed this register, she set about pairing them off, one Gryffindor to one Slytherin.

"Why do I have to work with him?" Mariah Flint objected when seated with her partner, Jules Abercrombie. "He's a Muggleborn!" She hissed in abhorrence.

"In this class everyone is either a witch or a wizard, Miss Flint. There will be no talk of whether a person is Muggleborn, Half-blood, or Pureblood," Harry said sharply. "Do you understand?" Snape had come to the door to watch.

"Yes, Miss Potter," she huffed taking her seat. "Filthy Mudblood," she muttered under her breath looking at Jules as soon as Harry turned around to flick her wand at the board. She was unaware that Harry had overheard her.

"Miss Flint," Harry stated spinning around, "I expect you to apologize to Mr. Abercrombie immediately," she knew the Slytherins were testing her, and Snape was watching with a sneer.

"I apologize, Mudblood," she stated looking at Harry with a smirk amid giggles from some of the other Slytherins.

"That will be one hundred points from Slytherin," Miss Flint, "and you will do detention on Saturday with Professor McGonagall. I will not tolerate any form of discrimination or house rivalry in this class. Do you understand me?" Harry questioned menacingly.

"Yes, Miss Potter," she replied looking over at Snape, who was glaring at her for the huge amount of points she had cost their house.

Harry suspected he was also going to hit the roof with her, but didn't care. The war was starting anew and she didn't need a class full of junior Deathaters.

"I might also remind you that I will be teaching both of your houses again on Thursday for Transfiguration and this same rule will apply there as well! Now get to work and start copying the class rules." The students immediately started to write, but Harry noted the delighted looks on some of the young Gryffindors. She had to stop that as well. "I also will not stand for the smug looks I see from those of you in my former house. Twenty five points from Gryffindor!" The Gryffindors looked a bit shocked, and Snape went back into his office. Harry knew he would complain to Dumbledore about how many points she had docked his house, but she didn't care. It was imperative that the students work together. She wondered idly if she sounded a bit too much like Severus, but decided that she was at least trying to be impartial. He never did. The rest of the class went smoothly and she allotted the last half hour for any questions they might have, as promised.

"Miss Potter, Er...this doesn't really have anything to do with the class...but...Um...do you really...Uh...have a scar like a lightening bolt?" A shy boy by the name of Scott Moody questioned.

"Yes, Mr. Moody, I do," she sighed pushing her bangs away from her forehead. There was an audible intake of breath amongst some of them. "Now that I have answered that question I have one I wish to give you."

"What is that?" he asked eyes wide with awe.

"Are you related to Alastor, 'Mad Eye,' Moody?"

"Yes, Miss Potter, he's my great-great uncle, but I don't really know him well."

"He's a good man," she nodded. "Now does anybody have any other questions?"

"I do," Mariah Flint spoke up loudly, "have you really dueled with the Dark Lord or is it just a lot of crap put out to make you look good?"

"I have, Miss Flint, and in view of the fact that Voldemort is once again causing havoc I believe I will have to do so again. Perhaps when that happens you would like to be there?" Harry remarked shrewdly. The girl may be outspoken but she had visibly gasped at Harry's use of Voldemort's name and sunk down in her seat. "Now if there are any questions in relation to this class I should like to hear them."

Several of the students were anxious about the quiz and she reassured them that if they did their homework and studied they should have no problems. They were also curious about what kinds of potions they would be making and Harry gave them a brief description. Two Muggle born girls grimaced about having to chop up salamanders, newts, and various innards, but didn't say anything. Finally, Harry assigned the class a foot of parchment for homework. They were all to write out the safety rules and then give a brief synopsis of what they thought Potions would be like. She then dismissed the class. As soon as the room was empty, she sat back with a sigh of relief. Severus entered from his office without a sound.

"One hundred points, Potter? Surely you were being a bit over zealous?" He glared at her.

"You could have interrupted at any time, Professor. Besides, I was not going to let them get the better of me. In case you missed it a certain Dark Lord is again in our midst and I am fairly certain her family still remains loyal to him."

"It would be unwise to think anything else," Severus agreed, "however I still think it was a bit harsh in view of the fact you only docked Gryffindor twenty five."

"If you had been the teacher Slytherin would not have lost any points and Gryffindor still would have. I have a long memory, Severus."

"Oh, are you playing at getting even now, Miss Potter?"

"No Sev, I'm not. I just don't want all the work I did last year to get the houses to work together to fall apart," Harry sighed. "I had to make a point with them. They really have no idea how much danger there is."

Severus placed his hand on Harry's shoulder, looking down into her eyes. "No, Harry they don't. Nevertheless I still think the deducted points were excessive."

"Look, I'm not going to fight with you. If you want to be stubborn about it we can let Albus decide."

"No, that won't be necessary," he grinned evilly. "Now, I have to go. I have the fourth year Defense Against the Dark Arts class with Gryffindor and Slytherin." He spun on his heels and headed for the door.

"Severus," Harry called after him, "please don't do what I suspect is in your mind. They have to learn to work together!" Snape ignored her plea. Harry stared after him for a few minutes and then gathered her papers and headed off towards the Transfiguration classroom to prepare for her next group, scheduled in half an hour.

Her Transfiguration class was a much better experience, as it was Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw. They were avid students and once past the fact that Harry was the instructor the class went smoothly. It was easier in that they were also third years. Harry enjoyed their enthusiasm and was more than eager to answer their questions. She had been smiling for most of the class since there was a gray tabby cat sitting beneath her desk. She knew Professor McGonagall was trying to keep her from feeling intimidated by her presence and was more than grateful. As Harry was winding up and assigning homework, the cat came out and jumped onto the desk. The students were surprised, and some laughed while others looked nervous. They were all aware that it was the Deputy Headmistress.

"Well third years, it looks like we have had a visitor," Harry laughed. "It was nice of you to join us Professor."

"It was a pleasure to be here, Miss Potter," McGonagall replied after transforming to the delight of the students.

Harry knew that the older witch was giving her a compliment and was pleased with the way she had handled the class.

"Thank you, Professor," she answered as one of the Hufflepuff students raised his hand. "Yes, Mr. Draconius?"

"Miss Potter, we've all heard that you are an animagus too, like Professor McGonagall. Would you transform for us?"

Harry glanced at McGonagall, who nodded.

"Very well, are you all aware of what my animagus form is?"

"I read in the Prophet that you are a Phoenix," Annabel Fortescue, a third year Ravenclaw called out. Her grandfather owned Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlor on Diagon Alley.

"You are correct, Miss Fortescue," McGonagall replied. "Go on and show them, Miss Potter. Most of them have never seen a Phoenix."

Harry smiled and transformed. There were Ooh's and Aah's from all over the room. She then spread her wings and flew over to sit on Annabel's desk, delighting the young girl, before flying back to the front of the room and resuming her human form.

"That was amazing!" James Willoughby, another Hufflepuff exclaimed. "I am a Muggleborn, Miss Potter, and didn't even know there really was such a thing as a Phoenix until I came to Hogwarts. "Do you think we'll ever be able to transform?"

"Professor McGonagall will test those of you who are in NEWT level Transfiguration in your seventh year. It is a very rare ability, so don't feel too disappointed if you can't do it. I am the only one from my year who can transform. Now, that said, it's lunchtime. Class dismissed." The students hurriedly gathered their books and wands leaving Harry alone with Professor McGonagall.

"Harry I am more than pleased. You did an excellent job."

Harry beamed, "Thank you Professor. I wish Potions had been as easy."

"I heard about what happened. Severus is in quite a tizzy over those hundred points. The Headmaster summoned him to his office following your class."

"Ouch, I had a feeling that would happen. What did Albus say?"

"He laughed."

"What?!"

"What neither of you knew was that he was there the whole time. You know he doesn't need a cloak to make himself invisible."

"I know," Harry grinned. "So what did Severus say?"

"There was nothing Severus could say other than he felt you were a bit over zealous, but Albus agreed with your handling of the situation. He was quite proud, actually, but don't let him know I told you. I am sure he will want to tell you himself."

"I promise I won't let on."

"Good. Now I am starved, so how about we go on down to the Great Hall and have some lunch." McGonagall steered Harry out of the classroom.

Lunch was an interesting experience. Severus was obviously disgruntled with both Harry and Dumbledore and spoke very little. Sirius was more than jovial, having heard through the school grapevine about Harry's handling of the Slytherins. Remus just shook his head.

"Severus, I heard Harry is giving you a run for your money in the points department," Sirius taunted.

"Hardly," Snape responded curtly. "She is merely inexperienced with a whole class and got a bit carried away."

"Yeah, against the Slytherins." Her godfather gloated.

"Listen, you two, knock it off. I did what I felt was necessary. You're both acting like a couple of prats! We have to keep some semblance of unity, even if it means doing something harsh."

"Well spoken, Harry!" Dumbledore cheered, and both of her protectors raised an eyebrow. "You would both do well to listen to our little Phoenix. She has all of our safety at heart."

"Headmaster, I mean no disrespect, but I still think the points were excessive."

"What's the matter, Snape, can't take your house being treated fairly?" Sirius jibed.

"That's enough, both of you. I'm going out for a walk. I will not listen to two grown men act like a couple of first years," Harry stated annoyed. Throwing down her napkin, she left the Great Hall, Sirius and Severus gaping after her.

Twenty minutes later, they both found her by the lake, watching the giant squid.

"Harry, we've come to apologize," Sirius said, looking at her fondly.

"We were out of line," Snape added. "You were right, I could have interceded when you docked Slytherin the hundred points."

"And you know I love to try and irritate Severus," Sirius grinned. "We both think that you did the right thing, and I shouldn't have taunted Severus the way I did."

"All right, I'll forgive you this time, but don't let it happen again. It makes me happy when I see the two of you getting along. I also don't want Sev to think I took those points out of spite for all the times he would ride me in class."

"I know you didn't, Harry, and I am sorry for being so angry with you after class. Which, by the way, you conducted quite well." He gave her one of his rare smiles. Harry beamed back at her two protectors, as they went back towards the castle. The rest of Harry's day went well, and she took the time to visit Hermione in the library. Her friend was in her element, and Harry could see that she was going to be an excellent librarian. Hermione loved books. She would go far using her knowledge to help others in their quest for information and facts. It had already been invaluable to Harry in her battles with Voldemort. She couldn't know that shortly she would need to rely on Hermione's research abilities again. Events were about to be set in motion which would test Harry's strength of character to its limit.

Part 19 - Halloween

Harry walked slowly down to lunch in the Great Hall. She had just finished her Transfiguration class with the first years and as usual, Mariah Flint was outspoken and obnoxious, costing Slytherin ten points. Harry's patience with the girl was wearing thin despite her resolve to treat the girl fairly.

Fortunately, the Parkinson twins were not as rash or as outspoken as their elder sister Pansy was. The two boys were consummate mischief-makers, much as Fred and George had been, but to a lesser scale. Nevertheless, the twins enjoyed pranking whenever they thought they could get away with it. Most of the staff tolerated their behaviors with a grain of salt, amused and happy that even with the uncertain times the twins were just enjoying being children. However, they did make one mistake. Neither really believed that Severus Snape, their Head of House, would not be open to their antics, when they played a cruel joke on Mr. Filch.

The boys had come across Filch's cat, Mrs. Norris, and secreted her away in an unused classroom. That evening at dinner, she was smuggled up to the Great Hall before feeding her a small piece of one of the Weasley's Canary creams laced with catnip. This resulted in Mrs. Norris sprouting feathers and bouncing around the Great Hall in a fit of frenzy with alternating meows and chirps. Filch had been beside himself, and Snape was livid that such cruelty to an innocent cat had been instituted by the students within his own house. He not only docked them both twenty points, he gave them detention. They had been ordered to clean the entire owlery by hand, including all the perches, from floor to ceiling, without magic. It had taken them three full days and Dumbledore remarked that he couldn't remember the last time the place looked and smelled so clean. Nevertheless, the prank had earned the twins the respect of many of their peers, since no one liked Mrs. Norris anyway, let alone Mr. Filch.

"Knut for your thoughts, Harry," Remus remarked as she took a seat beside him at the teacher's table.

"Oh, just thinking about how the past few weeks have been."

"The good things or the bad?"

"Both," Harry answered offhandedly. "The Death Eaters have been active raiding and killing. Voldemort has no fear these days. He even let the Hit Wizards send him an *Avadra Kedavra*. Of course, he can't die now, so he just laughed insanely and sent the spell back at them, killing one of them. I saw the whole thing with one of my visions when I was so tired I fell asleep before occluding my mind."

"I know, Princess, but Charlie and Bill are due back any time," he whispered. "Did Albus tell you about the package he received last month?"

"Yes, it contained an ancient tablet with half of the missing spells I will need. Too bad it isn't translated," she added bitterly, "that would be half the battle."

"Arsinoe is working it out as quickly as she can. In the meantime Charlie and Bill are bringing the rest."

"I know. Albus told me that they had originally only found half of the tablet and decided to send it on ahead. This way if it fell into the wrong hands it would be useless without the other part. They found the rest last week. I hope they don't meet with any trouble bringing it back."

"They're both good wizards and know how to protect themselves."

"But what if Voldemort..."

"Don't even think it!" Remus growled sharply. "Now tell me some of the good things that have happened. It will do no good to keep worrying about what might happen."

Harry nodded thoughtfully, "Well...our night out was lots of fun, Professor. I never knew you could be so romantic." She smiled warmly at the werewolf.

Remus had gotten Madam Rosmerta to give him the back room in the Three Broomsticks. He had set up a candlelight dinner for two, complete with enchanted violins and fairy lights.

"I'm glad to see that it made you so happy."

"You're not a bad kisser either, but I already knew that." She blushed remembering his having kissed her in the garden last summer.

Remus grinned, "What would you expect from the big bad wolf?" He howled softly under his breath.

"At least with Sirius there are no surprises."

"Ah, yes...A wild motorcycle ride against the night sky, Italian food..."

"Pizza," she interrupted.

"And a night of dancing to loud rock music," he finished.

"You forgot the snogging," Harry teased.

"I'm ignoring that part," he countered with aplomb.

"Jealous?"

"I trust you both implicitly."

"That doesn't answer my question."

"That's the best one you are going to get. How was the symphony with Severus? You never did tell us. You just walked around with a crooked smile the entire day afterwards."

"Wonderful," she beamed "They did selections from Strauss and Mozart. Then we went for a late night dinner in a quiet little French restaurant before Portkeying back to Hogwarts."

"What no snogging?"

"Considering a large gray wolf and a big black dog were watching us from the Astronomy tower when we got back we decided to keep it simple."

"You saw us?"

"No, Sev did. Of course you didn't see what happened once we came inside," she giggled, looking up at him through her lashes. Remus playfully growled low in his throat. "Now would you like to hear my favorite date?"

"Hmm...?"

"The day we all went to lunch and bowling."

"I am pleased you enjoyed it, Child," Dumbledore's soft voice remarked from behind, startling her. He had just entered from the anteroom behind the dais.

"Headmaster, you always seem to show up at the most interesting moments," Harry laughed.

"He just likes to keep us on our toes," Remus smirked.

"Sirius had a great time too, especially when he put that spell on my bowling ball and caused it to come back just before it hit the pins," she added, as they all smiled at the memory.

"Speaking of my dear godfather, where is he?" For that matter where is Severus?"

"Sirius took Circe into Hogsmeade," Remus answered, not meeting Harry's eyes, "and Severus is on order business. I'm covering his Defense Against the Dark Arts class and Tiberius has his upper level Potions."

"Oh..." Harry frowned.

"Don't look so downcast, Child." Dumbledore stated, kindly.

"Why didn't Circe just apparate? She certainly doesn't need Sirius to bring her every time she has to go into town."

"Sirius is also on an errand for me," Dumbledore explained, "so he offered to take her on his motorcycle."

"There is no need to be jealous, Harry," Remus assured her.

"I am not jealous! I just worry about all of you, and Sirius has a habit of being in the wrong place at the wrong time." Harry insisted. "I am even more concerned since having that vision from the *Peyote*."

"Don't become obsessed with it, Harry," Dumbledore soothed. "Visions are often difficult to interpret."

"Just the same, Headmaster, it wasn't pleasant. Tom Riddle has a knack for doing the unexpected."

"What exactly did he say?" Remus questioned. "You were crying and shaking so badly that you were babbling incoherently."

"I saw him talking to Lucius Malfoy. They were discussing a plot to destroy me but first Voldemort said he would attack me through my conscience. He told Lucius I wouldn't be able to stop him because I could never destroy those I loved. Then all I saw was Voldemort laughing. His face was twisted into the most evil expression I had ever seen. After that, the vision changed. I could still hear his laughter but I was surrounded by fire everywhere. I was trapped somewhere that seemed familiar, but I was too distracted to determine the location," Harry shuddered at the memory. "The next thing I knew Hermione was slapping me to bring me out of the trance and everyone was all around me. My scar had opened up and the blood was running into my eyes. I'm still not sure what exactly happened afterwards."

"Princess, we had all we could do to keep you still. Your magic was so strong you actually blocked the binding spells we had to use. You were having some kind of a fit, thrashing and screaming as you rolled on the floor. You kept yelling that you had to save them."

"Yes..." Dumbledore mused aloud, lips pursed in thought, "you seemed to be in pain and trying to free yourself. I want you to continue practicing your telekinetic skills. They have proven invaluable in the past and may once again."

"Headmaster, he means to kill me, but I will do as you say, even though I don't believe it will make any difference."

"Harry, Tom has been trying to kill you for the past seventeen years, and you have withstood every assault he has thrown at you both physically and mentally. This was merely a vision, and could mean any number of things."

"Like what?"

"I am not certain. That is why visions are so hard to interpret," Dumbledore stated, blue eyes studying her intently. "We don't even know if it was an event that will actually happen or just your unconscious fears manifesting themselves."

"Ron's vision wasn't hard to interpret. He was obviously shagging Hermione."

Dumbledore and Remus looked at one another and smiled at the memory of the young wizard's vision remembering the look on Hermione's face. Ron's movements and mumblings during the vision were unmistakable. Hermione had been mortified and Ron was beet red when he awakened, the stain on his trousers telling more than words. He had just looked at his fiancé and grinned sheepishly saying, 'It's going to be one hell of a honeymoon.' Hermione had then conjured a bucket of ice water, dumping it over Ron's head.

"Just the same, Harry," Remus reiterated, "Dumbledore is right. Ron may have just envisioned what he desires too. Not what will actually happen."

Dumbledore took Harry's hand gently before he continued, "Do you recall anything else from the vision that might help us to determine it's meaning?"

"Only that Voldemort said our final battle would begin when it had started, on Halloween, and that's today. My scar had been throbbing all morning."

"Princess, why didn't you tell us about your car earlier?" Remus admonished.

Harry shrugged, "I didn't want you to worry," she sighed pushing back her plate, leaving the chicken sandwich only half eaten.

Remus wanted to hug her but was unable to do so as all the students would see. Instead, he whispered softly in her ear, "We're all behind you, Harry. After all we are your strength, courage, and endurance as well as your heart, soul, and conscience."

"And Dumbledore keeps the trust so you that you will know what to do when guided by Ron's Right of Vision as the Keeper of the Goblet," Harry smiled, reaffirming the Protectorship. Thanks for reminding me, Remus."

"No problem." He smiled at Harry tenderly as the doors to the Great Hall flung open and Severus strode in, black robes flying behind him. He headed directly to the head table.

"Headmaster, the package has been delivered," he informed Dumbledore, black eyes glittering.

"And our two young wizards?"

"They are both waiting in your office."

"I trust there was no trouble, Severus?"

"Some, but the five Death eaters who tried to ambush us will not be causing any more problems," Snape replied shooting a guarded glance at Harry. "Three have been apprehended and the other two escaped but will have to answer to the Dark Lord." His lips twisted into an icy sneer and Harry gave an involuntary shudder.

"I see," Dumbledore acknowledged. "Arsinoe will want to be there. She is in her office working on the first part of the translation. Would you go fetch her and bring her to my office? I will meet with you all shortly."

"Yes, Headmaster," he nodded turning on his heel. He strode out as swiftly as he had entered.

"Harry, Remus, if you will both excuse me I must attend to this immediately."

"It's the rest of the spell, isn't it?" Harry questioned with trepidation.

"Yes, Child. Bill and Charlie Weasley are home safely. Molly will be relieved as will the rest of the Order."

"Here, here," Remus agreed.

Dumbledore was rising to leave just as a large falcon flew in to the Great Hall. He carried a letter in his powerful beak. Swooping towards them, he dropped the letter in front of Harry and flew off. Her name was scrawled on the envelope. Harry blanched in pain, a shooting pain running through her scar.

"It's from Voldemort!" she gasped, as Dumbledore gently touched his wand to her scar easing the pain.

"Come into the anteroom now," the headmaster instructed, "and bring the letter." They moved into the small room behind the dais where Dumbledore and Remus began to examine the letter for any dangerous hexes that may have been attached to it. Once they were satisfied it was safe Dumbledore turned and nodded to Harry. "Go ahead, Child, open it."

Harry's hands shook nervously as she tore open the seal, a wax version of the Dark Mark. She slowly began to read the missive aloud.

Harry,

As I am sure, you are now aware there are no hidden hexes on this letter, since I am certain that old fool, Dumbledore, will have checked it over before allowing you to read it. So I will get right to the point. I promised you a surprise and since it is Halloween I thought now would be an excellent time to send it. Unless you decide to join me I am going to make sure you receive something extra special for Trick-or-Treat. Of course, it will be my extreme pleasure to perform a rather nasty trick. The treat will be mine as well since the link between us will enable me to feel your reaction, just as you can feel mine. How is your heart my dear? I know you are wondering what I could possibly do now to either bend you to my will or kill you. Believe me when I say that your pain will be my pleasure, for there are many kinds of pain Harry, and you need to be reminded of that. Do enjoy your feast tonight as it will undoubtedly be your last should you fail to concede and join my ranks of Death eaters. You will have one hour to respond.

Morsmordre,

Voldemort

As soon as she finished reading, the parchment burst into green flames. The Dark Mark appeared in the middle, the parchment itself disintegrating, until only a small version of the dreaded symbol was left hanging in the air in front of them.

"I thought there were no hexes on that letter," she sputtered.

"There were no dangerous hexes, Harry," Dumbledore responded calmly, "but Tom is ingenious in his forms of intimidation. He is a powerful and cunning wizard. He knew I would examine the letter so he merely put a simple warning charm on it."

"You knew it was there?"

"Did you not sense something when you handled it?"

"I felt cold inside, like someone had walked over my grave. My scare was burning as if it was charged with electricity."

"You felt the power of the charm, Harry," Remus explained. "It is called the *Exemplum Postremus*, or final warning."

"Why isn't it taught at Hogwarts?"

"Because it is only used when two or more enemies wish to offer an ultimatum. It is a semi dark spell and rarely used."

"Semi dark, how can a spell be semi dark?" Harry questioned, looking from one man to the other.

"Well, Child, there is no danger from the charm itself. It is always the forerunner of something terrible to its recipient should the sender's demands fail to be met."

As Dumbledore was explaining the significance of the spell, Severus returned, entering the antechamber. Freezing abruptly, his dark eyes locked onto the slowly fading Dark Mark.

"Headmaster," he breathed, composing himself, "what has happened?"

"Harry has received an *Exemplum Postremus* from Voldemort," Remus answered, studying Severus intently. His heightened senses immediately picked up on Severus' fear, although the other wizard gave an outward appearance of composure.

"I see. You will need to send a reply, Potter. How long has he given you to respond?"

"She has one hour," Dumbledore informed him before Harry could reply.

"I have no intention of answering that piece of trash," she stated angrily. A sudden burst of pain shot through her scar and Harry grabbed hold of Remus.

"Even Wizarding wars have rules, Harry," Dumbledore counseled while Remus gently lowered her into a chair. "You have to send an answer. It is proper custom," Dumbledore said conjuring a quill and parchment.

"What should I say?" she asked absently rubbing her scar. It was burning intensely and felt as if it were boring into her head.

"The words will come from within." Dumbledore placed a gentle hand on her shoulder. "I cannot tell you what to say. The choice must come from you alone."

Harry stared at the blank parchment for a full five minutes, her brow creased in thought. Slowly, she picked up the quill, dipped it into the inkwell that had appeared on the table, and began to write.

Tom,

I am sure you are now aware I have received your short missive containing the Exemplum Postremus. It was very proper of you to send me this warning since I am sure you already know that my answer is a resounding NO! Do what you will, for it can be no worse than what I have already suffered through your vile actions. Our destinies are linked, cousin, and it shames me to admit that we are related by blood as well as magic. I will leave it to fate to determine which of us will succeed. You have besmirched the names of the founders as well as countless others in your quest for power, giving the world cause to hate all of wizardry. I cannot and will not allow you to continue. Even if it means I will die in the quest to restore peace to both our world and that of the Muggles, whom you have so ruthlessly butchered these past years, I will see you stopped and your Deathaters in chains. You foul the earth

with your presence. If there is justice in this world, I fully intend to see your soul returned to whatever loathsome pit it from which it was returned. Have a Happy Halloween, for I guarantee it will be your last.

In Exillum Mitto Morsmordre,

Harry James Potter

"Headmaster, may I use your seal?" she asked folding the letter and carefully and conjuring an envelope.

Dumbledore removed the seal containing the Hogwarts Crest from the pocket in his robes. Harry dripped some red candle wax to the back of the envelope and affixed it onto the flap. Taking out her wand she cast a spell on it so that the Dark mark would appear inside of a circle with a slash after the Dark Lord read it. It was the same mark she had used to be rescued from the tower roof to avoid freezing to death. Dumbledore's blue eyes were twinkling, his lips fixed in a shrewd smile.

"I told you the words would come from within."

"I believe Harry should use my raven to send the letter," Snape remarked. "It would be unwise of her to try and send Hedwig. The Dark Lord will have anti owl wards posted."

"I take it the raven already knows the way?" Remus looked at Snape, his expression unreadable.

"He does," Severus affirmed blandly. "I can send it if you wish, Harry?"

"Thanks." She handed him the envelope before placing her head in her hands.

"Are you all right, Princess?"

"I think I am going to be sick, Remus," Harry replied. Jumping up she tried to get to the wastebasket. Overcome with a wave of dizziness, she didn't make it, vomiting all over the floor. Remus helped her back to her seat.

"You need to lie down, Harry," Dumbledore said as flicked his wand to clean up the mess.

"I can't. I have the third year Potions class and the second year Transfiguration class this afternoon."

"I will cover your Potions," Snape stated gently. 'Merlin I hate seeing her like this. She despises people having to see her appear weak. I know it bothers her,' he reflected to himself.

"I am sure Minerva won't mind helping you out with the second years Transfiguration class either," Dumbledore informed her. His voice brooked no argument. "You need to lie down and rest until dinner."

"Do I have to go to the feast?"

"It would be best. We do not know what Voldemort has planned. It will be safer for you with all of us present. If he thinks that you are afraid he will take your absence as a sign of weakness," Dumbledore added, voicing Severus thoughts.

"You're right, of course," she sighed.

"Come on, Princess, I'll stay with you."

"Remus, you have a class this afternoon too. It wouldn't be right to keep you away because I'm not feeling well."

"Nonsense, Child, I will have Hagrid cover the Care of Magical Creatures," Dumbledore proposed.

"But what about Phaedra? If Hagrid is teaching he won't be able to get her from school."

"I will go and get her myself. She will enjoy being apparated back anyway." Dumbledore smiled anticipating the child's delight at his coming for her. He made a mental note to bring some extra lemon drops. "Now as your employer and Trust Keeper I am ordering you to go and get some sleep. You will feel better and be prepared for what ever Tom is planning."

"Yes, Sir," Harry conceded, allowing Remus to help her upstairs. 'I wish Sirius were here,' she thought. 'I really need him now. What is he doing with Circe in Hogsmeade anyway?' she wondered.

"He'll be back soon, Harry," Remus remarked as if he were reading her thoughts.

"You don't think Voldemort will try to go after him in Hogsmeade, do you?"

"Sirius can take care of himself. He survived Azkaban didn't he?"

Harry merely nodded, allowing Remus to open her door and lead her into the sitting room. She flopped down on the sofa, kicking off her shoes, and curled up closing her eyes.

Remus closed the drapes on the afternoon sunlight to darken the room then conjured a fire in the grate. A pot of tea magically appeared on the table with a tray of biscuits. He shook his head at the uncanny ability of the house elves to know just what to send at any given time. Seating himself in one of her overstuffed chairs, he poured a cup of tea, and sat quietly watching Harry. She had fallen asleep almost immediately. Her face etched into a frown. 'Damn, how much more pain and tragedy will she have to endure now that the war is started again? I wish Sirius would hurry up and get back,' he mused. 'Damn, Padfoot, hurry the hell up will you? Harry needs you here. I know what you're doing is important to both Circe and Moody, but Harry is terrified inside even though she masks it well. You're the only one out of all of us that can make her smile in the face of adversity. She needs that special strength only you can give her.'

Harry moaned softly as the pain in her head intensified, a tear sliding from the corner of her eye. Remus got up, going into the bathroom. Soaking a washcloth with cool water, he muttered a spell to keep it cold. Returning to Harry, he placed it gently on her forehead, stroking her hair, until she seemed to relax. Meanwhile, a large black raven was winging its way towards the hidden lair of Lord Voldemort....

Voldemort sat beside his blazing fire, staring into the flames. His pet snake, Nagini, was wound around the back of his chair, her massive head resting in his lap. He sat stiffly, his only movement being the two fingers he used to stroke the massive serpent.

"Master," she hissed, "when will Lucius be back? I'm hungry. You promised he would bring me a treat."

"Patience my pet," he cooed in Parsel Tongue, "he is on a mission for me."

"Is it something to do with Potter?"

"He is arranging a little reunion party," Voldemort smiled coldly. "I have a special treat in store for Potter tonight should she fail to agree to join the Death eaters."

"She is to become a Death eater?"

"No. I have no doubt she will refuse."

"Then why did you send her that letter?"

"Fear, my dear Nagini. I have planted the seeds. Now we will watch it grow until she can no longer resist my will. Then I will strike."

"You will kill her?"

"In time, but first she must suffer. Yes...suffer...she will pay for her defiance through her heart. I will stab her as she stabbed me, but in a much different way."

"I do not understand."

"You will...yes...you will see how she crumbles. In the end she will beg for death," Voldemort laughed. His red eyes glowed with an inhuman hunger. He licked his lips in anticipation as a large black raven tapped on the window. "*Aperio*, he said, waving his hand. The window slid up with a groan. The raven flew in, warily hovering beside his chair, as Voldemort untied the letter. Nagini eyed the bird hungrily while her stomach rumbling in protest. "No, my pet. Lucius will bring your dinner and it will be something much more to your liking," he soothed the snake, twisting his lips into a rictus smile. Nagini laid her head back down onto his lap as the raven disappeared out the window into the setting sun. Deftly, Voldemort opened the envelope, scanning its contents. He leered with pleasure as he read Harry's reply. "Ah, Nagini, it is as I thought. Potter is an emotional fool!" Voldemort grinned evilly as he dropped the letter to the floor. It immediately began to disintegrate, the symbol Harry had conjured springing up in front of him, turning the smile into an outraged snarl. Leaping to his feet with unnatural speed, he tossed Nagini aside. The snake hissed in surprise, dropping down onto the floor with a thud, as a sharp knock sounded on the door. "Enter Lucius," Voldemort bellowed impatiently.

"My Lord," Malfoy whispered warily. Dropping to his knees, he set a small canvas bag down beside him. "All is in readiness." His cool gray eyes quickly scanned the room for the source of his master's anger, resting briefly on the floating symbol.

"Good, Potter has mocked me once too often."

"I take it she has refused My Lord's kind offer to join us?"

"Did I not say she would? Nevertheless, she has wrought my wrath by her blatant impudence," Voldemort seethed, waving his hand towards the now dissipating symbol.

"Yes My Lord. It will be my pleasure to join you in her destruction along with that of my son."

"Umm...Draco...He will be fodder for the rats. I expect you will kill him slowly?"

"I think it will be amusing to break his spirit with some kind of torture, following which, with your permission, I will offer his worthless carcass to Nagini for the final kill."

"She will enjoy the thrill of a human kill. She has had none for a long while. Leave just enough fight left in him to make it worth our while," Voldemort's eyes glittered in anticipation at the idea of watching Draco die. He chuckled evilly.

"As you wish, Lord."

"Master, " Nagini hissed, "am I to have human food tonight?"

"Not tonight, my sweet, but I know Lucius has brought you something to whet your appetite," Voldemort hissed back. "Lucius show Nagini what you have brought her to eat. She is most impatient."

"It is here, My Lord," Lucius responded. Opening the sack, he dislodged the large lump, which had been moving within. A large white rabbit hopped out in terror. Lucius has stolen it from the hutch in the backyard of a Muggle family after he had killed them.

"Ah...let us allow Nagini her pleasure in the hunt while we watch."

Lucius, still kneeling, threw the rabbit part way across the room, the snake slithering after it. The rabbit's nose was twitching furiously, eyes wide with fear, as he ran about looking for a place to hide from the stalking predator.

"Have I pleased you with my selection for Nagini, Master?"

"Yes. You may rise Lucius and we shall see how long it takes for our prey to succumb to death."

Lucius Malfoy rose gracefully to his feet. He knew Lord Voldemort was not just referring to the doomed rabbit, and the corners of his mouth twitched into a sly sneer at the thought of Potter and his worthless son, Draco...

Remus heightened werewolf senses alerted him to Sirius' return. Sirius' scent told Remus of his friend's anxiety and Sirius' footfalls were hurried and nervous. Remus looked up as Sirius entered Harry's chambers and placed a finger to his lips for quiet.

"How is she?" Sirius whispered, eyes darting over the sleeping form on the sofa.

"Not good, Padfoot. She's been restless and dreaming a lot." As if to confirm Remus' statement Harry moaned softly, curling into a tight ball. "I take it Dumbledore told you what happened?"

"Yes, I'm glad you were here for her, Moony. As much as I hate to admit it, I'm relieved that Severus was too."

Remus nodded, flashing his friend an understanding smile as he pulled up a chair beside him.

"I have been watching her and I believe she may be seeing some of what Voldemort is doing. Every so often, she mumbles in her sleep and has been speaking in Parsel Tongue. I wish I could understand snake language but unfortunately I'm limited to wolf speak and other forms of canine," Remus stated winking at Sirius, trying not to sound too worried.

"Does it seem like Voldemort is aware of her presence?"

"I don't think so, but I can't say for certain."

Both men sat quietly watching Harry sleep for another fifteen minutes, when Sirius spoke again.

"Moony..." Sirius voice caught in his throat, "do you think Harry would understand that a person could love more than one person at a time, but could be in love with only one of them?" His brown eyes locked with Remus' hazel ones for a brief minute before turning back to the sleeping form. Remus hesitated briefly while forming his reply.

"Harry is a very warm and understanding young woman. I think she would want what is best for all of us. She is only now coming to grips with her own feelings, Padfoot. That's why she is so torn up inside. She doesn't want any one of us to be hurt, but at the same time she fears being hurt herself."

"Um...that's what I thought too," Sirius mumbled. "She has a strong attraction to Severus."

"Does that bother you?"

"Oddly enough, no. He's changed, Moony, he's not the boy we knew in school."

"I'm glad you can see that, Padfoot. Harry has brought him out of his shell. She sees the man he really is, not what he pretends to be."

"Uh huh...she has brought him to life. I knew him before Hogwarts, you know. His family was as bad as mine. We were actually friends once, before Hogwarts, when we were just little boys."

"You never told me that. What happened?"

"He believed what his family told him. His father was very much like Lucius Malfoy. He never talks about it but I suspect they were unusually cruel. Circe is his half sister. Her mother died when she was a child and their father remarried. He wanted an heir. I think he was disappointed in Severus."

"It seems he and Harry really got the worst of it from their families. Neither one of them was wanted."

"No...That's why she was so determined that he not hate her just because of what James and I put him through."

"I was also a party to many of those pranks, Padfoot. In any event, Harry has brought about a change in him. He cares about her, but I think he has trouble expressing his feelings."

"He was never one to say much. Unless he was putting a curse on you," Padfoot grinned. "Do you think Harry will marry him?"

"I don't know, Padfoot. She loves you very much." Remus averted his eyes.

"We all agreed, Moony. The decision would be hers. Are you still seeing Arsinoe?"

"Yes, she's a wonderful young woman. She has no fear of me either."

"That's good, old friend, you need someone to make you happy."

"I know, but..."

Harry stirred in her sleep again cutting off their conversation. Taking a deep breath, she uttered a sharp cry as her eyes flew open.

"The rabbit...Don't kill the rabbit!" she yelled looking around in confusion.

"Harry...Harry...It's all right. You're here safe with us. You're in your own room," Sirius comforted, taking her into his arms, while Remus poured her a cup of tea. "It was just a bad dream, love."

"No, it wasn't!" She shook her head adamantly, but her hands were shaking as she took the cup Remus offered her

"What did you see, Princess?" Remus inquired gently.

"Voldemort was with Lucius Malfoy. I didn't know what they were planning but Lucius set it up for him."

"What was the rabbit thing all about?" Sirius asked puzzled.

"Malfoy had it in a sack. They fed the poor thing to Nagini. They thought it was funny watching it fight for its life. They compared it to me and Draco..." her voice trailed off as she shuddered again.

"Harry, you are not a meek rabbit. You are the most powerful witch of the age," Sirius remarked fiercely, startling Harry. She was unaccustomed to hearing him speak so strongly. "You're brave, smart, and caring, not to mention very pretty," he grinned, giving her a peck on the nose.

"And you, Mr. Black, aren't so bad yourself!" She smiled back warmly. "That goes for you too, Professor," she told Lupin. Taking a sip of the tea, she began to relax. "What time is it?"

"Almost time for the feast," Remus answered.

"Do I have time to shower and change into fresh robes?"

"I think so." Sirius glanced at his watch. "We have about an hour yet. Do you want us to stay for a bit longer?"

"Sorry, Padfoot, no getting to guess what I look like under my towel," she teased, getting up from the sofa.

"Miss Wings, do you really think I would do such a thing?"

"Yup, and so would our resident werewolf," Harry chuckled, giving Remus a shy glance. Both men just grinned back wickedly, getting up to leave.

"We'll pick you up in about an hour, Princess. In the meantime I will try and control this bad dog's naughty thoughts."

"Humph, you would do better to try and control your own," she snorted with a wry smile as they left.

Harry's scar was still prickling but she was used to it after so many years. She enjoyed the steamy shower and allowed herself to relax under the warm spray. Her thoughts drifted to her friends.

Arsinoe was translating the ancient Aztec writings as well as some she had gotten from Bill Weasley. He had secured them from another Curse Breaker he was friends with in Egypt. The hieroglyphics were complex and difficult, but Arsinoe felt they were much the same thing. Hermione's thirst for knowledge and study of ancient runes had impressed Arsinoe so much that she had granted Hermione a limited apprenticeship. Harry believed that with the two of them working for her they would unlock the secrets of the ancient magic. Hermione had been thrilled to be included, considering it a part of her duty to the Order to assist on such an important project. Harry had been delighted for her friend. She knew that if anybody could spot a clue of any significance it would be Hermione.

Harry had also warmed towards Arsinoe over the past few weeks during their lessons. She was a difficult taskmaster but her patience was a thing to be admired. Harry was now able to transform as quickly into her snake as she could her phoenix. Unfortunately, she could not go from one to the other. Try as she might, the most she was able to manage was to go from human to bird then back to human then snake in record time. She was growing concerned that she would never be able to accomplish the combination to winged serpent.

Her thoughts then drifted to Ron. He had grown into a wonderful young man and was doing well with his Auror training. Since Harry was going to do free lance Auror work for Moody, Ron would often meet her in the Room of Requirement with Draco. The three of them would practice their dueling skills. While neither of the wizards had ever beaten her she knew they could hold their own in battle should the need arise. Ron was also very much in love with Hermione. When ever she came into the room to watch his mouth would twist into a goofy

smile and his eyes would glow with pride. This worried Harry immensely since the Death Eaters might try to get to Ron using Hermione. Harry knew all too well that she had already succumbed once, nearly getting her expelled. 'I'll never let that happen again,' she vowed silently. 'Ron and Hermione deserve to be happy and I would never forgive myself if they were killed because they were helping me. I want them to live to see their children and grandchildren grow up.' As this thought passed through her mind she smiled picturing a group of little Weasleys with bushy red hair.

Draco was another problem. With Lucius having been resurrected, he was in grave danger. While he and Harry were not the best of friends, they had come to an understanding. She found he could be quite pleasant and was becoming more tolerant of Muggle-borns. Harry believed this was a direct result of his association with Ginny and her family. She could tell Draco loved her as much as Ron loved Hermione. Unfortunately, this placed them both in double jeopardy. Lucius and Voldemort would target them out of revenge and utter hatred for Harry.

Sighing, she stepped from the shower and went to get dressed. Since it was Halloween, she chose a set of black robes trimmed in orange silk. She then put in her contact lenses to highlight her green eyes. Her unruly black hair was tied back at the nape of her neck with a black ribbon. She was glad that since she had allowed it to grow it no longer stuck up at odd angles. Placing her wand in her pocket, Harry couldn't help but notice that the ruby ring the Snapes had given her for her birthday was very dark. The dragon etched into the stone out prominently. The significance of the ring stuck in her mind. Something bad was afoot. The danger warning was not to be dismissed. 'I'll have to let the Headmaster and the others know,' she mused. Her reverie was interrupted by a knock on the door. Opening it she was surprised to see Severus, rather than Remus and Sirius.

"Are you feeling any better, Harry?" He inquired studying her intently. "I had expected to find Black and Lupin here."

"I'm okay, but my scar is prickling. It feels like someone is sticking little pins into it. I sent Remus and Sirius away so I could shower and change for the feast," she explained. "I thought it would be them when you knocked."

"I see," he frowned.

"Are you having any problems occluding the Dark Lord?"

"Some, but I'm holding my own. I can feel his emotions though. He's excited. My ring is dark tonight too. Something important is going to happen and I can't stop it."

"All we can do is wait," Severus replied feigning calm. Inwardly he was very worried. He had been right about Tiberius being Dumbledore's new spy. His uncle had been summoned by the Dark Lord half an hour ago. "Are you ready to go to the feast?" Severus asked as the other two wizards came out into the hall.

"Harry," Remus called jovially, "I see you're ready and Severus is here too."

"Lupin, Black," the Potions Master acknowledged with a brief nod, "We should be going."

"You look lovely tonight, Harry," Sirius said appraising her appearance.

"Thanks, you don't look so bad yourself. Come to think of it you all look good!" The three men were all wearing their best robes; Remus in navy blue, Sirius in dark brown, and Severus in his traditional black. They proceeded to the Great Hall as Harry filled Sirius and Remus in about the feelings she was receiving from Voldemort and the warning sign from her ring.

Reaching the Great Hall, they took their seats, as the rest of the staff and students came in for the celebration. Harry noted that the Aurors were present also, situated at strategic areas around the room. Glancing up to the far end of the staff table Harry realized that Phaedra and Circe were also present but Tiberius Snape was missing. Severus took a few minutes to fill Dumbledore in on Harry's condition before going to sit with his sister and niece. Dumbledore smiled briefly at Harry and nodded his understanding before starting the feast...

Tiberius had apparated to the designated site, taking his place among the other Death eaters. Voldemort had accepted him into the inner circle following a rigorous session of questions and torture. Like his nephew, he was able to withstand the *Cruciatius Curse* without screaming for quite a length of time. He was also skilled with potions and had means of smuggling various artifacts and illegal materials into the country due to his many contacts within the import business. This had made him a valuable addition to Voldemort's forces, although he had not been entirely trusted.

Voldemort was more than aware that Severus had been a spy for Dumbledore, and the elder Snape might be one too. To gain Voldemort's trust Dumbledore and Tiberius had concocted a scheme to allow Voldemort access to the missing spells, which would vanquish his soul. The tablet was actually a clever forgery made by the Aztec tribe to which Arsinoe belonged. It had even fooled Voldemort's experts. The actual tablet was hidden in a secret room in the Headmaster's office.

Tiberius had accomplished the theft by being one of the Death eaters who had attacked Severus and the Weasley's on the way back to Hogwarts. He knew that the Weasleys were carrying the forgery. The real tablet had been secured by Severus. The whole plot had been carefully timed so that Tiberius was present to cover Severus' upper level Potions class. They had also made sure Tiberius was one of the Death eaters who had escaped. Severus also had to hit his uncle with several curses during the battle to prevent the Dark Lord from becoming suspicious. The other Death eater who had escaped had been a new recruit who had been brought along for muscle. Voldemort had dealt with him severely. Tiberius was also put under the *Cruciatius* for a brief period for allowing the others to be taken but Voldemort had been pleased that he had succeeded, securing what he believed to be the key to his ultimate victory. Fortunately, Tiberius was also a skilled Occlumens, which had also aided in the plan.

Now, as he awaited the Dark Lord's appearance, Tiberius stood straight and stiff, with no signs of the pain he had endured earlier. He had made sure to take both a healing and pain-killing potion upon his brief return to Hogwarts. His blue eyes scanned the area where they stood and his jaw tightened behind his mask. They were in a clearing in the Forbidden Forest, halfway between Hogsmeade and Hogwarts. A large covered pallet stood off to one side, its contents unknown. Catching a slight movement from the corner of his eye, which would be imperceptible to most people, he realized they were being watched. All his senses seemed to be charged and on alert. Whatever the Dark Lord had planned, it was not good. As he considered the possibilities, Lucius Malfoy appeared and took his place in the circle. The Dark Lord then appeared within its center, raising his arms to address his loyal followers.

"Welcome my most trusted allies. Tonight will be the beginning of my revenge against Harry Potter. She has been the bane of my existence and a force to be reckoned with. Yes, she is an admirable foe, more than worthy of my special attention to her demise. Tonight we will strike at her by using her most deepest and hidden desires. We shall hit her through her heart and into her soul making her rue the day she was ever born. Even the mighty Dumbledore will not be able to console or help her. For only I hold the key that will weaken her resolve and secure her into our hands. Behold that which will make Potter the slave to my will!"

Lucius stepped forward and with one fluid movement pulled the tarp from the pallet. Tiberius breath caught in his throat. In his wildest dreams he had never expected to see what lay before him...

Part 20 - A Crisis of Soul

Harry sat scanning the students pretending to concentrate on her meal but her scar continued to burn. She knew Voldemort was planning something terrible. However, there was nothing she could do. Everyone around her was enjoying the feast, yet her heart was heavy and every nerve in her body was on alert. Yet, all she could do was await the inevitable, which was why she was trying to occupy her mind by watching what was taking place within the Great Hall.

Scanning the Gryffindor table, she noted that Ginny Weasley was talking with her boyfriend, Draco Malfoy. The young Auror had stopped by her seat while making his rounds, much to the chagrin of her brother Ron. He was glaring at Draco from across the room, but the two young lovers were ignoring him. Ginny was beaming up at Draco, who had just told her a joke, and his smirk was unmistakable. Colin Creevy had just snapped their picture while his brother looked on.

The Hufflepuff Quidditch team was plotting strategies, using the floating pumpkins as hoops. Every now and again, a piece of candy would sail into the mouth of one of the jack-o-lanterns, scoring a goal.

Meanwhile, Mariah Flint was creating a scene over on the Slytherin table. The Parkinson twins had struck again, pranking her with one of the Weasley twins Furry Fingered Foulies. She had reached into the candy bucket for a treat and the odd creature had begun crawling up her hand. Mariah had been taken by surprise, threatening to hex the two boys. Professor Snape had stopped her with his proverbial glare.

Harry's lips were pursed in a wry smile as her gaze drifted over to the Ravenclaw table. Luna Lovegood was staring up at the enchanted ceiling with a vacant expression, her brow furrowed into an intense frown. Harry's stomach tightened as a shiver of fear ran down her spine. The burning in her scar had become a dull throb, sharp pains coursing through it, as Luna rose from her seat. Looking straight at Harry, she proceeded up the aisle towards the staff table. Their eyes were locked. Harry was vaguely aware that Dumbledore was watching intently while pretending to eat his pumpkin pasty.

Sirius had put his arm around her waist and she realized that Remus heightened senses recognized that something was not quite right. Farther down the table, Severus was watching stiffly, muscles taught, like a cat getting ready to spring.

Luna stopped in front of Harry. Her gaze was unblinking, breath coming in short gasps. She appeared to be in a trance and her jaw was working furiously to form her words. Her ethereal voice came out in a hollow rasp.

"The Lord of Darkness shall cast his charm of revenge this night in the tongue of the snake. The Great Prince of the Forest will arise with the Red Flower as the Army of the Watching Huntress falls to the Circle of the Skull. In the shadow of the place of the great sleep the Phoenix shall curse the darkness as the Serpent War begins..."

Tiberius watched as the Dark Lord's evil eyes roamed over the assembled members of the inner circle after Voldemort had pulled the tarp from the pallet. Two figures lay there, both bound, yet unmoving, clothes in rags. Tiberius held his breath, careful to keep his mind occluded. If the Dark Lord even suspected he was a spy Tiberius knew his life would be forfeit. Yet, he had to stop this atrocity, but had no idea how he could summon help. He

swiftly mulled over the possibilities in his mind, discounting them. There had to be something he could do. He only half heard the Dark Lord as he proclaimed the downfall of Harry Potter, describing how this would keep her at bay until he could make an example of her. Cheers rose up around him, and Tiberius added his voice to the assembled group so as not to arouse suspicion. The Dark Lord smiled coldly, turning to look at Lucius. It was then that Tiberius saw his opportunity. A watcher elf was cleverly hidden in the trees at the edge of the clearing. Tiberius recognized her as the one Harry and Phaedra had told him about. The elf had known Harry's parents, helping to rescue the two girls last Christmas during their kidnapping and subsequent escape from Voldemort. Focusing his attention on the spot where he knew she was observing, he sent her a swift message. 'Summon Dumbledore, get help.' Tiberius knew that watcher elves were highly telepathic, and while the Dark Lord could see into his mind with *Legilimency*, he had no actual telepathic ability.

Voldemort had turned his attention back to the assembled inner circle, and walked around them, studying each one intently. He stopped when he reached Tiberius.

"Ah...my faithful servant, Tiberius. You have proven your worth to me. Therefore, you shall be rewarded. When I waken the sleepers, it will be you who will deliver the *Cruciatus*, to assure me of your continued allegiance. They will remain as my hostages and we will use them for our amusement.

Tiberius knelt before his master. "My Lord, it would be my utmost pleasure to aid you in your humiliation and destruction of Harry Potter," he responded, keeping his eyes locked with Voldemort's. "She has made a blood traitor of my nephew and he has become a sniveling weakling." Tiberius made sure to let Voldemort see the image he had planted in his mind of Severus laughing and smiling at Harry.

"Then come, we shall begin. The ritual will take but a few minutes." Voldemort led Tiberius to where the two figures were lying, eyes closed in repose. He then turned to his followers and raised his arms to begin the ritual. As he did so, there came a great clatter among the trees, interrupting him, and the group in the clearing was surrounded by approximately fifty watcher elves, armed for battle...

Luna had collapsed in a faint as soon as her message had been delivered to Harry and the staff immediately moved to help her. Madam Pomfrey had them bring her into the anteroom while Professor McGonagall calmed the students down telling them Luna would be fine. Harry was shaking with the pain in her scar, her face ghostly white, but she followed the group into the anteroom.

"What the hell was that all about?" Sirius questioned. "She made absolutely no sense."

"I believe Miss Lovegood has uttered another prophecy," Dumbledore stated quietly as Madam Pomfrey worked on the stricken girl.

"No..." Harry managed to whisper. "It was no prophecy. She had a vision."

"Humph," Snape snorted with a sneer, "she was talking in riddles."

"Headmaster...I...I think I know...what she was telling me." Harry was shaking so violently the she had to sit down, and Madam Pomfrey looked up at her with concern.

"Miss Potter, do you require some assistance?" the nurse asked worriedly.

Harry ignored her and looked at Dumbledore. "We have to stop them...we have...to go...now!"

"Child, what is it that you believe she was telling you?"

"Yes, Princess, she made absolutely no sense. Something about a prince and a red flower. All I can ascertain is that she may have been speaking about the Death Eaters," Remus added with concern.

Harry nodded vigorously, her color starting to return as Luna moaned and opened her eyes. "What am I doing here?" Luna asked sitting up. "I was at the feast. Did something happen?"

"You fainted dear. Are you feeling better?" Madam Pomfrey queried.

"Yes. Why did I faint?"

"You apparently had some kind of vision," Dumbledore soothed.

"Really? That's interesting," the Ravenclaw remarked with fascination. "What..."

"Headmaster! We have to go! We have to stop him!" Harry interrupted sharply, her voice rising. "You don't understand. It's happening now!" she exclaimed as her scar seared with intense pain.

"Now, Harry, calm down. We will get to the bottom of this." Sirius moved to put his arm around her, but she shook him off angrily.

"I told you I know what is happening. Please listen to me. We have to go and stop Voldemort!"

"And where, pray tell, do you expect to find him?" Snape sneered.

"Luna told us where if you had only listened," Harry yelled, running from the anteroom. "We don't have much time. He's in the forest clearing below the cemetery..."

The Watcher elves had taken the Death Eaters by surprise but they recovered swiftly, drawing their wands. Voldemort glared over at their leader, furious that they had interrupted them. A petite lavender haired elf stepped forward in defiance, no fear reflected in her eyes.

"I am Artemis, the commander of this army. We are here to tell you to stop this vile action at once or face the consequences."

"You dare to try and order me? I am the greatest wizard in the world. You and your pitiful army are no match for my Death Eaters." Voldemort stared down at her, his slits for nostrils flaring angrily.

"Dumbledore is the greatest wizard in the world and Harry Potter has power that even he cannot match," she told him defiantly, "and as for my army, do not underestimate our strength. We demand that you return the sleepers to their rightful place immediately."

Voldemort laughed icily, red eyes scanning the forest. "Dumbledore is an old fool and Potter will die at my hands. She allows her emotions to cloud her judgment. She is weak and has only escaped me by pure luck. However, that is about to change."

"She has powers you will never know," Artemis replied coldly. "That is why she has succeeded in defying all your efforts to destroy her."

"Then perhaps I should allow you to live long enough to see her undoing. I have no intention of meeting your demands. If you think you can take the sleepers, as you call them, go ahead," he sneered. "I warn you that I will not give up my prize easily."

"My Lord," Lucius Malfoy addressed him, submissively, lowering his eyes. "Forgive my interruption. These elves are beneath us. Why not just kill them and be done with it? "

"You, Lucius Malfoy," Artemis interjected before Voldemort could answer, "are an arrogant fool. You have followed this one blindly, devoting yourself to darkness. You have shamed the name of Malfoy with your attitudes and beliefs."

"Ah...I see you know my favored Lieutenant's name, despite his mask," Voldemort leered, "and how is that may I ask?"

"We know all of your names, Tom Riddle," Artemis said using Voldemort's given name to annoy him. "Many of us have watched you all grow up in the shadow of the castle."

"Tom Riddle no longer exists. I am Lord Voldemort and you are a bigger fool than I had thought. By admitting you know the identities of my loyal followers you and your army have signed your death warrants."

"Your ego has gone to your head, Tom. You are an abomination to both your people and all that is natural in the world."

"Artemis, you have begun to bore me with your righteousness," Voldemort ridiculed with disdain, looking around the circle. The Deathaters stood ready to defend their master. "I have work to do." He turned back to the couple on the palate. "Kill them!" Voldemort bellowed with a hollow laugh.

The Deathaters sprang into action at his command, curses flying. Artemis leaped aside sharply, blocking the *Avadra Kedavra* Lucius had directed at her heart, countering with a wave of blue light. He was sent flying backwards, landing in a thistle bush, stunned.

"Thera, quickly... free the sleepers," Artemis yelled to another elf with pink hair. The elf jumped onto the pallet, cutting the magical cords with a powerful blast of white light, before being hit with a killing curse by Bellatrix. The elves were fighting furiously, and two other Deathaters were stunned, but the magic and weapons of the elves was no match for the power and swiftness of the dark wizards. Their numbers were quickly being diminished while Voldemort chanted his evil spell in Parseltongue ignoring the carnage around him.

Tiberius had been forced to fight along with the others but was deliberately missing the elves or stunning them. He had to make it look like he was supporting the Dark Lord at all costs. Gradually he worked his way towards Artemis, making eye contact, sending her another mental message. 'Did you send for Dumbledore?'

Artemis nodded. "This will help to keep you from being discovered, Tiberius," she responded mentally before stunning him with a blast of blue light. He fell backwards into the trees, losing his mask. His last thought before losing consciousness was that the elves really did know all of their identities...

Harry was running through the Great Hall, her protectors following in pursuit, the aurors moving to assist with what ever was going on. Dumbledore's voice boomed from behind her, his anger apparent.

"Harry, stay where you are!"

She froze instantly as all heads turned to see what the commotion was all about, students standing up to get a better view. Simultaneously, the doors to the Great Hall were flung open. A small figure with turquoise hair stumbled in, collapsing into Harry's arms. It was a watcher elf. He was out of breath, bleeding heavily from an array of wounds. Several students screamed and Dumbledore took immediate action.

"Silence!" he ordered firmly. "All Prefects are to escort the students back to their common rooms immediately. You will await further instructions from your Heads of House."

The students obeyed without question swiftly following the Prefects from the hall. Harry gently carried the elf over to the nearest empty bench, transfiguring it to a small bed, before carefully laying him down.

"Thank...you...", he moaned in pain. "I...seek...Harry...Potter...and the...wise one." He breathed heavily as Madam Pomfrey came running over to assist Harry, who had begun to assess his injuries. She realized he was bleeding internally.

"I am Harry Potter," she told him gently. "Professor Dumbledore is here too."

"Can you tell us what happened, Mercurio?" Dumbledore asked, smoothing the soft hair from the elf's forehead, while the nurse examined his injuries.

"The forest...the Evil Lord...in the...clearing. I...was...injured trying...to...come...for help."

"Try to lie still," Madam Pomfrey stated, running her wand over his tiny body.

"You...must...stop him. Unspeakable...act...Harry...", he gasped grabbing her hand. "He...means...to..."he never finished his sentence. Gasping and spitting up blood, Mercurio's chest gave a violent shudder, and he breathed no more.

"Albus, I'm sorry," Madam Pomfrey sighed, "There was nothing I could do. His injuries were too serious.

Dumbledore nodded, looking down at Harry. She was shaking, but whether it was with anger or pain over the death of the elf, he was not certain. He suspected it was a bit of both.

"Harry, what is Voldemort up to?" Dumbledore queried, blue eyes meeting her green ones. Harry didn't respond verbally, but allowed the Headmaster to probe her mind using *Legilimency*. Her heart was racing and a look of extreme sorrow mixed with fury flashed over his features. "Aurors, we must go immediately, we may yet have time to stop them!"

Dumbledore headed towards the front entrance of the castle. The others hurrying to catch up with him. Professor McGonagall and Hermione followed in their wake, the other teachers remaining behind to see to the students.

"Sirius," Harry called, "transform. We can get there faster in our animagus forms." Harry did not wait for his reply.

Transforming into her phoenix she flew over their heads and out the front doors. Sirius did the same, the large black dog anxious to see what was happening. He was determined to keep Harry out of danger. Reaching the front gates, Dumbledore turned to the others.

"Minerva, I want you to wait here. If we fail to return within a timely manner secure the school and notify the Ministry."

"Albus, what is going on? What did you see in Harry's mind?"

"I would rather not say what she believes. If it is true the situation is critical," he replied. "Kingsley, take Draco and bring up the rear. It is likely that Lucius is there with Voldemort. Ron, you stay with Severus and me, Remus you go with Tonks and the other two aurors. Hermione I want you to stay with Professor McGonagall. Find the members of the D.A. Ginny Weasley has been running the club since Harry graduated. Have them patrol the halls with the teachers and Prefects. The rest of us will apparate to the clearing below the cemetery on the count of three. Are you all ready?"

"Yes," they responded in unison.

"Very well, One...two...three..." they disappeared leaving Minerva McGonagall and Hermione Granger to walk back up to the castle. Minerva's heart was racing with worry, Luna's words running through her mind. Hermione's face was grave. She was terrified that she would lose the two people she cared about most in the world...

Harry flew through the trees faster than she had ever flown before. She had to stop Voldemort before he completed his evil deed. 'Please let me be wrong about Luna's vision,' she worried to herself. 'This can't happen.' She flew up above the trees, her keen phoenix eyes spotting the fire below. A fierce battle was going on and she could discern the figure of Padfoot heading right towards it. She had to stop him before he was killed! Diving down into the trees, she let out a shrill call, landing in front of him. They both transformed.

"The battle is still going on," she panted. "You were heading right into it. We have to walk from here or they will spot us."

"Where are they? I can smell the smoke from a fire."

"Just up ahead. Stay to the trees."

"Harry I want you to wait here. I will go and scout out the area for the others."

"No! There isn't time. He is almost finished the spell." She winced at the pain racing through her scar. "He's happy. Oh god, I think we're too late," she muttered moving through the forest, tears stinging her eyes...

Voldemort laughed wickedly. He had done it! They were moving slowly and the man opened his eyes in confusion.

"What...where?" He looked around sitting up. The woman beside him moaned softly and he reached out for her.

"You belong to me now," the Dark Lord grinned, red eyes aglow with delight.

"Voldemort!" the man gasped just as the woman opened her eyes.

"Yes indeed you foolish man. You will help to ensure my supreme victory." Voldemort smiled pointing his wand at the woman as she sat up and looked around in horror. "*Crucio!*" He hit her directly in the stomach..

The woman screamed in pain, Voldemort laughing wildly.

"Let her go you bastard!"

"Perhaps you would like some of the same?" He directed his wand at the man, his smile growing wider.

"Nooooo!" his companion screamed. She leaped up and trying to tackle him

He fell backwards as she landed heavily and he flung her away with inhuman strength. The man who had been sitting on the pallet stood up. He was horrified by the carnage around him. Watcher elves were battling the Deatheaters and he was surrounded by the dead and dying. He reached into his tattered robes but he had no wand.

"Run...get away while you can," one of the elves yelled to him. He wasn't sure but he thought it was Artemis. "Go quickly! I will cover you. Help is on the way!"

He grabbed his companion dragging her to her feet and whispered something in her ear as they started to run towards the edge of the forest.

"So...you're still alive!" Voldemort screamed pointing his wand. "I have been hindered by your interference for the last time. *Avadra Kedavra!*" A stream of green light shot from his wand directly towards the elf.

Artemis dodged swiftly and the curse flew through the air hitting Lucius, who fell over, stunned. He too, was immune to its effects, as was his master. Shaking his head, he recovered swiftly, laughing at the futility of the elves...

Harry and Sirius were on the edge of the clearing, looking around at the devastation that Voldemort had wrought. At least forty elves lay dead or injured. A moment later Dumbledore and the others appeared and started firing hexes at the eight Deatheaters who remained standing. Out of the corner of her eye, Harry saw a large stag run into the trees, a woman straddling his back.

"Dumbledore," Voldemort hissed, "you cannot stop me now."

"Don't be so sure Tom. You may be immune to the killing curse, but not any of the others. Your body still can feel pain and be stopped," he stated. Confidently aiming his wand he shouted, "*Stupefy!*"

Voldemort evaded the curse swiftly. "*Avadra Kedavra!*" he screamed spinning on his heels only to find Dumbledore was no longer there. "Where are you old man?"

"I'm right behind you, Tom." Dumbledore's voice came from over his shoulder.

Voldemort reacted swiftly. He spun around intending to use physical force to topple Dumbledore in an effort to bring him to his knees but once again, he was not there. A piercing screech echoed through the air as Fawkes appeared in a shower of sparks, flying towards him, claws at the ready. Harry had seen him going to help the Headmaster; transforming, she dove into the fray, following Fawkes. She had been too late to stop Voldemort's plan but maybe she could capture or injure him somehow.

"Potter!" Severus yelled running through the onslaught of hexes. "Stay back!"

"Now I have you both! You will die together traitor!" Voldemort immediately sent a volley of curses through the air but Severus had been prepared for the killing curse and dove to the ground as it sailed over his head. Harry merely flew above them.

"Give it up, Tom," Dumbledore's calm voice echoed through the meadow. "You will never win."

"You can't kill me, Dumbledore, but rest assured I will have my revenge. Potter will watch as you die at my hands along with her friends. She will be unable to stop me now!" He laughed coldly and pointed his wand into the air disappearing. The remaining Death eaters realized their master had gone followed suit.

"Help the injured," Dumbledore instructed as Tiberius came forward. He had recovered a few moments before and apparated back into the clearing as soon as the Death eaters had disappeared. He had to protect his cover. Two of the Aurors stationed at the school were not members of the Order and didn't know he was a spy.

"Uncle, I was concerned," Severus looked the elder Snape in the eyes.

"I have only just returned," he answered aloud so the others would think he had not been present. "I saw the wand flashes from the path and came to investigate." He would give his report at the meeting of the Order but had to be certain there were still no Death eaters lurking about who might overhear. 'I was stunned by Artemis and lying just inside the forest. She is aware I am Dumbledore's spy and stunned me to protect my cover,' Tiberius explained mentally.

"I am glad to see you have made it safely back from your journey," Severus replied aloud, nodding his understanding.

"I must speak with the Headmaster immediately."

"I will see you shortly in my office, Tiberius," Dumbledore said over his shoulder. "I am concerned about what may have happened here."

"Didn't you see them, Headmaster?" Harry asked looking over towards the forest where the stag had disappeared.

"See who, Harry? I was busy with Tom from the time I apparated into the meadow."

"Sirius, did you see them?"

"Harry, I was trying to keep up with you and keep you out of harms way. What do you think you saw?"

Harry just looked around in dismay. Did she really see the stag? Could she possibly be wrong in her assumption regarding the meaning of Luna's vision?

"Princess, what did you see?" Remus asked gently.

"I don't think you will believe me," she sighed. "Maybe it was my imagination."

"No, Little One. Your eyes did not deceive you," Artemis quiet voice remarked. She walked over to stand beside Dumbledore. "I was unable to stop him."

"Where did they go?"

"They are safe and hiding by the lake."

"Who's safe?" Severus questioned, arching his brow.

"I have to go to them. This is my fault. Merlin, I swear by my blood to do all that's good and right. By the powers of all the ancient gods I will stop the Dark Lord even if it means my own death!" Harry cursed into the darkness. Taking out the small knife she always carried in her pocket, she sliced her palm, dripping the blood into the ground. As soon as she did, a rumble of thunder filled the air followed by a flash of lightening, yet the sky was clear. Her protectors looked on in dismay. Turning towards the edge of the forest, she began to walk slowly, accepting the inevitable.

"Harry, where are you going? You shouldn't go into the forest by yourself." Sirius stopped in front of her, hands on his hips.

"Ask Dumbledore. He knows what the vision meant. I have to go."

"I think you three should go with her." Dumbledore waved his hands at the three protectors. "I will expect you all back at the castle shortly. I see the elves are being cared for by their brethren. Artemis would you like to join me up at the castle?"

"I must attend to my people but if you need me send word. I will come as soon as I can. The house elves will know how to find me."

"Understood." The old man nodded.

"Little One, I will go and tell them help is coming," she said sadly, disappearing with a pop.

"Come on, we have to get to the lake. They will be cold." Harry's voice cracked but she refused to cry.

The little group lit their wands against the darkness of the forest and walked towards the far end of the lake on the edge of Hogwarts land. It was a cold moonless night and Harry felt the chill deep within her soul.

"Harry, who is waiting for you at the lake?" Severus tried again to get her to talk.

"My worst nightmare since this whole business started," she snorted, anger at Voldemort welling up inside of her. "What am I going to do? This nightmare can't really be happening. Why can't I just wake up?" she thought anxiously.

Nearing the lake, she saw three figures through the trees. It was too dark to determine who they were but Harry instinctively knew one of them was Artemis. The elf pointed in Harry's direction and disappeared.

"Was that Artemis?" Remus whispered. He somehow thought he shouldn't speak loudly. Harry merely nodded. Stopping, she looked at the outlines of two people sitting on an old tree trunk.

"Come on, Harry," Sirius called moving forward to come around where the two people were sitting. A moment later, he dropped his wand, his mouth hanging open in shock. Remus ran over to see what was wrong, his eyes wide. His werewolf senses screaming at him that this was impossible.

"Hello, Padfoot. It's good to see you again. You too Moony."

"James...Lily?" Sirius whispered. "Is it really you?"

"It's them," Harry answered softly. "This is what Voldemort was doing. It is his way of controlling me." Severus inhaled sharply as he came up beside her to face the two figures.

"Hello, Severus." Lily smiled wanly, turning her emerald green eyes on Harry.

"Prongs, I can't believe it." Sirius moved forward swiftly grabbing his friend in a bear hug. The two men were smiling at one another, thumping each other on the back. Remus cautiously moved to join them, tears in his eyes.

Harry did not move. Severus put his arm around her shoulders as she and Lily continued to stare at one another. Lily spoke first.

"I thought you pretty that last night, when James found you on our doorstep," she remarked, remembering the night of her death. The night Harry had been sent back through time. "If you hadn't kept to the shadows I would have recognized you immediately. You're the image of your father except you have my eyes."

Harry merely nodded, continuing to stare at her mother as the men calmed down and looked over towards her.

"Harry?" James Potter questioned as she stepped further out of the shadows, a look of consternation on his face.

"How much do you remember?" Harry asked looking from one to the other.

"We...uh...we know we died," James replied nervously.

"Anything else?"

"Harry, we were in a peaceful place, if that's what you're asking."

"Harry," Lily's soft voice interceded, "we know we aren't supposed to be here. I don't know how Voldemort did it but it had to be some very dark magic."

"It was Necromancy," Severus answered.

"Snape, you are looking well."

"Potter, for a dead man you are too," he sneered.

"Severus we are aware of what has happened since we died. Well...most of it anyway. Right now, everything seems a bit jumbled and confused. We were unaware that Voldemort was still alive. I thought Harry had killed him that day in Grimmauld Place."

"I did. He came back. His followers used the same dark magic on him and Lucius Malfoy that he used tonight. He is in effect immortal, as are you." Harry looked from one to the other of her parents.

"I see...is there a reversal spell?" Lily asked wide-eyed.

"It is being translated," Severus answered quietly.

"Translated?" James looked at Severus.

"Yes, Potter. It is an ancient text and must be preformed by a Parselmouth."

"I see..." James furrowed his brow in concentration. "Harry...are you..."

"A Parselmouth?" she interrupted his thoughts.

"Yes, I can't seem to remember. Damn, it's all mixed up. I know I made peace with Severus though. I meant what I said that night." James extended his hand and Severus took it reluctantly.

"Harry, are you a Parselmouth? We have watched you grow up but your father is right. Everything we knew is fading."

"Yes, I can speak Parseltongue."

"Well then, as soon as you have the spell you can send Voldemort back to what ever Hell he came from," James spat.

"It isn't quite that simple. The counter spell must be done in his presence under the full moon."

"Then we'll help you to stop him!"

"I can't."

"Of course you can, Harry," Sirius spoke up. "You're the most powerful witch of the age."

"And Voldemort has done what he does best. He has played on my weakness," she shuddered. Lily got up to put her arms around her but Harry pulled back before she could. "Don't touch me! You can't get close."

"Princess, what are you doing? These are your parents."

"My parents died seventeen years ago tonight!"

"Harry! Don't talk to James and Lily like that!" Sirius yelled angrily.

"You don't understand. They're Voldemort's insurance. In order to send him back to whatever pit his soul crawled out of I have to send them back too! I can't allow them to get close to me." Her eyes met her mother's.

"Harry, are you sure?" Sirius paced, running his fingers through his thick hair. "I mean, James and Lily...they sent me back." He looked at James for confirmation.

"I can remember...you fell...through the veil," James muttered uncertainly.

"Yes...can you remember anything else?"

"I think I can," Lily responded. "You were stunned...but your soul...it was still within your...body."

"Lily, that's right. We told him to apparate before he passed through into the other realm!" James beamed excitedly. "He wasn't really dead."

"You sent me back to be with Harry," Sirius smiled.

Harry closed her eyes in pain. She had to make them understand that this was different. Her parents no longer belonged in the world of the living. They had been yanked from the afterlife to satisfy the ambitions of a dark wizard. Lily saw the pain on her daughter's face.

"James, Harry is right. We don't belong here. If Voldemort is to be stopped..."

"I understand, Lil."

"James, Harry is your daughter," Remus spoke up suddenly, "she will do what is right as opposed to what is easy."

James looked at Harry, studying her intently. She was standing with her chin set and her green eyes had a look of sad determination in them. He cocked his head, nodding, giving her a proud smile.

"Stopping Voldemort is the most important thing. Even if it means we will be returned to the afterlife. Your mother and I will know that you did it for all the right reasons. We were proud of you before. Don't let us down. Fight him...destroy him...we will help any way we can. In the end, we will still be with you. We always have been."

"I will meet you all back at the castle," Harry told them as she pulled off her cloak. "I'm sure Dumbledore is anxious for news."

"Princess, put your cloak back on. It's freezing out tonight."

"Yes, Remus, I am aware of that," she replied. With one swift motion, she placed her cloak over her mother's shoulders to conceal the rags that had once been her burial robes. Harry then transformed without another word, flying off in the direction of the school. She never saw the smile on her father's face as he looked down at her mother.

"She truly is our daughter." Lily beamed back up at her husband.

"I know," James replied hugging his wife.

"Here Potter, take my cloak. My robes are made of wool. It wouldn't do to walk into the castle half-naked. Your bodies may have been magically preserved but your clothes certainly weren't," Severus smirked, tossing the cloak over to him. 'Damn, after what he did to me I should let him go naked, but Harry would be too upset,' he mused as they started the long walk around the lake...

Harry reached the castle and flew directly up to the windows of Dumbledore's office. He was seated at his desk. Kingsley and Tonks were also there along with Ron, Hermione, Draco, Arsinoe Darkmoon and Minerva McGonagall. Tiberius Snape had just stepped onto the moving stairs, leaving the office. He had spoken to Dumbledore in private before the others had arrived. Harry tapped softly on the glass to alert them to her presence. Hermione dashed over and opened the window. Harry flew in and transformed. She went directly over to Fawkes and stroked his head while he filled the air with Phoenix song.

"Harry, what is going on? Professor Dumbledore said you would tell us everything as soon as you got here," Hermione questioned, dismayed by Harry's withdrawn countenance.

"I see Arsinoe is here. I suppose that is because of what has occurred."

"Yes, Child, I thought she should be aware of what you will now have to face."

"I understand," Harry answered avoiding Dumbledore's blue eyes. "How is the translation coming?"

"We have about half," Arsinoe replied. It is tricky and painstaking work."

"Keep at it. Hermione is great for details and research as I'm sure you have found out."

"Harry, you haven't answered Hermione's question. What actually went on out there mate? The goblet started to smoke, but it didn't burn so I couldn't see."

"Something unspeakable happened tonight, Ron. I watched my worst fears become reality." Harry finally raised her eyes to meet Dumbledore's. "I guess what they say is true about being careful what you wish for..."

"Child, even I would not have believed that Voldemort would stoop so low as to do what he did tonight."

"Will you all stop talking around us and tell us what is going on!" Tonks exclaimed. Dumbledore looked over at her sudden outburst. "Uh...sorry Professor, I just want to know what happened and why. We all do."

"It's okay Tonks," Harry remarked allowing her gaze to drift around the small group assembled in the office. Any other day she would have been amused by Tonk's bizarre shade of orange hair. "Headmaster, I need to sit down. They'll be here in a little while."

"I apologize, Harry. I should have offered you a seat as soon as you came in." Dumbledore promptly conjured her a soft comfortable chair and she curled up with a grateful smile.

"Who will be here, Harry?" McGonagall asked her in her crisp brogue.

"Draco, did you see your father tonight?" Harry looked at Draco, pointedly ignoring McGonagall's question.

"He fired off a *Cruciatus* curse at me but I was able to shield it. The bloody bastard probably wanted to make me suffer before he killed me. Why?"

"You know that the spell to send Voldemort back will do the same to him don't you?"

"Yeah, and good riddance, I say."

"Harry, please tell us what is going on!" Hermione begged impatiently. "Where are your protectors? Did something happen to them?"

"No, Mione. I told you they went with Harry into the forest."

"Something could have happened while they were in there, Ron. Why did Harry fly back alone?"

"Oi, Mione, if something had happened to them Harry would have said something right away. Isn't that so mate?"

"Ron's right. They're all fine. A bit shocked but dealing quite well actually."

"Then for Merlin's sake tell everyone what happened. Why did you go into the forest in the first place? What happened that the watcher elves were fighting with You-Know-Who?" Tonks demanded exasperated.

"Go ahead, Child. It is better if they are told before the others arrive."

"You're right, Headmaster, as usual." Harry stared off into the fire for a few minutes as Fawkes began to sing quietly from his perch. Taking a deep breath, she looked at the group of anxious faces. "Voldemort was practicing Necromancy again tonight. That's what Luna's vision was."

"What did Luna tell you? I was at the other end of the table talking with Hermione and we didn't hear it," Arsinoe remarked quietly.

"Nor did the Aurors. We were all circulating through out the Great Hall," Shacklebolt said from his seat in the corner.

Dumbledore quickly brought them up to speed. Harry could see Hermione's mind working and Ron's look of utter disgust. Arsinoe seemed intrigued but the others just looked confused.

"What kind of nonsense was that?" Ron shook his head.

"I think I understand some of it, Ron, " Hermione speculated. "We already know that You-Know-Who was in the forest clearing just below the cemetery. Therefore, that would be the shadow of the place of great sleep, and the language of the snake is Parseltongue. There was also a battle fought there with the watcher elves army."

"Very good, Hermione," Dumbledore commented. "Can you understand any of the rest?"

"Well...Harry did you utter any kind of curse tonight? I think you are the Phoenix."

"I made a blood oath tonight to all the ancient gods of goodness stop Voldemort even if it costs me my life."

"Bloody Hell, Harry! What could have been so terrible for you to swear such a thing?" Ron jumped up from his seat and started pacing as Professor McGonagall and the others gasped. Each knew that such an oath was deemed irrevocable.

"Do your protectors know of this, Harry," Tonks questioned.

"They heard me but it wouldn't have made any difference. I have bound myself to the prophecy now whatever the outcome."

Hermione looked as if she were going to cry. Ron's features alternated from anger to worry as he glanced at his friend. McGonagall's stern features were drawn into a tight mask and Arsinoe had a slight smile on the edge of her lips. Tonks and Kingsley exchanged nervous glances. Dumbledore's blue eyes reflected his love and pride. Oddly enough, Kingsley broke the silence.

"Miss Granger, is there anything else you can add?" He looked at Hermione with interest.

"Um...I...I'm not certain. The watching huntress must have something to do with the elves and the Circle of the Skull must be Voldemort's inner circle."

"You always were smart Hermione." Harry managed a weak smile at her friend. "The watching huntress is Artemis. Do you remember your Muggle mythology?"

"Of course! Luna was talking about Artemis. Artemis and Diana were the same deity but one was Greek and the other Roman. They were considered the goddesses of the moon. The watcher elves worship the moon," she answered excitedly.

"But what about this business of a red flower and the Great Prince of the Forest?" Tonks wondered aloud, looking at Hermione.

"That one has me stumped," Hermione confessed.

"Oh, Hermione, you can do better than that. Think about fairy tales. Who was the Great Prince of the Forest?" Harry watched her friend closely. "Then put that answer together with the red flower."

"Hmm..." Hermione's face set into deep concentration and everyone could see her going through various things in her mind. All of a sudden her eyes widened in understanding. "Harry...he didn't ...he couldn't!" she choked on the words.

"Mione, what are you getting off about?" Ron demanded. "If you know something just spit it out."

"Oh, Ron...it's just too terrible. It's a wonder that Harry isn't a basket case over this."

"Over what, Hermione?" Ron shook his head growing flustered by Hermione's dismay and Harry's silence.

"It's just that if what I think has happened...Oh Merlin, Harry I'm so sorry. This is just too awful."

"Miss Granger perhaps if you could fill the rest of us in?" Professor McGonagall queried forcefully.

"It's all right, Hermione. Go ahead and explain the rest of the vision. I just don't have the heart to do it," Harry said sadly. "Then they'll understand what exactly is going on."

"Are you sure, Harry?" Hermione asked studying her friend closely for any sign of emotion.

"I'm sure."

"Well then...The Great Prince of the Forest comes from a Muggle fairy tale called Bambi."

"What!" Tonks inhaled sharply. "My dad told me that story when I was little. The Great Prince...he was a stag!"

"A stag? What on earth would a stag have to do with Harry..." Ron began and then looked at Harry in shock. "Harry, your Patronus is a stag. Wasn't that your dad's animagus form?"

"Yeah."

"That means the red flower..." McGonagall looked up sharply. "Harry are you telling us that the Dark Lord has actually committed another act of Necromancy...that he...raised your...parents?"

Harry hung her head, unable to look at the horror and shock she knew was reflected on their faces. She could feel their emotions. Hermione was angry with Voldemort. Tonks was amazed and shocked. Professor McGonagall was sad, while Kingsley astounded. Arsinoe seemed to be accepting and understood what this would mean to Harry. It was Ron's feelings that troubled Harry. He seemed genuinely happy and Harry looked up at him in confusion.

"Harry, this is a good thing,. You will get to know your Mum and Dad. It's the one thing you've always wanted. You have your family back!"

Harry had begun to shake at his words. It was the one thing she could not allow herself to do. If she did...

"Ron, how can you be so thick?" Hermione shouted.

"Calm yourself, Miss Granger. Your fiancé's heart is in the right place. He merely doesn't understand," Dumbledore counseled.

"What don't I understand?"

"Ron," Arsinoe spoke seriously, "the spell that Harry must use to stop the Dark Lord and send his soul back will have the same effect on both Mr. Malfoy and her parents."

"You mean..."

"Yes, Ron. To finally do away with Voldemort I must also do away with my parents. He brought them back because he knew that it would kill me to do so. The longer it takes to learn the spell the more chance he has of me refusing to perform it. I can't get close..." Harry's voice trailed off.

"But Harry, maybe there is another way. Maybe they will be able to stay." Ron looked at Dumbledore hopefully.

"I'm afraid not, Mr. Weasley. They are just like Voldemort and Lucius Malfoy. Their bodies work because their souls were returned, but they are no longer mortal."

"Harry...mate...I"

"It's okay, Ron. I swore a blood oath tonight and I intend to follow it through," Harry remarked, her shoulders sagging, green eyes reflecting her turmoil. "They are on the way here right now. Sirius and Remus are escorting them with Severus."

"Harry, how did my cousin, Sirius, and Remus take this?" Tonks asked.

"Sirius was delighted at first. He was so happy to see my dad again. Remus was a bit more cautious but I could tell that he was glad."

"What did Professor Snape do?" Ron grinned.

"He said hello to my mother and shook hands and made peace with my father."

"How did you feel, Harry?" Dumbledore looked at her, blue eyes intently studying her reaction.

"I told them just what I told you. They understood, I think. They offered to help us fight Voldemort. They're very confused right now. Headmaster, I hear them coming up the stairs...I need to not be here when they arrive. I...would you send for Molly Weasley for me?" The edge in Harry's voice was unmistakable. She was holding on by a thread.

"Harry it will do no good to avoid them. We need to make some decisions right away. I have summoned the other members of the Order and we will have an emergency meeting tonight in the Room of Requirement. You will have to be there. I will see to it that Molly is told of your desire to speak with her."

"Yes, Sir."

"In the meantime I think the rest of you should attend to your duties until the meeting starts. I have scheduled it for eleven, which is in another hour," Dumbledore advised them as the door opened and five figures stepped in.

All eyes were on the man and woman who were standing looking about them uncertainly, unsure of what to expect. James Potter looked over to where Dumbledore was rising from his desk.

"Hello, Professor Dumbledore. It is nice to see you again."

"I had not planned on our next meeting to be on this plane of existence but it is good to see you again too," Dumbledore greeted him, blue eyes twinkling. "Please come and sit down. I am sure this whole experience is as unsettling for you as it is us." He conjured some more chairs and they joined the group.

"Thank you, Albus," Lily replied. He still had the effect of putting her at ease.

"I should introduce you to the others here. I know you know Minerva, and the young woman in the back of the room is Arsinoe Darkmoon." The two women nodded, Minerva wiping a tear from her eye.

"I recognize Kingsley," James nodded in greeting, "but who is this pretty witch with the bright orange hair?"

"As if you can't guess James Potter," Tonks grinned. Sirius snickered in amusement.

"Nymphadora, is it really you?" Lily asked studying her. "You were just a little girl the last time I saw you."

"Lily, please don't use that accursed name. It's Tonks now."

"I think it is a nice name," Lily retorted with a chuckle.

"Thank god Sirius named me Harry," Harry muttered under her breath but her mother heard her.

"I'll have you know we both named you Harry."

"Yeah, I heard. I was named for some old bald news stand wizard."

"Well you did look kind of like him." Lily smiled at the memory.

"I'll have to remember that one, Potter," Draco snickered.

"Shut up, Malfoy, or you'll be on the wrong end of a very nasty hex. I seem to recall you looked rather nice as a ferret." Harry glared. She was in no mood for Draco's wise remarks.

"Malfoy?" James Potter looked at the young Auror closely. "Are you related to Lucius Malfoy? I seem to remember that he had a son the same year as Harry was born."

"Unfortunately, Sir, he is my father. These days I prefer to deny there was ever any relationship. My cousin Sirius or my godfather, Severus, can fill you in," Draco replied offering his hand. "It's nice to meet you."

"I see you are in training to be an Auror," James remarked.

"Yes, it seemed the best choice under the circumstances," Draco shrugged.

"Excuse me, Mr. Potter, but I'm Hermione Granger, and this is my fiancé, Ron Weasley, she interrupted waving her hand towards Ron. "We're friends of Harry's."

"Ah...Sirius and Remus told us about the two of you on our way up to the castle. Seems you three are quite the mischief makers."

"James, if anyone created mischief while in Hogwarts it was the Marauders," Lily admonished. "Miss Granger, we're very happy to meet you, and you too Mr. Weasley."

"Call me Ron," he said offering his hand to Mr. Potter. "As for who could create mischief, you've never met my brothers, Fred and George."

"Are you related to Arthur Weasley or Bill? Bill was behind us in school, but I think he was a first year when we were in our seventh. I remember he had red hair."

"He's my father and Bill is my oldest brother. I have five of them and a younger sister, Ginny, who is a seventh year."

"I knew your father from the Ministry. Everybody liked him."

"The Weasley's have always considered Harry a part of their family," Hermione interjected trying to sound casual while she studied the Potters carefully. "Molly was Harry's surrogate mother."

James Potter smiled benignly, but Lily looked uncomfortable. Ron looked at Hermione with a silent glare. He had seen the sad look in Lily Potter's eyes.

"Ahem," Dumbledore cleared his throat to relieve the sudden tension, "I believe you all have duties to attend to. I will expect you at the Room of Requirement in an hour for the meeting. "Minerva, if you would stay for a moment, I have need of your services."

"Of course, Albus," McGonagall answered. "You know I will be happy to help."

"Harry, I would also request that you stay too," Dumbledore said as Harry started to follow Ron and Hermione from the office.

She shrugged her acquiescence while giving her friends a look that said it was okay to go without her and resumed her seat.

"Now that we are all here let me just say that this situation poses a number of problems. First off, we will have to find a secure place for the Potters. While you will both be relatively safe here at Hogwarts temporarily I think we should look for some sort of long term solution."

"I agree, Albus. I would offer Grimmauld Place but it was destroyed following Harry's last battle with Voldemort," Sirius told him thoughtfully.

"How long are we talking about?" Remus questioned.

"I can't answer that Remus. The situation with Voldemort could take days or months."

"Headmaster, my town home in London is empty at the moment," Severus suggested quietly. He knew that his offering assistance to Harry's parents would go a long way with her feelings towards him. He also wanted to get them out of Hogwarts as fast as possible. Even though James had made peace with him, he still didn't fully trust his old rival.

"I shall consider it, Severus."

"Are there any other suggestions?"

"What about the Shrieking Shack?" Remus offered. "It could certainly be made habitable and no one ever goes near it. It will also provide James and Lily with easy access to the school without being seen."

"Hmm...It may work, but it will take quite a bit of work. I know you and Sirius would like to be close to James and Lily, despite the circumstances."

"Headmaster, I may have a solution, but I would prefer to discuss it with you in private." Harry looked at Dumbledore with a half smile.

Her eyes were glittering with anticipation at the idea she had formed in the back of her mind. The headmaster studied her shrewdly, blue eyes meeting hers, attempting to enter her mind unsuccessfully. Harry had anticipated his using Legilimency and put up all her blocks, closing her mind.

"Very well, Child. I will listen to what you have to say in a few moments. In the meantime, we need to get your parents settled for the night and into some proper clothes. I am sure they would like to freshen up before the Order meets. Minerva if you could find something for Lily to wear I would be most appreciative. Sirius, if you could find some clothes for James, I am

certain he would be more than grateful. They can stay in the guest quarters off the third floor tower."

"Right," Sirius grinned. "Come on James, lets get you fitted out in something more substantial than those rags you have on while Minerva takes care of Lily. I'm sure we can all find something appropriate."

"I will see you all at the meeting then," Dumbledore nodded, "and James, I expect you and Lily too. You are still members despite the situation and since the meeting will involve your return I feel you should both attend."

"We'll be there," James agreed for them both. Taking his wife's arm, they all left Harry to speak in private with Dumbledore.

"Now, Harry, I know you are more than a bit distraught by this entire situation but I expect you to do your best to deal with what has happened," the old man counseled. "It has been a terrible shock for all of us."

"Headmaster, no one seems to understand what this means to me. In order to defeat Voldemort I have to kill my own parents."

"Child, we both know that they died seventeen years ago. It is just as difficult for them as it is for you. I could sense your mother's worry that you are trying to avoid them."

"I am," Harry said bluntly. "If I get close to them I know I will fail. Headmaster, this is killing me. All my life I have wanted to know my parents. The only time I ever spent with them other than my infancy was the night Voldemort sent me back in time so he could kill me along with them."

"I know, Child, but they love you very much. At least try to get to know them even if it is from a distance. You will be the better off for it. I know that when the time comes you will do the proper thing. I think they know it too."

"I'll think about it," she sighed. "I really do need to talk with Molly. I think she will understand how I feel inside. She really has been like a mother to me."

"I know. She will be here shortly for the meeting. I didn't say so before but I have already sent word to her to speak to you in your rooms before we start."

"Do any of the Order members know what has happened?"

"I told Arthur and Alastor. I did ask them not to say anything although Arthur did say he wanted to warn Molly."

"At least she knows why I need so badly to speak with her."

"I understand," Dumbledore smiled benignly. "Now I would like to know about this idea you have for your parents' safety."

"It is quite good actually." She grinned mischievously. "Have you set up the wards yet at our new headquarters on Privet Drive?"

"I have started. However, your aunt and uncle will not be leaving for another two weeks yet. It seems your cousin had to attend a two-month training program and your uncle's new position does not start until the fifteenth of November."

"All the better, I can't think of a less likely place for Voldemort to look for them. They can help to protect my relatives at the same time. I know you have been having the house watched and I am sure that my mother would like to see her sister."

"Harry, do I detect a note of sarcasm in your voice."

"I think Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon need to be taught a little lesson. Besides," she added before he could interrupt, "they really do need the protection. Even after all the mean things they did to me I still don't want to see them killed."

"Do your parents know how you were treated?"

"They said they can remember some things and that they were always close by but they are confused and are starting to forget. I think that may be why they were not sure who Ron's family was and were asking Draco about Lucius. They also didn't seem to know Hermione at all," she considered contemplatively. "My dad did say they were in a peaceful place though. So maybe even though they were watching out for me they didn't keep track of everything."

"They may also be unsure of letting you know how much they are actually aware of. I'm sure it must have been painful for them knowing how much you had to face without them," he told her gently. "As for your suggestion, don't you think it is more than a bit of spite on your part? You have admittedly said how poorly you were treated."

"Guilty," Harry smirked, "but you have to admit it would be the perfect place."

"Unfortunately you are right. It would be beneficial to the Order, at least until we can get the Shrieking Shack into habitable shape."

"So you are going to take Remus suggestion. Is that wise? I think it will not be good for Sirius and Remus to be so close to my dad. I can also sense Severus is more than a little uncomfortable."

"Severus feelings are understandable. As for the other two, I know it will be as hard for them as it is for you, perhaps even harder. At the same time it may help all of you to accept their loss later on."

"Maybe," Harry frowned. "I only know that somewhere deep inside I don't want to do what I know I have to," Harry lowered her eyes. "Professor Dumbledore...I'm afraid...I...Oh, Merlin, I don't know how to explain what I'm feeling."

"Child, no one expects you to do the impossible. I am sure James and Lily would not want to remain here if it means Voldemort will be victorious," he said gently.

"I know, they already told me that but what if I fail and Voldemort kills me?" she asked fearfully. "Then they will be his slaves forever."

"Harry, I promise you that if that should ever happen I will find a way to free their souls."

"But what if you get killed too? Then who will help them?"

"Arsinoe's people. They will find a way. If it makes you feel better I will speak to her tonight and see that her grandfather is made aware of the situation."

"If you think it will help then do it."

"Very well as long as you promise not to think about losing to Tom Riddle," he said firmly. "I have confidence in your abilities. You are already as powerful as me even if you don't realize it."

"I'll take your word on that one," she answered skeptically. "Now what about my suggestion?"

"Very well, even if you do want to get even with your aunt and uncle it is a good idea. However, it will only be until the repairs on the Shrieking Shack are completed."

"Thanks," Harry beamed up at the old man. His mouth was set in a firm line but his blue eyes were twinkling."

"Now off with you. I know you want to see Molly before the rest of the Order arrives, but remember what I told you. Your parents love you and you should get to know them while you have the chance."

"I'll remember," she promised stepping onto the moving stairs.

Dumbledore sat and watched her as she disappeared then sank back in his chair. 'What more can happen to my poor Little Phoenix,' he thought sadly. 'She does not deserve this heartache. Tom, you despicable bastard, I swear to Merlin that you will pay for what you have done. I will do everything in my power to see that Harry returns you to whatever Hell you came from. I will not rest until the world is rid of your evil influence.' He then rested his head in his hands contemplating how the members of the Order would take this horrific set back. He was only grateful that the Death Eaters who had been killed had all been cremated. At least Voldemort could not resurrect any more of his other followers.

Part 21 - A Perfectly Abnormally Normal Evening

As Harry waited patiently for Sirius, Remus and her parents to meet her by the front doors of the castle she allowed her mind to wander back to the previous evening's events. Voldemort had done the unthinkable, yet she had accepted the fact that she couldn't change what had happened. It was her solemn duty now to rectify the situation and see that it could never happen again. She would do all in her power to see that the Potters were safe and secure until the day came for her final confrontation with Lord Voldemort.

Arthur Weasley had told his wife what had occurred and Molly had come directly to Harry's rooms as soon as they arrived at Hogwarts. Harry had completely broken down when she saw her, crying so hard that Molly was afraid her 'poor Harry' was on the verge of a total breakdown. Molly's mothering instincts took over allowing Harry her grief, cradling her while she rocked gently back and forth until Harry's tears were spent. Molly understood Harry's despair better than anyone did. All her life Harry had wanted nothing more than to know her mother's love and comfort, which had been denied because of Lord Voldemort. Now he had come full circle and taunted the poor girl by putting them just beyond her reach. Molly fully understood Harry's dilemma. If she allowed her parents into her heart, Harry believed she would ultimately fail to destroy the Dark Lord. In her mind, she equated the act of destroying Voldemort with killing her parents. Molly felt it was her duty to convince her otherwise. Once Harry had calmed down sufficiently Molly had spoken to her as she did her own children.

"Harry dear, you know I love you as one of my own. When the time comes I will be there for you, as will your protectors and the rest of the Order."

"But Mrs. Weasley, how will I ever live with myself? My parents gave their lives to save me. Now I have to kill them all over again only this time I will be the one committing the act."

"Harry," she replied slowly, "your parents would not want you to feel that any of this is your fault. Try to look at it from their point of view. They are being given a chance to know the child they fought and died for; all you will be doing is returning them to a better place. You said yourself that they told you they were always with you. Give them the chance to know how much you care and let them show you what they are really like. You have only known them through the eyes of others. Let them go back knowing that their time here, no matter how evil the Dark Lord's intent was in bringing them back, was actually a gift from Heaven. As a mother, I can tell you that Lily's heart will break if you deny her. I am sure she ached as much for you as you did for her. Let them get to know you and not the child they had to watch from afar. I'm sure they are as confused as you are. Yet they will be there for you even knowing that in the end they can't stay. It will be their love that will guide you to do the right thing."

"What about Sirius and Remus. They will only end up hating me. They lost them before and now that they're all together, I will have to take that away. I can't bear the thought of how they will look at me. Sirius was so happy to see my dad..." Harry's voice trailed off.

"Harry, they won't hate you. If anything, they will love you all the more. You have given them the chance to say good-bye. They didn't have that before. Your act of love will bring all of you the closure which was denied for so long."

"And Severus, what about him?"

"He will have the opportunity to resolve his anger and pain. Did you ever think that maybe he needs to rid himself of the ghosts of his past so he can get on with his life? You have already brought him partially out of his shell. Your parents' presence may open old wounds but now he will have to deal with them as an adult. He needs to face the truths of what caused his animosity in the first place. Severus has already come to terms with your godfather now he can finally clear the slate with your father."

"He'll probably be happy when they're gone," Harry muttered.

"No Harry, he won't. He has come to love you as much as Sirius and Remus. He will not want to see you in pain."

"Oh, Molly, you make it sound so easy but what if I can't do it? What if..."

"Hush! I won't have you talking about failure. You are too brave and loving to fail and your powers are stronger than even I can imagine. It is my belief that the Dark Lord has made a grievous error in judgment by resurrecting your parents."

"I don't understand. What sort of error?"

"I believe that it will be their presence that will give you the impetus to succeed. Their love will help you to right this grievous wrong. You will give them peace knowing that you did what was right just as they would have done. Now go and wash your face or we will be late for the meeting."

Harry stared at Molly for a moment then did as she was told. Molly had given her a lot to think about and Harry trusted her. When she returned to the sitting room, Molly was waiting.

"Okay, I'm ready to go," she sniffed.

"Just one minute. Let me look at you," Molly said coming over and studying her face. "It's just as I thought. Your eyes are red and swollen from crying. This will never do." She waved her wand over Harry's face with a quick healing spell, nodding in satisfaction. "Now that's better," she stated smugly. It had the desired effect. Harry smiled up at her affectionately and they headed off to the meeting.

When they arrived at the Room of Requirement, most of the other members had already gathered with the exception of her parents and Sirius. Remus was sitting with Severus and Circe. They were talking quietly among themselves. Ron was present with Hermione and they were sitting with the most of the Weasley clan. Draco, Tonks, and Kingsley were not present and Harry knew that they were on duty. Ron would fill them in following the meeting. Minerva was sitting with Arabella Figg and Mundungus Fletcher, who was having an argument with Professor Sprout. Neville was also present. He was sitting with his parents. Mad Eye Moody was beside Tiberius near the front of the room. The room went silent when Harry and Molly entered. Harry knew word must have spread about the Potters resurrection. Professor Dumbledore was seated at the front of the room facing everyone with Mr. Chang on his left. He motioned for Harry to come and sit in the vacant seat to his right while Molly went to sit with her family.

"Ah...Our *Lung Huang* has arrived." Mr. Chang greeted her warmly, rising to bow gracefully.

"Good evening Mr. Chang," she bowed back, "it is nice to see you again. Unfortunately I have no idea what *Lung Huang* means."

The old Chinese gentleman laughed softly, his smile causing the corners of his eyes to wrinkle. He stroked his white beard thoughtfully as he studied Harry.

"Then today you will learn some Chinese." His dark eyes twinkled almost as brightly as Dumbledore's. "*Lung* is the Chinese word for dragon and *Huang* is a female phoenix."

"I'm a phoenix dragon?" Harry questioned, frowning, wondering just how much Dumbledore had told his contemporary.

"I meant no insult," he remarked. "I did not mean to distress you. It was meant as a compliment to your abilities. The phoenix and the serpent have very powerful magic in my culture."

"No insult was taken." Harry smiled ruefully. "It's just that sometimes I wonder how much you are able to discern on your own and how much Professor Dumbledore tells you." Harry eyed Dumbledore suspiciously.

"There is no need to fear that Albus has betrayed your abilities to me. He is aware that Chinese magic has its own means of foretelling the outcomes of certain events." He glanced at Dumbledore with a mysterious smile and both men seemed to share some kind of message. Harry wondered if Mr. Chang were a *Legilimens*.

"I see...and what will be the outcome of my current situation with a certain Dark Lord?" Harry was aware that Dumbledore was listening despite appearing to be reading a parchment sitting in front of him on the table.

"That which has been prophesized will come to pass in its own good time. Your path has been set and even my humble means of divination have not yet been able to lift the veil on the final outcome," Mr. Chang answered. "But I can tell you that in fire you will find darkness and in darkness you will find salvation."

Harry's stomach lurched and she was about to question the old man further but at that moment the door opened and Sirius entered with her parents. Sirius looked at Harry, giving her an encouraging wink then ushered her parents over to sit beside Mad Eye Moody and Tiberius.

Harry had thought her mother beautiful before but seeing her now took her breath away. Her mother had changed into a set of pale blue robes and her red hair glinted in the firelight. Her creamy complexion was flawless, while her emerald eyes were like two jewels beckoning to be plucked from the earth. It was no wonder her father had fallen so hard for her. Harry's father had also showered changed. His black robes accentuated his tall frame. Behind his glasses, hazel eyes were looking at everyone with open curiosity. He wore a crooked smile and his hair was untamable. He was also handsomer than Harry remembered from their last encounter back in time though not quite as good looking as Sirius.

Opening herself up, Harry decided it would not be wrong to use her empathy to discover how they really felt about being back. She also wanted to know how the others felt. Unfortunately, she was not given the chance to find out. Just as she was about to scan the room a burst of agonizing pain shot through her scar and she could hear Voldemort's crazed laughter. He was

happy. Something else had just happened, but before she could determine what, he became aware of her presence. She heard a scream of agony from somewhere in the room and realized that it was her own voice as the pain welled up inside of her. The last thing she saw before passing out were two red eyes blazing with delight.

She awoke several hours later to find herself in her own bed. 'Well at least I'm not in the infirmary for once,' she thought looking around. Her three protectors were scattered about the room. Sirius and Remus were asleep and Severus was sitting in the wing chair by the fire, reading a book. She could hear soft muted voices coming from her sitting room. Severus looked over at the sound of her movement as she sat up slowly.

"How are you feeling?"

"Okay, I guess. I have a headache."

"I should imagine so. You screamed and grabbed your scar before you passed out," he remarked quietly. The voices from the other room stopped. Looking towards the door, Harry's face registered surprise upon seeing her parents standing there.

"Harry, are you all right? What happened?" Her mother came over to her and instinctively tried to put her arms around Harry's shoulders but she pulled away.

"Just Voldemort touching my mind, it happens from time to time." She didn't want to tell them she had opened her mind to feel the emotions of the people around her and had inadvertently felt those of the Dark Lord. Snape looked at her suspiciously but kept silent.

"You frightened your mother and me half to death. We knew you were linked but didn't realize how bad these attacks actually were," James Potter told his daughter, coming over to sit on her bed. "I see your protectors are doing a fine job," he grinned looking over at the sleeping forms of his two friends.

"Severus is awake. They tend to sleep in shifts when I need them here," Harry shrugged. "Besides, it has been a rather stressful day for all of us."

"You're right." Her mother smiled. "You should try and get some rest. I understand that we will be moving tomorrow evening to our temporary quarters after dinner but Albus didn't say where. He said we should ask you."

"Did he tell anyone where I suggested you be lodged?" Harry questioned looking at Severus.

"No," Snape answered. "I believe he wants as few people to know as possible. He wouldn't even tell the three of us. He merely said that it was your idea and that he would have Lupin and Black accompany all of you."

"Why aren't you coming too?"

"I did not wish to intrude on your parents and their friends. Besides, I have to prepare the mid year exams for my OWL and NEWT level classes. I prefer to get them done early to avoid rushing before the Christmas recess."

"What's all the noise about?" Sirius' sleepy voice interrupted. He looked around in confusion, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. "Harry, are you all right?" He jumped up, tripping over Remus' outstretched feet, landing on the floor. Remus immediately came awake, drawing his wand. Getting up swiftly he lost his footing and tumbled on top of Sirius.

"What the hell is going on? Sirius are you all right?"

"I will be Moony as soon as you get off of me." Sirius tried to sound mad, but failed miserably. Both men struggled to their feet, grinning at one another sheepishly.

"Princess, how are you feeling?"

"Never better," Harry laughed. "I see you two are the perfect protectors for a young woman in distress. That is, if she is on the floor."

"My sentiments exactly," James chuckled.

"Are you two finished clowning around or do I have to send a hex your way to make sure you take your obligation to my daughter seriously," Lily chided trying not to smile.

"You can't hex them. You don't have a wand," Harry stated firmly.

"Albus returned my wand at the meeting tonight and your father's as well."

"He had them both? I thought the Ministry had yours?"

"Arthur secured mine and gave it to Albus. Artemis brought your father's to Albus. It had been buried with him. Apparently the Death eaters who retrieved his body missed it," Lily responded with an involuntary shudder.

"It's okay, Lils, try not to think about it." James comforted his wife.

"Um..." Harry faltered, uncomfortable calling her mother Mum but not wanting to call her Lily either. Covering her discomfiture, she hurried on. "You are aware of the reason the Ministry had your wand?"

"You used it to pierce Voldemort's heart." She looked at her daughter evenly. "You were very brave."

"Of course, she's a Potter." James smirked arrogantly.

Harry noted Severus' scowl and immediately changed the subject.

"Severus are you sure you don't want to come with us tomorrow? I think you would find it interesting."

"I'm sorry, Harry, but I do need to get some work done. Where are you planning on taking them?"

"That my dear Severus is a secret. I will however let you and only you in on it," she smirked, meeting his eyes. He understood and looked into her mind. A moment later, he arched his brow in amusement. "Now I know why you should have been in Slytherin."

"Yes, it is a rather devious idea," she winked.

"Harry, did the hat really want to put you in Slytherin?" James asked curiously. "I've heard you say so before but I thought you were just joking."

"The Sorting Hat felt that I would do very well in Slytherin. It said I had a strong desire to prove myself with plenty of courage along with a pretty good mind. The hat felt I could be great and that Slytherin would help me on the way but I refused to go there. So I became a Gryffindor," she explained glancing smugly at Severus.

"Humph, just as well the way you go running off to rescue everyone without thinking," Snape responded evenly.

"I think Harry should get some rest now," Lily interceded seeing the warning glare in her husband's eyes.

"I agree," Remus nodded. "Do you want us to stay awhile longer, Princess?"

"No, not really, I can call you if I need you. Severus, ordinarily I wouldn't ask you this but would you mind if we did our Potions tutoring on Saturday morning? It will make it easier for me rather than having to rush back after escorting my parents."

"I understand. I'm sure you will like to see them settled in to their new surroundings personally." His eyes glittered as a slight smile crossed his lips. "I will expect you directly after breakfast on Saturday and be prepared to spend the entire morning."

"What will we be doing?"

"I want you to mix the Draught of Living Death from memory. Do you think you are prepared to do so?"

"We'll find out on Saturday."

"Then I shall bid you good night." He rose from his seat. Going over to her bed, he kissed her gently on the lips. James Potter scowled but refrained from commenting as Lily directed a stern look in his direction.

"You're sure you don't want Padfoot tonight?" Sirius asked transforming and hopping up onto the bottom of her bed.

"No Padfoot. I will be fine. No go home to your own room and go to bed!"

Sirius gave a low whine and turned his sad puppy eyes on her. Harry just laughed and pointed.

"Ah well...you can't blame a dog for trying," Sirius grinned after changing back. Lily rolled her eyes and James laughed.

"Now what's your excuse?" she asked Remus.

"Who me, I'm innocent."

"Wolf in sheep's clothing is more like it."

"Good night, Princess."

"Good night! Now let me get some sleep!" Harry exclaimed pursing her lips.

"We'll see you tomorrow, Little Girl," James smiled as he and Lily moved to follow them from the room. They were half way out when Harry realized she hadn't told them about Voldemort.

"Wait! There's something I forgot to tell you."

"What's wrong?" Lily dashed back to her daughter's side.

"Before I passed out...Voldemort...he was...laughing. Something else happened tonight besides..." she looked at her parents unable to complete the sentence. "We need to tell Dumbledore."

The small group shifted uncomfortably looking from one to the other unable to meet Harry's eyes. Sirius finally broke the awkward silence.

"Harry...you're right. Something did happen. Dumbledore was informed by owl just after you passed out."

"Tell me...what...happened. Was anyone...killed?"

"Yes, Harry. The Deathaters attacked two Wizarding families tonight. Did you notice that Bill and Charlie Weasley weren't at the meeting tonight?"

"Please tell me they aren't dead," Harry cried in dismay.

"No, they managed to escape, but Bill is in St. Mungo's. They were attacked on their way here."

"You said two families, who else?"

Sirius shifted uneasily.

"Harry you have to understand that it is not your fault," Lily spoke calmly. "No one is safe with Voldemort back."

"I said who else!" she yelled shrilly.

"The Diggory's," Severus replied quietly. "They were tortured and killed along with some of their Muggle neighbors."

"Damn! The Order had no way of finding out ahead of time. If only we had someone who could infiltrate the Death Eaters. He did this deliberately to get to me because of Cedric." Harry's voice caught, but she refused to let them see her cry.

"Well...Uh...we do, Princess," Remus' soft voice muttered.

"What! Who?" she sputtered. "Why weren't we warned?"

"Our spy was not there. He was injured during your parent's resurrection and did not answer the summons," Snape explained. "He gave a full account of the events of the battle between the elves and the Dark Lord at tonight's meeting."

"Who is this spy that he would let this happen to my parents? Why didn't he try and stop Voldemort?" Harry demanded angrily.

"He worked with the Watcher Elves to try and stop it, and in return they protected his cover."

"Who is it Severus? Why won't you tell me?"

"Harry, you have to understand that he did everything he could," James counseled her calmly. "What happened to your mother and me was nobody's fault."

"I asked a question and I would like an answer."

"It is my uncle, Tiberius," Snape told her steadily looking in her eyes.

Harry didn't say anything for a moment as she digested this information.

"I saw him afterwards. He said he was on his way back to the castle."

"He had actually been stunned by Artemis and was in the trees at the edge of the clearing. She knew he was Albus spy. He did his best to only stun the elves to make it look as though he was helping the Dark Lord's cause," Severus explained.

"Harry you are not responsible for anything that happened tonight. You should not feel guilty," Sirius stated forcefully. "You need to keep your focus on stopping this monster. Don't let him play with your emotions."

"Sirius is right," James agreed. "I for one welcome the opportunity to aid in the fight against him. Our lives were cut short during the first war but so were many other people's. Don't let him win, Little Girl, and above all don't feel guilty about our being here."

"Listen to your father, Harry. We were in a good place and our only sadness was not being able to be here with you. Albus likes to say things happen for a reason. Maybe our being here will help you to win this fight so that other children won't have to grow up without their parents," Lily added adamantly, tossing her head.

Harry studied her parents soberly. She was thinking about what Molly had told her earlier. She wanted to hug her mother but resisted the urge and simply nodded.

"I need to get some sleep. Maybe things won't seem so bleak in the morning." They bid her good night once again and left her quarters. Harry tuned over, closing her eyes. Nevertheless, it had been a long time before she finally fell asleep. For the first time in a long while, her dreams were once again filled with her mother's screams and a flash of green light....

"We're all ready Love," Sirius jovial voice interrupted her reverie as he levitated a large trunk down the stairs to the main entrance.

"Thank you for securing some more clothes for us from Hogsmeade, Harry." Lily smiled affectionately as she followed Sirius down the last of the stairs.

"Yeah, fortunately Sirius was able to lend me some robes last night and your mother got some from that Aztec witch...what's her name again?"

"Arsinoe," Remus answered from behind him. "She is helping Harry to become an animagus multiplico."

"I thought she was translating the spells to reverse Voldemort's Necromancy?" James questioned.

"She is," Harry answered. "My friend Hermione is helping her. She is a whiz at ancient runes and charms. She's also a real bookworm. I think she's read every book in the school library."

"Just like your Mum," James smirked.

"She's the new school librarian isn't she?" Lily inquired ignoring her husband's comment.

"Yes, she's the smartest witch of our generation."

"You should read more often, Harry. I always thought you neglected your studies in favor of Quidditch."

"What's wrong with Quidditch?" James looked at his wife askance.

"Nothing, Dear, I'm just saying that Harry could have taken more of an interest in school when she was a student."

"Humph, if I neglected my studies so much I certainly wouldn't have survived this long. Hermione may be book smart but she doesn't know how to deal well with people, let alone Lord Voldemort."

"Honey, I didn't mean to offend you," Lily remarked with dismay.

"Just forget it," she shrugged, "we need to be going. "It would be best if you shrunk your trunk as we will be going by portkey."

"I'll do it," Remus said pointing his wand at the trunk. James then pocketed it.

"So, Miss Wings, where are we going?" Sirius questioned

"Miss Wings?" James interrupted. "Why do you call her that?"

"Have you forgotten already that my animagus form is a Phoenix?"

"Right," James grinned, "it's your nickname."

"Given in true Marauder's tradition, I might add." Sirius laughed clapping James on his back. "And you should see her on the Quidditch pitch. She's even better than you and she's a Seeker."

"I know she's a Seeker, Padfoot! As to whether she's better than I am...well...that remains to be seen."

"Are you challenging me?" Harry demanded rising to his baiting.

"When ever you're ready. Do you think you could make up a team?"

"It shouldn't be too difficult," she grinned, warming towards her father.

"Then whenever you're ready, just let me know."

"I'll speak with the Headmaster and see if we can't do it as a special treat for the students." Harry's eyes were sparkling with anticipation and Sirius looked ecstatic.

"Remus, will you please tell my husband and daughter that Quidditch isn't everything!"

"Sorry, Lily, but I do not want to end up hexed," Remus chuckled. "I think you will enjoy seeing them play. I know I will."

"Thank you, Moony," James remarked giving Lily a smug look. "Now let's be off."

"The Portkey is voice activated," Harry told them pulling an old work glove from her pocket. "Is everyone ready?"

"Whenever you are, Princess," Remus responded as they all took hold of the glove.

"In that case, four, three two, one..." Harry felt the familiar tug behind her navel as they vanished from the Great Hall. They appeared a few moments later standing in front of Arabella Figg's house. "We will go the rest of the way on foot."

Sirius looked around and immediately started laughing, while Remus smiled and shook his head.

"What is so funny, Padfoot?"

"Don't you see where we are James?"

"Isn't that Arabella's house? Is this where we are staying?"

"No, I think Harry had a much better idea, and I for one can't wait to see what will happen next."

"Now Sirius, I would never do anything mean to my relatives."

"Harry, just where we are going," Lily asked looking at Harry evenly as she began walking down the street.

"We are going visiting. I thought you might like to stay at our new headquarters. Unfortunately, the present occupants will be there for another two weeks. However the mortgage has already been paid by the Order so they have no choice but to allow us the use of their home."

"And whose home might that belong to young lady?" Lily's tone was that of a mother who had just caught her child sneaking a treat before dinner.

"I thought you might like to pay a visit to your sister and her husband. You have also never seen your nephew. It's time you got to know him."

James began laughing uproariously while his wife gave him a dirty look. She had no idea how Petunia would react to her presence and suspected Harry did this deliberately to annoy her aunt and uncle. At the same time, she wanted to give Petunia a piece of her mind for the way she had treated Harry. Her expression must have conveyed her feelings because James put his arm around her shoulder and gave her a big squeeze.

"Lils don't be angry with Harry. I think this was a wonderful idea. After all it is the new headquarters for the Order."

"Harry, do your aunt and uncle know we are coming?"

"Not unless Dumbledore told them and I don't think he did. Put up the hoods on your cloaks. I will need to break them in gently," Harry sneered.

Sirius was still laughing quietly, tears streaming down his face as Remus rolled his eyes.

"Harry, this is worthy of any Marauder prank and then some," her godfather panted. "No wonder Albus suggested Moony and I accompany you."

"It will be very interesting to see their reactions but I will try and forewarn them." Harry pretended to sound serious but the look in her eyes betrayed her anticipation of the reactions of her aunt and uncle. Going up the front walk, she saw the kitchen curtain move and knew her aunt was watching. Harry assumed she was doing the dinner dishes. Ringing the bell she waited patiently but no one came to the door.

"Looks like they aren't going to answer," Remus speculated.

"Let's give them one more shot shall we?" Harry pressed the bell again ringing it insistently. A moment later, she heard the disgruntled voice of her uncle yelling at Dudley to get upstairs and for her aunt to come into the hall. The door opened a crack and a moment later Vernon Dursley's face appeared with her aunt's slim form behind him.

"What are you doing here girl? We haven't left for New Zealand yet."

"You are both aware that the mortgage has been paid. It was explained to you that we may need to use the premises prior to your leaving in the event of an emergency," Harry told her

uncle stiffly. "So unless you want the neighbors to see something odd happen on your front lawn then I suggest you let us in."

"Do as she says Vernon," Petunia hissed from behind him. "We don't want anyone to see her kind around here."

Vernon Dursley swung open the door and the group walked in. Harry directed them into the kitchen and her aunt and uncle moved to go upstairs.

"Uncle Vernon, Aunt Petunia, I need you both to stay. This is a matter of great importance. I think Dudley should be here as well."

"What business of your kind could possibly concern us you freaks," Vernon growled.

"Just do as she says, Vernon," Petunia advised, "or she may give us trouble."

"I assure you aunt that there will be no trouble unless you start it. Now call Dudley and meet us in the kitchen. I will put on the tea."

Harry disappeared into the kitchen and motioned for her parents to keep their faces hidden while she put on the kettle and conjured four more chairs. She could sense the disgust in her father. Her mother's emotions ranged from pain to fury. Her aunt, uncle and cousin entered quietly and took their seats.

"Where did these chairs come from, girl? You know I will not permit magic in my house!" Vernon grumbled as he sat down.

"Unless you want to bring some from the dining room I would not complain," Harry shot back annoyed.

"Harry what is going on?" Petunia asked coldly. "Why are these people here and why are their faces hidden?"

"No manners that's why, the stupid freaks!"

Harry's father started to stand but Lily placed a restraining hand on his arm and he sat back down. She was fascinated watching her sister and brother-in-law yet sickened by their behavior.

"I'll get right to the point," Harry began. "You were told that we might need to use the house before you left and it has become necessary to do so. It will also be of benefit to your family as it will help to reinforce the wards."

"Humph, more of your bullshit spells."

"Uncle Vernon, these people may just be what save you from Lord Voldemort."

"Nonsense, girl, you really don't believe that rubbish that Lord Thingy came back from the dead. Such things are not possible."

"I told you before he used *Necromancy* and some very ancient spells. Whether you believe he is back is your business. Suffice it to say he is alive and well. The blood magic will help to protect you and this house will act as a safe haven for these two people for the next two weeks until other quarters are made available."

"Harry, does this mean you will be staying here? I absolutely forbid it. You will only bring more problems down on us!" Petunia Dursley glared.

"I will be going back to Hogwarts tonight. So will Remus and Sirius," Harry added nodding in the direction of the two men. "I told you only the other two would be staying."

"And where are we supposed to put them?" Petunia asked haughtily.

"I think Dudley's king size bed will do nicely. He can use my old room unless you want to put him in the cupboard under the stairs."

"That will be enough, girl! They can sleep on the roll out in the living room," Vernon spat.

"Uncle, I would appreciate it if you would stop calling me girl. You are well aware of my name," Harry stated coldly, putting a hand on her mother's arm. She could feel her anger getting ready to burst. Sirius and Remus just looked at one another.

"Mr. Dursley, forgive my asking but would you put your friends or relatives on the roll out?" Sirius questioned. His eyes were shining with mirth and Remus pretended to be studying something on the ceiling.

Vernon never got the chance to answer since at that moment the kettle began to whistle.

"I'll get the tea," Petunia said getting up hastily. The room was quiet while she poured the tea.

"Uncle you didn't answer Sirius question. How come Aunt Marge never was put on the roll out in the living room?" Harry asked feigning innocence.

"I would never put my sister on the couch! She's a good woman and I will not have you making snide remarks about her."

"Made a good balloon too," Sirius muttered just loud enough to be heard.

Vernon was starting to turn purple but Aunt Petunia pursed her lips and Dudley snickered under his breath.'

"I'll not have your kind saying things about my sister!"

"What about your niece? You called her a freak. I don't think that was very nice," Harry's father spoke slowly and distinctly. Harry could see a look of intense concentration on her aunt's face.

"Excuse me, but I don't believe you should be talking about my niece. She is an ungrateful wretch and we took her in out of the goodness of our hearts."

"I don't think this is getting us anywhere," Remus cut in to diffuse the situation. "Harry, would you tell your aunt and uncle why it is necessary for the two of them to be here."

"I have been trying to but it seems my relatives have ideas of their own."

"I say we should just show them," Sirius grinned wickedly.

"I'll be more than happy to," James laughed evilly, so long as Harry agrees.

"No, I promised Dumbledore I would explain the situation," she said stopping him from removing his cloak. She noticed her aunt looking at her father oddly.

"What's the matter, Aunt Petunia? You have a funny look on your face."

"That voice is familiar, but I can't place it. I know I've heard it somewhere before."

"Yes, you have, but not for a very long time." Harry smiled casting a wicked look in her parents' direction.

"What do you mean?" Petunia questioned, only to be interrupted by Dudley.

"Mum can't we just throw them all out? I want to go and watch the telly. This is boring."

"Dudley shut up," Harry snapped, "unless you would like to be turned into a slug."

"That's enough, girl. You have no business threatening your cousin like that."

"Oh, I don't know," James' thoughtful voice responded, "He's certainly caused Harry enough problems over the years. Wouldn't you say so Hon?"

"Definitely," Lily's soft voice purred. Her anger with Petunia was growing but it was nothing compared with what she felt for Vernon.

"Then get this over with and tell us why we need to keep them here. I know I have met him somewhere before and there is something very familiar about the woman too," Petunia stated trying to see her better.

"It has to do with Voldemort," Remus interjected. "He is back from the dead and what's worse he is entirely capable of bringing back others to suit his needs."

"I still say you are all talking nonsense," Vernon huffed.

"Then why don't we ask Aunt Petunia? Aunt, will you tell Uncle Vernon who these two people are?" Harry asked smiling at her aunt.

"How should I know if I can't see their faces," Petunia frowned.

"Then maybe they should refresh your memory," Sirius gloated as Harry nodded to them to lower their cowls.

As Lily and James Potter lowered their hoods to expose their faces, Petunia Dursley's face turned the color of chalk, her mouth open in a silent scream before she fainted. Vernon's chair toppled over as he moved to keep his wife from falling. He turned the darkest shade of purple Harry had ever seen. She thought he would have a stroke any minute. Harry knew he must also recognize her parents. Dudley just looked on in confusion at the spectacle unfolding before him and started yelling at Harry.

"Cousin, you freaking bitch what did you do to my Mum?"

"I simply brought my parents here so they would be safe and comfortable. It's not my fault Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon have a guilty conscience," Harry replied sweetly, green eyes flashing with delight. Harry knew she shouldn't be feeling happy about her aunt's reaction but she couldn't help it.

"Vernon I think you should get Petunia into the living room and put her on the couch," Lily instructed calmly. "Once we revive her sufficiently I think we will have a lot to talk about."

"What kind of joke is this? Lily's sister and her husband died nineteen years ago," he spat slapping Petunia in the face trying to revive her.

"Move out of the way, Dursley, and let us get her into the other room," James told him forcefully as he pointed his wand at his sister-in law.

Vernon backed off in terror and Dudley fled the kitchen. Harry could hear him pounding up the stairs to his room. A minute later, his door slammed. She had the feeling he was trying to hide under his bed.

Sirius was still finding the whole thing extremely funny and Remus face was set in a wolfish mask. Nevertheless, Harry caught his eyes shining with pleasure as her father levitated Petunia into the living room and gently lowered her onto the couch. Lily followed behind him and quickly conjured a glass of water then pointed her wand at the prostate form.

"*Enervate!*" she exclaimed.

Petunia slowly opened her eyes and looked around. As soon as she spotted Lily, she began to quiver all over.

"It's all right Lambkin," Vernon soothed. "This is obviously some kind of a vicious joke that freak is playing on us."

"Sorry, Dursley," Sirius grinned, "but this is reality. Voldemort raised Lily and James from the dead last night. Believe what you want but your wife knows her sister better than you."

"It's not possible to bring back the dead!" Vernon bellowed banging his fist on the coffee table.

"Vernon," Petunia began, sitting up slowly, "you don't know what those people are capable of. If you're really Lily and James then answer me a question to prove it."

"What would you like to know?" Lily asked coolly.

"What color was your room when we were kids?"

"I shared a room with you and it had rose flowered wall paper with pink curtains made by our mother."

"Humph you could have learned that from some of my old friends."

"Then why don't you ask me something?" James questioned amused.

Petunia's brow furrowed in concentration as she considered what to ask. She finally smirked. An unattractive chuckle erupted from her lips as she posed her next question.

"What happened behind the garden wall the night before your wedding?"

"You caught me and Lily shagging and threatened to tell your parents. Lily was furious so she transfigured you into a shrew until the next day," James laughed.

"You never told me that," Sirius erupted with his barking laugh.

"I promised Lily I would never mention it."

"Why do I think I shouldn't be hearing about my parent's prenuptial escapades?" Harry muttered to no one in particular.

"Is he right Mrs. Dursley?" Remus asked looking at James and trying not to grin.

"Yes...but that doesn't prove anything."

"Oh, Petunia, don't be such a stubborn twit. I kept you in a shoebox all night and didn't turn you back until an hour before the wedding. Mum and dad were furious because you weren't ready to go to the ceremony. They thought you had gotten drunk after the rehearsal and had slept off somewhere since you were still in the same clothes. Mum had to lend you some clean clothes to wear to the church."

"Lily?" Petunia looked at her sister and Harry was shocked to see tears in her eyes.

"Is...it...really...you?" Her aunt was shaking with combined fear and disbelief. A myriad of emotions passing over her thin face.

Harry's empathic abilities allowed her to feel what was reflected on her aunt's features, fear, disbelief, love, regret, anger, loathing, worry, and amazement. However before she could say anything Vernon interrupted her thoughts.

"Petunia do you expect me to believe that your sister and her dead beat husband have come back from the dead? This whole thing is absolutely preposterous!" he shouted, mustache twitching angrily. "This is just some ploy of that old man Dummydore to get us to take the girl back."

"Who are you calling a dead beat?" Sirius demanded pointing his wand at Vernon, "and the old man's name is Dumbledore."

"Ah..." Vernon sputtered backing off in fear.

"My dad was an Auror," Harry yelled defending her father, "Which is like the wizard police. They go after dark wizards who would like nothing better than to make you into stuffed pork."

"Mr. Dursley," Remus interjected, "calm yourself. Whether you choose to believe it or not, Voldemort, is back. He was raised from the dead using a very dark form of magic known as *Necromancy*. Harry has already explained this to you. What you may not know is that he has also raised one of his staunchest supporters, Lucius Malfoy."

"So now you're trying to tell me that these people are his supporters too? I might have known my freakish niece's parents were up to no good."

"NO! He raised them to get to me!" Harry's green eyes flashed. "In order to send him back I have to send them back too." She could feel her magic beginning to get out of control and was struggling to keep it in check.

"Princess, why don't you go upstairs and find your cousin and bring him down?" Remus asked in an effort to distract her so that she wouldn't do any unintentional magic.

"Remus is right, Harry. You need to get away from this situation for awhile," Lily told her daughter gently. She could feel the power emanating from her child and while she was secretly pleased, she realized what she might be capable of doing to her unsuspecting uncle. Not that Lily had anything nice to say about her brother-in-law. She simply wanted to keep Harry from getting into trouble with the Ministry.

"You're sure you will be alright?"

"Harry your mum and dad are more than capable of taking care of themselves. Besides, Remus and I are here too." Sirius winked reassuringly.

"Heaven help them then," Harry mumbled going to do as she was told....

"Now Vernon, I expect you to apologize to my husband and myself for your rude behavior. We are here and you have been told nothing but the truth. The magic protecting you and Petunia as well as your son will be strengthened during our stay."

"Freaks," he mumbled angrily.

"Vernon dear, please don't get them any angrier than they are. I know my sister and I can tell she is holding back."

"Humph, I have taken in their child out of the goodness of my heart and now they are threatening me? I'll be damned if I apologize! What right did they have to go off and get themselves killed saddling us with their little brat?"

"Vernon, think about what you're saying!" Petunia gasped. She had seen the look on Lily's face and the obnoxious gleam in James' eyes but before either of them could react, Sirius looked at her husband threateningly.

"Did you just call my goddaughter a brat? As I understand it she spent the first ten years of her life in that damned cupboard beneath your stairs," he whispered, eyes glinting dangerously.

"Not my fault she had no manners and was a sniveling little bitch."

"Vernon..." Petunia never finished her sentence as a jet of blue light shot out from Sirius wand...

Harry reached the upstairs landing and quickly made her way to Dudley's room, knocking sharply on the door. There was no answer so she knocked second time.

"Dudley, come on out. They want you to come downstairs." She could hear him shuffling around inside.

"No, I have the door locked and I'm not coming down till everyone leaves."

"Don't be ridiculous. Come on out."

"No, I won't."

"Then I'll have to come in and get you."

"Hah! You can't I've locked the door."

"Oh, bother," she sighed rolling her eyes. 'When will the stupid ass ever learn?' she thought in annoyance. "Dudley this is your last chance to open the door otherwise I will come in and get you!"

"Just try it!" he yelled nervously.

"If you say so, I will," she said pulling out her wand. "*Alohomora!*" The lock clicked and Harry walked into Dudley's room. He immediately ran and hid in the closet, locking the door behind him. Harry just smirked, shaking her head, going over to the closet door. Performing the unlocking spell once again, she found her cousin sitting on the floor quivering in fear.

"Leave me alone. You're going to turn me into a frog or something."

"Tempting as that thought may be," she sneered crossing her arms, glaring in imitation of Snape, "I am simply going to bring you down stairs to the living room. I think you should greet my parents properly."

"Are they really your mum and dad? Did that Voldimert really come back?"

"It's Voldemort, and yes, he did. Everything that you heard is true. Now come on before I really do decide to turn you into a frog." Harry grinned in spite of herself. 'Actually, he would make a great hippo with that fat round body and big mouth,' she considered silently.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" Dudley questioned fearfully.

"Oh nothing. I was just considering what you said. Now get downstairs," she said poking him in his gut with her wand.

Dudley didn't have to be told twice. He crawled from the closet and slowly backed towards the door. Once out in the hall he kept glancing over at Harry to make sure she wasn't going to do anything before they started down the stairs...

Sirius had had enough of Vernon Dursley's arrogant and stubborn attitude and let his temper get the better of him. Without giving it a second thought he decided that Vernon needed a dose of his own medicine. Pointing his wand in Vernon's direction the spell was out of his mouth before James could stop him.

"*Infans Magnitudo*," he hollered furiously. Vernon Dursley was immediately shrunk in size to that of a ten-year-old child.

"What have you done to me?" Vernon cried in terror. The pitch of his voice sounding like a garden gnome.

"Turn him back immediately you beast!" Petunia gasped.

"Uh oh, now they've really done it," James smirked looking at Lily while Sirius pointed his wand towards the cupboard that Harry had occupied, opening the door.

"You're right I am a beast." Sirius grin widened as he transformed. Vernon backed up in horror as he was confronted with the huge black dog. Sirius snapped at him playfully, and James knew he was still grinning.

"James, do something," Lily pleaded.

"Lils you know what Padfoot is like when he's pissed off, and right now I would say he's pretty pissed off."

Sirius continued to growl and snap at Vernon, as Petunia looked on too afraid to do anything but shriek. He was clearly enjoying himself as the now child sized Mr. Dursley started backing away. Sirius advanced slowly, stalking his prey. Vernon saw the big dog was not going to back down. Panicking, he felt his bladder let go, wetting his trousers. Looking for a way to escape he ran towards the hallway tripping over a footstool in his haste to get away from Padfoot. Seeing an opportunity not to be missed, Padfoot grabbed Vernon and nipped him in the ass. Dragging him by the seat of his pants, he pulled Vernon to the closet. Shrieking, Vernon was pushed inside and the door banged the door shut behind him. Padfoot sat down guarding the door, tongue lolling out in amusement.

"Let me out, you brute!" Vernon panted, pounding on the door of the cupboard. "I can't breathe."

Remus calmly walked over to the cupboard, petting Padfoot's great head, giving him a sly smile before he spoke.

"Mr. Dursley, you are in no danger and I would advise you to calm down. Once you are sufficiently under control I'm sure Sirius will allow you back out. Until that time I suggest you just sit quietly," he informed the frightened and furious child sized man. Maybe it was the

calm firmness in Remus' voice but for once Vernon Dursley did as he was told. Remus then rejoined the others in the living room leaving Padfoot to guard the cupboard. 'It's about time that nasty buffoon got what's coming to him,' Remus thought seriously. 'It's a good thing there is no full moon tonight or he would have had to deal with me, the odious bastard.'

"Petunia, shut up!" Lily snapped at her sister as Remus entered. "Sirius didn't hurt him but I may have. You have quite a bit of explaining to do."

"I for one am all ears," James agreed plopping down in Vernon's favorite easy chair.

"What...do...you mean?" Petunia shuddered from her place on the couch.

"Tell me, sister dear, why you treated Harry like she was a piece of shit? Surely your jealousy of me did not extend itself onto Harry?"

"I think I'll go and get us some more tea. It's going to be a long night," Remus stated going back into the hall.

"Thanks, Moony," James nodded. 'The hell with tea, I could go for a shot of firewhisky right about now,' he mused. 'Lils is going to let Petunia have it good for this. Not that I blame her.' He smiled to himself.

"Now answer my question." Lily stared at her sister in silent fury.

"I...ah...It's all his fault," Petunia stammered pointing towards James.

"And just how it your treatment of Harry my fault?" James inquired sarcastically.

"If you and Lily hadn't got married then she would have still been alive. She left us to go and live with your kind!" Petunia was starting to feel brave.

"What kind is that?" James queried evenly, his hazel eyes eyeing his sister-in-law with disgust.

"Uh..." Petunia thought hastily. She didn't want to find herself on the wrong end of his wand. "Magic people," she finished lamely.

"It might surprise you Petunia, but there are a good number of so called 'magic people' living through out the world. Some may even be your neighbors."

"My...neighbors?" she questioned weakly. James merely sneered.

"What has my marrying James got to do with Harry?" Lily demanded impatiently.

"He got you killed, Lil. It's true I was jealous and thought you were strange with all the things you could do. But if you hadn't gone to the stupid school..."

"Enough! My going to Hogwarts was the second best thing that ever happened to me. The first was marrying James and giving birth to Harry." Lily flashed a smile in James direction. "He didn't get me killed. He died trying to save me and Harry."

"But if you hadn't tried to save Harry maybe that evil wizard, what's his name, would have left you alone. Why couldn't you just give her to him?" Petunia sobbed.

"Pet, would you have given up your son?" Lily was trying to control her anger. She was shocked that her sister could suggest such a thing.

"What...no...of course...not. Oh...Lily I didn't mean to be so mean to her," Petunia began to sob hysterically, "but every time I looked at her I saw James Potter...except...except...for her...eyes. I couldn't...stand...to see...them. It hurt...too...much. Vernon...he...hates anything...abnormal...or different. He...didn't want to...keep her. I told him...we...had to or...the old man...he would come...and...well...you know. We did...as we were...told...and pretended she...was a boy. Vernon, he wouldn't let me...buy her anything. It was...his idea...to keep the...baby...in the cupboard," Petunia hiccupped in tears. "I couldn't go...against...my husband. So I...just kept her...away from me too." Petunia was hanging her head in shame. "Did she tell you everything?"

"Harry never had to tell us anything," James stated coldly. "We were watching."

"What...do you mean?" Petunia's eyes were wide with fright.

"This may surprise you Pet, but there is an after life. We saw most of what you put our daughter through. So did Mum and Dad as well as James' family. You will have a lot to atone for," Lily told her sister with revulsion.

"It might be a good idea if you started now," James commented. "You have a lot of souls that would like to get hold of you and heaven be damned!"

Petunia nodded in shame, her eyes worried. Her lip was twitching in fear as Remus came back into the living room. He set the tea tray on the coffee table as the sound of footsteps could be heard coming down the stairs.

"I think Harry has convinced Dudley to come down," Remus remarked casually, pouring the tea....

When Harry reached the bottom of the stairs she was surprised to see Padfoot sitting in front of her old cupboard.

"Woof," he wagged his tail in greeting.

"Cool!" Dudley exclaimed. "Where did this neat dog come from?" He pet Padfoot on the head and Harry could see him smiling with amusement.

"Dudley, this is Padfoot."

"You mean you got another dog? I know about Snuffles from when you brought her home that time. When did you get this one and where was he when you came in?"

"Dudley...um...this may come as a shock to you but Padfoot isn't a dog."

"Of course he's a dog, cousin. Have you gone daft?" He asked turning to look at his cousin.

"Dudley, Padfoot came in with the rest of us. He isn't really a dog. He's a wizard. It is my godfather, Sirius. He's an animagus."

"An ani what?"

"Animagus," Sirius soft voice responded with amusement.

Dudley spun around to face Sirius. His expression registered his shock at finding a man sitting on the floor and not a dog.

"How...how did you do that?"

"Magic," Sirius laughed. "Harry can do it too. So can your uncle James."

"Can...Can all...of you...do it?"

"No, it is a very special talent. Want to see?" he queried amused.

Dudley nodded nervously. Before Sirius could transform they was interrupted by a knocking coming from behind the cupboard door.

"Dudley, let me out. I'm trapped in here and it's hard to breathe," Vernon Dursley's gnome like voice called. Dudley's mouth dropped open and he stood gaping. "Dudders do you hear me? This is your father speaking! Do as I say now."

"Uh...Daddy?" Dudley looked at the door suspiciously.

"Yes, let me out. That freak dog man locked me in here. Now do as I say and open this door immediately."

Dudley's frightened eyes looked up at Sirius as he gave a low growl, giving Dudley a silent warning.

"Uncle Vernon, why did Sirius lock you in the cupboard?"

"Shut up you little freak! When I get my hands on you there will be hell to pay!"

"Now, now, Mr. Dursley, you really shouldn't threaten my goddaughter like that. I'm sure a few hours without food or water will change your mind. After all, it worked wonders for Harry," Sirius' sneered sarcastically. "Look at what nice a young woman she has become. I wonder why you never put your son in here too." Sirius was looking oddly at Dudley and Harry could see his mind working.

"How dare you compare that little freak with my Dudley? He's a good normal boy," Vernon screeched. Dudley unlock this door immediately."

Dudley looked from the cupboard door to Sirius and then at Harry. His eyes were like saucers and he was shaking all over.

Harry could tell that Sirius was enjoying himself but was also reminded of the incident with Severus she had seen in the pensive. She had no love for her uncle but was worried about her

parents staying in this house. She had wanted the Dursley's punished for the way she had been treated but wasn't sure if this was right or not. Sirius saw the look of distress coming into her eyes and put a gentle hand on her shoulder.

"I won't hurt him, Honey, but he needs to be taught a lesson. His treatment of you was intolerable and inhumane. I know I did some bad things in school but this is different. He needs to learn that his behavior was abusive and neglectful. Now go on back to the living room. The others are waiting for you and Dudley."

"Dudley don't you listen to that freak! Open this door so I can get those abnormal freaks out of our house."

"Dudley, I wouldn't try anything if I were you," Sirius warned with an evil grin. "I seem to remember that Hagrid once gave you a tail. Perhaps you would like the rest of the body to go with a new one?"

"So...sor...sorry, Daddy, but I can't let you out. I...uh...have to go...and uh...see what...Mummy wants," Dudley babbled looking towards the living room where his mother was sitting crying on the couch.

Sirius grinned at him and then transformed back into Padfoot. Dudley let out a frightened squeal and fled into the living room dropping down onto the couch beside his mother.

Harry looked at Padfoot for a moment then shook her head with a sigh. She knew that when Sirius was determined to do something there was no changing his mind and followed Dudley into the living room. Her aunt was sobbing and begging her mother to forgive her for treating Harry so badly. Her father rose from Uncle Vernon's favorite chair as she entered giving her a wink.

"Hello, Dudley, I'm your Uncle James," he said approaching her cousin with an outstretched hand, "we weren't properly introduced in the kitchen."

Dudley took the proffered hand reluctantly, palms sweating, fear reflected on his face. "Hello...Sir," he answered hesitantly.

"Hello Dudley, I'm your aunt Lily, your mother's younger sister and Harry's mother." Lily Evans smiled pleasantly but her green eyes showed her displeasure with her nephew.

"Ni...nice...to...meet you Aunt Lily," he stammered moving closer to his mother.

"We will be staying her for the next two weeks," James continued, "and we really would like to get to know you better. In fact I think you and I should have a little talk soon."

"A...talk...Sir?"

"Yes, I would be very interested in discussing my daughter. I understand you and she did not get along very well?" The intimation was clear in James Potter's voice. "I really would have thought you would have looked out for your cousin better, Dudley, instead of making her your personal punching bag when she was little."

"But...Daddy..."

"No buts, Dudley..." James smooth voice interrupted... "and what was this I heard about you trying to watch her in the shower awhile back?"

Dudley yelped with fright, and Petunia turned to her son, aghast. Harry had never told her about the incident but Petunia knew that even if she had she would have ignored her. However, she saw her opportunity to try to start making amends with her sister.

"Dudley! How could you? Whatever were you thinking?"

"Mummy, that's when she put that spell on me and made me sick!"

"Humph, you see, Lily..."

"Petunia, Harry did not use magic on Dudley. She knew you wouldn't believe her if she said anything," James informed her coldly. "She simply punished him by putting a laxative in his brownies." James glanced at Harry and she could see the laughter in his eyes. Flushing she lowered her head.

Petunia swallowed hard, but offered no reply. She knew that her sister and brother-in-law were not to be argued with and were most likely right.

"Now, I think it's time Padfoot let Vernon out of the cupboard and we all have a little family chat, don't you?" Lily asked.

Petunia simply nodded weakly, too afraid of her sister's implied threat to respond.

"Woof," Padfoot barked from the hallway.

Harry could hear the bolt being slid and a moment later a child sized Vernon Dursley appeared, seething with rage, in the living room. Harry had all she could do not to start giggling uncontrollably. To make matters worse, Padfoot came up behind him, further insulting him by sniffing him in the ass much as any dog would greet another. Vernon glared and backed up to the sofa. Padfoot sat down beside Moony all the while growling softly and eyeing her uncle dangerously. Moony smiled at Harry and reaching over gave Padfoot a biscuit off the tea tray. He ate hungrily making sure to drop crumbs all over her aunt's clean floor.

"Well, since we'll be staying until it is time for you to leave for New Zealand in two weeks I think it is time we laid down a few ground rules," James began pleasantly as Vernon glared up at him. "First of all I would like to thank Dudley for giving up his room for us to stay in. It was very gracious of you young man despite your treatment of our daughter." Dudley opened his mouth as if he were about to protest, but James silenced him with a wave of his hand. "I am also sure you wouldn't mind if I gave you some advice on doing the household chores either. I know it can get rough sometimes, what with wanting to hang out with your friends and all," James grinned maliciously but continued, "but they say hard work is good for the soul, not to mention the waist line. I am sure Lily will like to get to know your neighbors Petunia. As for me I would like to get to see how things are going on over at Grunnings, Vernon. I invested heavily in some of its stock when I married Lily to help give the company a boost. It seems our Harry will be coming into about a forty-nine percent share shortly, and I need to make certain that part of her inheritance is secure."

Vernon blanched, Petunia's mouth dropped and Dudley looked confused. Harry's head shot up at this announcement. She was a major stockholder in her uncle's company and never knew it. What's more, her aunt and uncle hadn't either. She could get her uncle fired, or at the very least demoted. Things were looking up nicely.

"I totally agree." Lily smiled at Harry, their green eyes locking and for the first time Harry smiled at her mother. "Now as it is getting rather late and I know my daughter has a busy schedule tomorrow I will ask Remus to escort her back to Hogwarts while the rest of us finish our little conversation."

"But I..."

"No, Harry," James interceded, cutting her off, "I know you have an important lesson tomorrow. Your mother, Padfoot, and I can finish up here and we will be in touch by the floo network. Dumbledore has put the Dursley's fireplace on a secure link between here and his office."

"Your father is right, Harry. You have to work with Severus in the morning and you know how he gets if you keep him waiting," Remus remarked rising. "Now let's get going. I'm sure Ron and Hermione will be anxious for news."

"All right," she agreed reluctantly, wanting to see what more would happen but realizing it would do no good to argue." She stood up and her parents came over giving her a hug. She stiffened at her mother's touch but did not resist. Remus then ushered her out of the living room and up the hall to the front door. Once they were outside Remus put his arm around her affectionately.

"Don't worry, Princess, they won't hurt them. Your mother and father may be angry at the way you were treated but Petunia is still Lily's sister and the blood tie helped to protect you for most of your life. They just want to be sure that any dealings you may choose to have with them in the future do not subject you to their bigotry and callous behavior any longer."

"Hey, if what my dad says is true I can always get Uncle Vernon in trouble at his job."

"I'm sure that if James says he invested in your uncle's company then he did just that. Many wizards often make investments in the Muggle world. Even though you are of age your parents had not wanted you to come into your full inheritance until after you turned twenty-one. They felt with everything you would have to deal with if anything happened to them it would at least make things a little easier."

"How do you know this?"

"Sirius told me when you turned eighteen and you found out all about your ancestry."

"Why didn't he tell me?"

"James swore him to secrecy about your financial status. All you were allowed to know is that you are an heiress. I don't even know the full extent of your holdings. So don't be angry with Sirius. I have probably told you too much already."

"Then this will be our little secret." Harry smiled up at the werewolf as they apparated back to Hogwarts. Her head was whirling with the evening's events and she eager to tell her friends what happened.

Chapter 22 - Plots and Secrets

Harry was waiting for Arsinoe in the empty classroom Arsinoe used to teach Ancient Mysticism. The Aztec witch was a few minutes late for Harry's Transfiguration lesson. While she waited, Harry was studying the pictures of the Egyptian and Aztec Gods and Goddesses. She found them intriguing and wished she had the time to sit in on one of Arsinoe's classes. It was extremely interesting to see the serpent represented so often. The serpent was both good and bad as in the Caduceus, which had become the symbol for modern medicine. There were other Gods as well and each had their name written beneath their picture along with a brief description. She walked around the room studying each one, reading the captions aloud, starting with the Egyptian gods and working her way around to the ones from Mesoamerica.

"*Aker*, the Egyptian dragon representing the earth, who bound the coils of *Apophis*, also known as *Apepi*, the primordial serpent who lived in the celestial Nile, nowadays known as the Milky Way. That's interesting, I wonder what kind of trouble old *Apophis* caused," she remarked to herself studying their pictures. "Hmm...*Am-Mut*, the eater of souls, sounds like a Dementor," she shivered. Moving down the line she continued, "*Denwen*, the dragon whose fire would have destroyed the gods but was stopped by the king. *Neheb-Kau*," she stopped, studying the picture. The serpent had human arms and legs. "He's really weird," she muttered reading the inscription. "A servant of *Ra*, the great serpent upon which the world rests. He must have quite a back ache." Harry grinned trying to picture the serpent holding up the world. "*Seth-heh*, opposes the boat of Ra on its journey. His name was distorted by the Hebrews to *Satan*." She mulled this over thoughtfully. "He must be on good terms with Voldemort." Harry continued to follow the line, stopping only at the various serpent gods. "*Typhon*, the Egyptian serpent lord. That must be where we get the term typhoon," she reasoned. "*Uraeus*, the fire serpent that crawls up the tree of life. Ah, this is the one used for the Caduceus," she remarked moving over to the last of the Egyptian serpents. "*Wadjet*, the guardian sent by Osiris to protect the Pharaoh and control the Nile. Well, so much for Egypt," she sighed to the empty room. "Let's see what the Aztecs have to offer."

Harry began the whole procedure again, bypassing any god that was not in serpent form. "*Coatlicue*, earth serpent goddess, mother of all living things. I think I like her." She smiled, studying the picture. "*Mixcoatl*, god of the clouds. He brought rain by having sex with the goddess *Coatlicue*. No wonder they're pictured together," Harry laughed blushing, moving on to the next picture. "*Quetzalcoatl*, the feathered serpent. He is the twin brother of *Quetzalpetzatl* whom he raped when the other gods got him drunk. He then disappeared in shame until his sister came and asked his help to overthrow the Spanish invaders and the evil Christian serpent god, *Satan*, to help them restore the old ways. He was unsuccessful and fell to temptation." Harry mulled this story over in her mind, reminded of how Voldemort had tried to rape her. She was intrigued by the pictures and studied the feathered serpents carefully. They had feathers around their necks and wings, but had the elongated head of a snake with the face and beak of a bird. They also had the serpent's body but the legs and claws one would see on a bird or dragon. She tried to get a clear image in her mind so she had something to go by for the transformation. Harry also noted that *Quetzalcoatl* had also been known as *Kulkulcan* by the Mayans. The Aztecs at one time also referred to him as *Tezcatlipoca*. The final god was *Xiuhtecuhtli*, the greatest god of the Aztecs, one of whose forms was a fire serpent. "Too bad I can't breathe fire, then I could just toast that bastard Voldemort into oblivion," she groaned sitting down to wait. Her scar had begun to prickle and she had the impression that the Dark Lord was not happy. She was mulling over the idea as to whether she should try to see what he was up to when Arsinoe entered with her parents and Remus.

Harry had been doing her best to avoid James and Lily as much as possible since they had been secured in the Shrieking Shack following the two weeks they had spent at Privet Drive. She had learned from Sirius and Remus that her parents had made sure her aunt and uncle knew how angry they were over their treatment of Harry. Not that Harry was sorry for the Dursleys. Vernon had to endure James' threats to have him transferred to a strictly wizarding area of the company and when Vernon insulted Lily her father had turned him into a trash can full of garbage, putting him out by the curb. Petunia had been horrified and begged Lily to get James to change him back. Dudley too had been punished. Not only did he have to do the chores, and sleep in Harry's room, he was locked in and fed through the cat flap just as she had been. This had infuriated Petunia who was caught sneaking him meals so Lily made sure her sister did a turn in the cupboard just as Vernon had done. It took a few days but the Dursleys had finally acquiesced becoming the model hosts. Sirius had summed it up by saying, 'What goes around, comes around.'

Lily and James now had free access to Hogwarts via James invisibility cloak and the secret tunnel from the Whomping willow. In addition, Dumbledore had disguised them both by transfiguring some of their features. Lily was now a blue-eyed strawberry blond while James had red hair down to his shoulders and brown eyes. He also had fashionable wire rimmed glasses. The couple was posing as Julian and Augusta Weasley, Arthur's distant cousins from Australia. Julian was an Auror who had come to help in the war. His sister, Augusta, had accompanied him. Moody had immediately drafted James into service helping to guard the school since James had actually been an Auror before his death. Lily, disguised as Augusta, was now teaching Charms. This left Sirius free to do undercover work for the Order and keep a closer eye on Harry, disguised as Snuffles, at the same time. Only the members of the Order, the Weasley's, and Luna Lovegood knew the Potters true identities.

Harry nodded as they entered but motioned for silence. Closing her eyes, she ignored the new arrivals, deciding to use the link with Voldemort to see what he was doing. Occluding her own mind, she concentrated on seeing what was going on. Rubbing her scar, she subtly opened the link and touched the Dark Lord's mind....

Voldemort paced restlessly back and forth while awaiting word from Bellatrix and Lucius. He had moved his headquarters to an abandoned farm a mere fifty miles south of Hogsmeade following the fiasco during the Potters resurrection. He had assigned two Deathaters to monitor the school and the wizarding village at all times, wanting to know the movements of his enemies. Even more, he wanted his two hostages back. The Potters were the key to his capture of Harry. In the month since their escape, there had been no sightings of the couple. Indeed, Harry Potter had rarely been seen and she was never alone. The brat was always accompanied by her Protectors, that imbecile Dumbledore, or Moody's bloody Aurors. Neither one of whom was ever Draco or that red headed Weasley friend of hers. Voldemort was growing impatient waiting for news. The Deathaters were becoming restless while he waited to plan his final assault. He had kept them busy with raids on important wizarding institutions and allowed them to revel in the torture and killing of Muggles. He sensed they were beginning to doubt his abilities to kill Harry Potter. 'Damn, I want that Potter girl dead,' he thought harshly. 'If need be I will just have to be a little more liberal with the *Cruciatius*. That will keep my followers in line a while longer. How dare they try to think that she is more powerful than I am! Harry Potter's luck is going to run out eventually and when it does she will rue the day that she ever dared to try and stop me..."

Remus was about to speak when he realized that Harry was staring blankly at the wall, her eyes focused on something they couldn't see.

"What's going on, Moony?" James questioned softly.

"Sh...I think she is sensing Voldemort. She must have felt he was up to something or she would never open the link between them," he whispered in reply. "We can't distract her or he will become aware of her presence in his mind."

"Remus, it's too dangerous. We have to stop her!" Lily gasped trying to move forward.

James caught her by the arm. "No Lils, leave her alone. You remember what happened when he caught her during the meeting last month," James hissed. "She knows the risks. We have to trust her."

Lily frowned up at her husband nodding reluctantly....

Voldemort was growing more and more angry as he waited for news. Scowling he clenched his bony fingers into his palm, drawing blood.

"Master," Nagini hissed from where she was coiled up by the hearth, "Bellatrix and Lucius are late."

"I am aware of that my pet," he hissed back. "They should have returned an hour ago."

"Where did you send them?"

"They are in the forest watching for signs of the Potters and that blood traitor Severus."

"Why do you wish to bring them here?"

"Why?" Voldemort hissed angrily. "I want Severus to pay for his disloyalty and my need for the Potters should be obvious. If I capture the parents, or Severus, the girl will come. She knows I will torture them unmercifully. The Potters will give me years of pleasure since they are unable to die again. She will not want to see them enslaved. The foolish little bitch will want to spare them. As for Severus, he will die very slowly and painfully," he remarked red eyes glowing as he envisioned Severus roasted alive on a spit.

"Master she has thwarted you before despite your best efforts. Is it wise to bring her here?"

"You dare to question me!" Voldemort roared pointing his wand at the snake.

"I was merely curious. I am often confused by the ways of humans," Nagini hissed curling herself tighter lest he curse her.

"If I have the parents or that blood traitor I will control the child. If I have the child the others will come and fall into my trap," he laughed icily, lowering his wand. "She will go out of her way to protect them and when she does it will be her downfall," he said with an evil twist to his serpentine lips.

"What will you do to her?"

"I will kill her, Nagini, but not until she watches her Mudblood mother and that blood traitor she calls her protector suffer."

"And what of her sire, will you torture him as well?"

"After he watches his wife suffer and his daughter die at my hands I shall feed him to you one small piece at a time until there is so little left he will beg me to give his soul to my Dementors...."

Harry pulled back sharply with a deep intake of breath. She was sickened and horrified by what she had heard and seen but knew the information that Voldemort was spying on the school and the village was important. As soon as she had pulled back from Voldemort's mind, the others came forward.

"What did you see Harry?" James asked putting his arm around her shoulders to steady her trembling.

"He's waiting for Bellatrix and Lucius. I need to see the Headmaster immediately."

"Albus is at the Ministry today," Lily reminded her. "He is at a conference of the Wizengamot."

"Perhaps you could contact him with my floo?" Arsinoe offered. The Aztec witch could see she was terribly distressed about something.

"It won't work," James replied. "Only the one in Albus office is on the network connected to the Ministry."

"Maybe I should use my Amulet," Harry replied pulling the golden disc from beneath her robes. James stared in shock and Lily gasped.

"Harry, your medallion...it's gold," Lily said in amazement. "Only Albus wears a gold medallion."

"You didn't know that I was given this medallion and named the Headmaster's successor when the time comes?"

"No, Harry, we didn't. We knew you were admitted into the Order...but...this..." James shrugged grinning with pride.

"What your father means to say is that we knew you were very powerful but hadn't realized your magic was as strong as Dumbledore's."

"So I'm told. I don't see it though."

"Now Princess," Remus spoke up from behind James, "you know you're an Empath, and have Telekinetic and natural healing abilities. You are also skilled with *Legilimency*, *Occlumency* and wandless magic. Dumbledore just has the advantage of age and experience behind him."

"Don't forget her two animagus forms." Arsinoe smiled at Remus.

Harry felt a pang of jealousy. She fancied Remus but not as strongly as she did Sirius and Severus.

"She is also a master at defensive spells and could manage a Patronus by the age of thirteen." Remus winked at Harry remembering when he had taught her how to conjure her Patronus during her third year.

"I'm not all that powerful," Harry frowned. "Now let me get hold of Albus." Harry put the medallion back beneath her robes. "I don't believe this is a dire emergency though. I will ask Minerva to notify him. I will need to speak with him as soon as he returns this evening." Harry moved over to the fireplace. Taking a small handful of floo powder from the cup on the mantle, she threw it into the flames. "Professor McGonagall's office," she called kneeling down.

"Yes, Harry, I'm here." Minerva McGonagall's face appeared in the flames.

"Could you get a message to the Headmaster for me?"

"Certainly, is there a problem?"

"I had a brief vision of Voldemort and have some information but it isn't urgent."

"May I ask what it is?" McGonagall asked briskly.

"He is in hiding not far from here but I'm not sure exactly where. He has been having the school and Hogsmeade watched by the Deathaters in the hopes of capturing my parents, Severus or me."

"I shall notify him immediately." Minerva's head disappeared from the flames.

"Harry, this is very important," James frowned. "Did you get any indication as to where he was at all?"

"No, just that he is somewhere to the south. Like I said before, he was waiting for Bellatrix and Lucius and he was quite angry. Apparently, they were late getting back. I think they may have been somewhere in the forest or the village."

"I'll go and get the other Aurors together and we will make a search," her father stated firmly.

"NO!"

"What! Why, what else did you learn?"

"Nothing," she replied refusing to meet her father's gaze.

"Harry, any information you may have could be useful," Lily admonished.

"I don't want either of you in any more jeopardy than you already are," Harry looked at her mother pleadingly. "I can't tell you what he plans on doing if you are captured."

"Princess, your father is more than skilled at taking care of himself."

"What is he planning that you are so upset?" James questioned gently.

"You don't want to know," Harry responded flatly.

"Harry, your father is an Auror and a powerful wizard. Have you forgotten that like Voldemort, he can't be killed? He and your mother are probably safer than anyone else in this castle," Arsinoe reasoned calmly.

"Just because he can't be killed doesn't mean he can't be tortured...or worse." Harry turned away unable to hide her worry.

"Don't you think it would be to our benefit to know what he plans? This way if he does capture us we will be prepared and may be able to thwart his plans." James gently turned her around to face him. "After all he already killed us once."

"Right, and I get to do it for him the second time," Harry spat vehemently. "He has me right where he wants me. He is gambling on my coming to the rescue."

"Princess, I know this is hard on you but you have to be rational. If you let your emotions get out of control Voldemort will succeed. James and Lily know what you have to do and they aren't afraid."

"Listen to Remus, Harry; he knows we don't want to live like this." James ran his hands through his hair, looking over at Lily. "This is not life. It is like a half-life. We are merely animated corpses. We don't eat and have no need of sleep. Hell, the only reason we can do magic is because it comes from our very souls. Being with you, even for a short time is the only thing that makes this worthwhile."

"Your father is right, Harry. We don't belong here and have no reservations about being sent back. I don't remember much but I can tell you that Heaven is a wonderful place." Lily looked at Harry with a soft expression knowing that her child was hurting deep inside.

"Well that's good to know since I may be coming right along with you." Harry waved her hands in frustration slumping back down into one of the empty desks and burying her face in her arms.

"Harry James Potter!" her father exclaimed sharply, shocking her to attention. "I will not have you saying such a thing. You will stop Voldemort and live to be an old woman. I do not want to see you joining us before then. We forfeit our lives so that you could have one!" James cried red-faced, clenching his fists in anger.

Harry gaped up at him stunned before collecting herself and looking over at Remus. "I thought Sirius said I got my temper from my mother? He acts just like me." She had never seen her father angry.

They all looked at one another for a moment and then erupted into laughter. Harry was right. Even though James' features were altered the facial expressions and motions were identical to those Harry used when angry or upset.

"Did Sirius really say you had my temper?" Lily asked with a wry grin. For the first time since she had returned, Harry met her mother's eyes with a smile that reached to her bright green eyes. Lily swore they were twinkling like Dumbledore's and her heart leaped with joy. In that moment she had connected with her lost child.

"Ahem," Arsinoe cleared her throat breaking the spell, "Harry we need to get on with your lesson."

"Right," Harry agreed standing, "but why is everyone here anyway?"

"We wanted to see you transform. We were too confused the night of our return to really pay much attention. I know I saw your phoenix but it really didn't register," James informed her, "so when Remus told us you would be working on combining your two animagi forms your mother and I wanted to see. Arsinoe was gracious enough to allow us to watch."

"Oh was she?" Harry glared at the Aztec witch.

"Geeze, Moony, her glare could rival that of Snivellus."

"If you had wanted to see me transform you could have asked," Harry remarked disgruntled, "and I would appreciate it if you wouldn't call Severus Snape, Snivellus. I chose him for one of my protectors and I don't think your old rivalry should be of any consequence. For the first five years I was at Hogwarts he took out his anger and hurt from your nasty pranks and bullying on me! Every time he looked at me, he saw James Potter and thought I was just like you. You lost Gryffindor more points dead than when you were a student here." Harry scowled up at her father. "I would also like to point out that you told him yourself that had you chosen him for a friend rather than that sniveling coward, Pettigrew, things may have turned out much differently."

"TouchÃ©," James Potter acquiesced, "and I meant it when I said it. I still do. It's just that seeing him again...well...old habits die hard."

"Severus is a very complex man, Harry. He is also very sensitive and caring. It's just hard for him to show it sometimes," Lily added thoughtfully. "If he hadn't tutored me in Potions I would never have passed. Your father was very jealous of my becoming friends with him."

"My father was an arrogant prankster with a big head!" Harry tossed her head with an exasperated frown.

"I really was, Lils, wasn't I?" He looked at his wife for confirmation. She nodded in agreement lips curved into a smile of amusement. "It took your mother to strighten me out."

"Harry has been told how wild we all were," Moony said calmly. "She also knows about the pranks you and Sirius pulled on Severus."

"Which ones?" James looked at Remus abashed.

"How about when Sirius almost got him killed or when you hung him upside down over by the lake simply because Sirius was bored?" Harry's scornful tone was not lost on her parents. Lily's eyes were shooting daggers at James.

"Harry, you have to realize I didn't know what Sirius was up to until he told me. I thank Merlin that I got there in time. The results would have been horrendous for both Severus and Moony." James ran his fingers through his unkempt hair. "Severus would probably have been killed and Moony..." his voice trailed off.

"Moony would have been put down like a wild animal," Harry finished for him.

"I know," James whispered, his thoughts drifting back to that terrible night.

"Harry, I think you should get to your lesson," Lily told her trying to steer the subject back to its original topic. Annoyed as she was with her husband that his youthful behaviors while a student had caused Harry such grief she didn't want to see him hurting like this. Harry had struck a painful nerve.

"You're right of course," Harry agreed letting the subject drop when she saw the shame reflected in her fathers face. "I have kept Arsinoe waiting for far too long and I have a Potions lesson after this."

"Ouch," Lily grinned, "if I remember correctly Severus hates to be kept waiting. He values punctuality."

"Your memory is accurate, Lily, and your daughter has a nasty habit of being late," Professor Snape sneered softly from the doorway, a potions vial in his hand. "I have brought your Wolfsbane Potion, Lupin. See that you don't wait to drink it. We all know the consequences of what could happen." His dark eyes bored into James Potter.

Harry wondered just how much he had overheard. Before either she or her father could say anything Remus voice cut them off.

"Thank you, Severus; I do appreciate your doing this. I worry constantly that I might harm one of the students or teachers." He took the vial from Severus outstretched hand, immediately swallowing its contents, grimacing at the flavor.

"You're welcome." Severus inclined his head towards Lupin.

"I guess it doesn't taste too good huh Moony?" James grimaced sympathetically. The potion had not yet been formulated when they were in school with the werewolf.

"The potion is rendered ineffective if its ingredients are altered with flavoring," Snape answered for the other wizard, turning to address Harry. "Will you be ready for your Potions lesson? It seems that you are running behind here."

"Uh...well yes we are running a bit late."

"Then I shall delay your tutoring session by half and hour if that would be acceptable to Professor Darkmoon?"

"I would appreciate it Severus, thank you."

"Then I shall be going. Harry I will expect you to be prepared to answer my questions as we will be doing a practice exam today."

"A practice exam," Harry choked, her stomach turning in knots.

"Yes. If you want to become the second youngest person to become a Master Potion Maker then you will need to prepare. Potions was not your best subject in school although you have made great strides with your desire to succeed."

"As a natural healer I think the knowledge will be helpful when I begin my studies with Dr. McBride and Madam Pomfrey. If I have a better understanding of Potions it will be a great help in knowing the best treatment to provide for the sick and injured."

"That is a laudable desire," Snape acknowledged.

"Severus, you said Harry would be the second youngest ever to achieve the title of Master. Who was the first?" James queried. He had wondered why Harry was studying Potions with the Snapes and knew they were not inclined to sponsor an apprenticeship.

"I was. Harry will miss my mark by two months as she will be closer to nineteen should she pass the exam in May."

"Oh..." James was stunned. He had known Snape was an expert at Potions but had not realized he achieved a Master of Potions so soon after they had graduated from Hogwarts. "Now if you will all excuse me I must speak with my uncle. There is to be a meeting tonight and he will be summoned by the Dark Lord." Snape did not wait for a reply but swept from the room without a sound, dark robes flying behind him.

"I hope Tiberius will be alright," Lily remarked with a worried sigh.

"Let's just hope Voldemort is in a better mood or he will be hitting his followers with the *Cruciatus*," Harry muttered. She then turned her attention to her instructor. "I think we had better get started."

"Are you all right with everyone here? You did not seem too happy about it before."

"I'll live but my father will have to pay for this."

"Oh? What will I have to do?"

"I hear you are still capable of transforming despite the circumstances surrounding your being here. I wouldn't mind meeting Prongs in person."

James tilted his head back with a laugh and transformed without a word. Prongs was magnificent. He was almost six feet at the shoulder and his rack of antlers looked as if they would make him a prime target for someone's trophy room. Harry grinned as she ran her hands over his soft tawny hair while he nuzzled her gently.

"We told you his name was Prongs for a reason," Remus grinned, licking his lips.

"Cool." Harry's eyes were sparking and everyone could tell she was enthralled with the stag.

"Harry what are you thinking?" Remus asked. "You have an odd gleam in your eye and I know that mischievous grin."

"I was just thinking about riding on his back into the Great Hall when everyone is at dinner. Can't you just picture the looks on everyone's face?"

"Ah...a true Marauder," James stated proudly, changing back. "When should we do it?"

"James! Think what Dumbledore would say!" Lily admonished shaking her head in dismay. She knew that if James set his mind on something he would be unstoppable.

"You sound too much like Hermione," Harry snorted. "We will discuss this later when she's not around. I'm sure Padfoot wouldn't mind coming along too." She winked conspiratorially while her father just eyed his wife pretending to look innocent.

"Harry we really should get started," Arsinoe reproached but her eyes were smiling. She knew the lesson would be easier if Harry was in a good mood.

"Umm..." Harry agreed and transformed into her Phoenix in the blink of an eye and began to sing. Phoenix song filled the room and they were all dazzled.

"Oh honey, you're beautiful," Lily sighed.

Harry took flight and flew gracefully around the room as her father transformed once again and she settled gracefully onto his antlers.

"Now that's what I really call a chip of the old block." Remus beamed at James.

"Can I pet her?" Lily inquired looking at Remus and Arsinoe for confirmation.

"Sure Lily, I don't think she would object," Remus answered.

Lily reached out with two fingers and gently stroked the soft red feathers. Harry cooed softly with Phoenix song, blinking at her mother. Prongs looked over at Moony and before Harry could do anything he transformed, catching her off guard. Flapping her wings, to keep her balance she found herself sitting on a nest of unruly red hair. Everyone laughed since she blended in so well with James' disguise. Letting out a squawk she reached down with her beak and gave his hair a tug.

"Ow! That hurts," he yelled. Harry wasn't finished yet though; she began to transform again. James suddenly found himself entangled in the coils of a large green boa constrictor. "Her other form is a serpent?"

"Didn't anyone tell you?"

"No," James replied as Harry came back to herself, still hugging her father. "I would have thought you would be a Griffin."

"No, it's the Slytherin in me that causes the serpent to come through. Why, don't you like it?" Harry queried nervously, dropping her arms.

"I am just surprised, that's all. I think you make a lovely snake. So what are you trying to combine into?"

"A winged serpent, like the one on the wall over there." Harry pointed to the figures of Quetzalcoatl and his twin sister. "Voldemort is a cobra and the spell needs to be spoken in Parseltongue. Arsinoe says the two combined will strengthen my power over him."

"Hmm...That is interesting. Have you been able to achieve any part of the combination yet?"

"No, she is only able to go from one animal to the other. As you can see she can do it quiet efficiently," Arsinoe explained. "She needs to visualize what parts to change now and what will stay the same."

"I didn't have anything to go by before so I wasn't sure what it would look like. I could only visualize a regular dragon, not one with feathers. The pictures on the wall are new."

"I only just received them." Arsinoe stated. "Do you think that now that you have seen the images you will be better prepared?"

"It can't hurt."

"Then give it a try, Princess. I for one am anxious to see what happens."

"Should I go from the Phoenix to the snake or the other way around?" Harry asked looking at Arsinoe.

"You are more comfortable with the Phoenix so you should start that way but eventually you should be able to do either."

"Arsinoe can go from one to the other too. She just doesn't have the need to combine her two forms," Remus stated eyeing the beautiful witch.

"You're a multiplico?" Lily asked stunned.

"I am. I am a leopard and a coyote."

"That is an odd combination," James mused. "A feline and a canine."

"Among my people they are two of the most common animals. We also revere the wolf and have no laws against those who have been touched by his spirit, like Remus."

"Wow!" James grinned. "That's great. You should hang onto her Moony," he quipped arching his brow.

Harry scowled at her father, feeling the jealousy flaring within herself. Arsinoe pretended not to notice and continued with her lesson.

"Harry I want you to transform again into the phoenix and then concentrate on the parts you need to change into the serpent."

"Right." Harry once again changed into her animagus form. Settling on the floor, she studied the picture on the wall and concentrated at hard as she could. All she could accomplish was a slight rustling of her feathers. "I can't," she sighed coming back into her human form."

"I didn't expect you to be able to on your first try."

"Don't get discouraged, Harry. Becoming a regular animagus is hard enough, but becoming a multiplico is probably the most difficult form of magic. The only other thing which is harder is to be a Metamorphagus, like Tonks or to combine two animagus forms."

"Tonks is a natural Metamorph. She didn't have to learn, it just happened."

"I know, Harry. Have you ever thought of trying that too? Sometimes an animagus can also become a Metamorph," her father explained considering the possibility.

"Not really and right now I think I have quite enough power. Maybe I will give it some though later on if..." her voice trailed off. She didn't want to say that she would try if she survived. Her father seemed to understand and gave her a quick squeeze.

"I told you not to think like that," he said sternly. "Now we really should be going. Your mother and Remus have classes to teach and I need to see Alastor about what is going on. We may be able to formulate a plan to trap some of the Deathaters."

"What ever you do be careful. You don't need to take unnecessary risks."

"I know," he grinned, "as Alastor would say, Constant Vigilance!"

"I will see you later, Princess. I want to catch Sirius before he leaves for Hogsmeade with Circe and my class starts."

Harry nodded, seething inside. She was more jealous of Circe than of Arsinoe. She wanted to know what she was up to with Sirius and began to formulate a plan in the back of her mind. 'With any luck I can transform and find them in the village and see what is going on. Sirius said I should trust him but if he is in love with Circe why would he just not tell me?' she wondered. 'I have to know what he is up to. I will hate it if he is lying to me about her. Maybe I can get away from Potions tutoring early if I tell Sev my scar is hurting and ask to lie down.' She plotted to herself as Arsinoe interrupted her thoughts.

"Harry, we really need to work on your transformation. It is vital that you succeed. I know that you can do the spell in the language of the serpent but this may just help you in the battle, and there will be a battle."

"How can you be so certain of that? I'll admit that it is likely but maybe I will just be in the right place at the right time. Or maybe the Order will come up with a plan for me to catch Voldemort off guard."

"No. There will be a confrontation. I have seen it in a vision with the Peyote."

"What did you see?"

"Fire and fear; there is darkness coming and you must be prepared."

"Did you see who was in the vision?"

"Yes," Arsinoe sighed, "those whom you love. They will be in peril but I don't know from whom or when so don't ask me any more." Arsinoe's expression was closed and Harry sensed that she would not say anything more no matter how much she tried to get the information. She stared at Arsinoe and began to try to use her *Legilimency* only to discover the other witch was a skilled *Occlumens*.

"I apologize," Harry muttered with embarrassment. Arsinoe had been aware of her attempt to read through her mind.

"I told you what I know. It is unwise to probe another without their permission but I suspected you might try."

"I...I was concerned for my friends and family. I knew better than to use *Legilimency* but..."

"I understand and accept your apology," Arsinoe answered calmly.

"So...Voldemort's plan will somehow succeed. I can only hope that I will be in time. I...I can't lose anyone else..."

"I have not seen that far." Arsinoe put a gentle hand on Harry's shoulder, the distress evident in Harry's voice. "Now let's make that winged serpent. It will be more than a little disarming to the Dark One and will give you an advantage over his serpent animagus since you will have wings."

"I already have wings," Harry countered.

"Yes, but only as a bird. Now you will be as a dragon."

"Good point. Let's go back to work. If it will help to stop him from harming anyone else I am all for it."

For the next half hour, Harry worked at trying to combine the two forms by transforming into either the snake or the phoenix and then altering the form but was unsuccessful. Arsinoe then had her attempt to transform into the winged serpent without becoming one of her other forms first but Harry was unable to make the change. She was becoming frustrated and upset. The elder witch suspected that Harry was unconsciously reluctant to assume the form of the ancient serpent god. She believed that part of Harry's problem was that she was associating the ancient god with dark powers and explained that all ancient serpent gods had both good and dark sides; that it was how they used their powers that determined their personality just like humans. In an effort to reassure Harry she gave her some reading material describing the power of Quetzalcoatl and Quetzalpetzatl, his twin sister. She also told her mediate on the form in the diagrams in an effort to relax so she could accomplish the transformation. Harry thanked her, agreeing to meet again next week for another lesson, then headed down to the dungeon for her Potions Master's practice. Severus was waiting at the door to the classroom his pale features etched into a scowl.

"As usual you're late again, Potter," he sneered.

"Only five minutes," she replied glancing at her watch, "and it's only because Arsinoe was giving me these books and some last minute instructions," Harry stated dropping the books down onto one of the worktables.

"I have warned you repeatedly about your lateness. You should have told Professor Darkmoon you would see her after dinner. You knew I would be waiting. Do you honestly believe that all of my time is centered on tutoring you in Advanced Potion making?"

"Oh, so now we're back to the nasty old Potions Master? Well, you can no longer intimidate me so knock it off," she shouted losing her temper. I had a perfectly good reason for being a few minutes late. If you really gave a damn about me you wouldn't get pissed off for taking the time and trouble to get some information that might help me to achieve the transformation. Or is stopping Voldemort no longer of any importance to you?"

"Control your temper, Potter, and do not use the Dark Lord's name in my presence ever again if you want me to continue your sponsorship for the exam." Severus glared furiously.

"Stop calling me Potter!" Harry exclaimed ignoring his threat. "You know I hate it when you act like an arrogant git. What's gotten into you?"

Severus didn't answer. Here merely spun on his heel, turning his back, stalking across the room to his desk, collecting his thoughts. He had heard James Potter refer to him as Snivellus, bringing back all his anger and hatred towards the wizard. He believed that with three of the four Marauders reunited the truce the Protectors had so carefully constructed would fall apart. 'Damn! Why did this have to happen now? I swear that if they start their petty little games with me again...' He clenched his fists angrily, frustrated that his life was suddenly taking a turn for the worse. 'Harry will side with that arrogant father of hers. How could I have ever been so stupid to think that she would ever want me when her father's friends...'

"Severus...is...is something wrong?" she asked timidly interrupting his thoughts. Harry wanted desperately to use her empathy to feel his emotions but feared angering him further causing him to withdraw completely. "Has your uncle's position spying on the Deathaters been compromised?" she questioned. He had told them all earlier that there would be a meeting of the inner circle tonight and Tiberius would be summoned before the Dark Lord.

"What? No. His presence as a spy has not been detected," Severus answered from under his curtain of black hair. Harry noticed that it was no longer being washed properly and that his old sneer was back along with his mannerisms. "I think you had better leave, Potter. It would be unwise to continue with your lessons at this time."

"Why? I was only a few minutes late Severus."

"Your lack of punctuality shows me that you have no desire to truly attain the title, Master of Potions, and your skills are no better than basic," he replied coldly. "Now kindly leave my classroom before I throw you out."

"Sev..."

"It is Professor Snape, Miss Potter, now get out!" he hissed through gritted teeth.

"Bu...But..." she sputtered gaping.

"LEAVE NOW!" He started to rise from his desk, wand drawn.

Harry backed out of the room, eyes wide with disbelief, before turning to run back the way she had come, forgetting the books and papers Arsinoe had given her. She was panting and on the verge of tears when she emerged from the dungeon door onto the main floor by the entrance to the Great Hall. She could hear Sirius motorcycle flying away towards Hogsmeade when she had another shock. Remus and Arsinoe were just coming back in with their arms around one another. They stopped abruptly when they saw her. Harry just stared for a moment, and then flung herself past them out into the cold November evening.

"Princess wait!" Remus called running after her. Unfortunately, the students were returning from the Hogsmeade weekend at the same time and Harry was lost in the throng. Even with his heightened werewolf senses so close to the full moon he was unable to catch her scent. Sighing, he went back inside. The moon would rise in two hours and he did not want to risk following her. He decided it would be wiser to contact Sirius and Severus to start a search.

Harry was frantic now and wanted to get to Sirius. She needed the comfort that Padfoot was so good at giving her. Transforming near the Whomping Willow she flew towards the village. As she neared the outskirts of town, she saw Sirius motorcycle in the alley behind the Hogshead Inn, catching a glimpse of a tall man with his cloak hood drawn up just ducking inside with another person. Alighting on a tree branch, she waited, catching her breath. 'What on earth are Circe and Sirius doing here?' she mused fluttering to the ground and transforming. Looking up at the dark building, she was just in time to see a light come on in one of the upstairs rooms. Circe was pulling down the shade, smiling happily. A moment later, the outline of two figures was silhouetted against the darkened window shade, embraced in a passionate kiss. Harry fell to her knees sobbing. Her world was crumbling before her eyes. She was too distraught to see the furtive movement behind her until it was too late. Spinning around her eyes met the ghostly white mask of a Death Eater as she reached for her wand.

"Stupefy!" The cold insane cackle yelled shooting a stream of red light towards her before Harry could respond.

"Bellatrix!" Harry managed to exclaim before the darkness claimed her...

Chapter 23 - A Secret Revealed

Bellatrix Lestrange couldn't believe her good fortune. She had just returned from the Forbidden Forest with Lucius and decided to check out the village one last time before apparating back to the Dark Lord's headquarters. Lucius had thought her foolish and apparated back to their master to give another negative report. Bellatrix had opted to remain behind for a few more minutes. In truth, she didn't relish the thought of the punishment she knew Lord Voldemort would inflict. She fervently hoped that he would take most of his anger out on Lucius before she arrived.

She had been on her way towards the far edge of Hogsmeade when her thoughts were interrupted by the distinctive sound of her Blood Traitor cousin's motorcycle. 'Well now, I may have something to bring my master after all,' she smiled to herself. 'Sirius will be almost as good a prize as the Potters or Severus Snape. The Potter girl cares for him.' She gloated remembering how Harry had tried to use the *Cruciatus Curse* after her Blood Traitor cousin had fallen through the veil in the Department of Mysteries. 'If I play my cards right Sirius will be in the Dark Lord's hands before he knows what hit him,' she snorted rushing towards where the sounds had stopped in the direction of the Hog's Head. Stealthily picking her way through the alleyways to avoid being seen, she spotted her cousin's motorcycle behind the inn. 'Stupid ass, he didn't even bother to conceal it,' she mused as the rear door shut. 'Damn, he's gone inside with someone. It can't be Potter though; he would never bring her here. Besides, the other is too tall,' she reasoned when another movement caught her attention. A large bird flew down from the tree behind the alley landing softly on the ground in the shadows. Her eyes opened wide as the bird transformed into the Potter girl! Stepping from the shadows, she moved swiftly, sending out the stunning curse before the girl could point her wand. 'This will be a day of victory for my master!' Bellatrix had gloated madly when Potter had recognized her too late.

Bending down to pick up the unconscious girl's wand her mad thoughts continued. 'The Dark Lord will reward me greatly for her capture. I may even become his second and dethrone that smug Lucius.' Kicking Harry's prostate form for the sheer pleasure of it, she decided to have some fun before bringing her to Lord Voldemort. It would also make her less likely to resist.

"*Enervate!*" she muttered pointing her wand at Harry to revive her. She sat up groggily looking around. Seeing Bellatrix glaring down at her Harry's memory kicked in and she automatically reached for her wand only to be met by cold laughter. "Looking for this little Potty?" Bellatrix taunted spinning the wand like a baton. "My Master will be so pleased to see you."

"Your master is not long for this world," Harry spat, heart racing, attempting to stand.

"Ah, ah, ah...we'll have none of that. I can't risk your flying away now can I?" Bellatrix sneered kicking her back down. "And just to make sure you behave," she sneered, "I will have to punish you severely. *Crucio!*" Bellatrix cackled pointing her wand at Harry chest.

Normally Harry would have fought the curse but she needed to get help. Giving in to the pain she screamed loudly as Bellatrix insane laughter echoed through the alleyway all thought of subterfuge lost with the insanity that permeated her brain...

Sirius received the frantic call from Lupin via his medallion within minutes of securing the room at the Hog's Head. He immediately alerted Circe to stay put and retreated back to the first floor to speak with the barkeeper.

"Aberforth, I need to leave the building. Harry has left Hogwarts alone. They believe she has headed into the village. I need to start searching for her," he whispered nonchalantly. "Keep an eye on the stairs for anyone trying to go up. Circe is aware of the situation."

Aberforth nodded imperceptibly, continuing to clean the glass in his hand with a filthy gray rag. Sirius threw a coin on the bar before letting himself out the front door. Looking around he made sure no one was within sight before transforming. The few citizens of Hogsmeade paid scant attention to the large black dog loping up the street nose to the ground, his ears pricked. They were too intent on making their way home for the evening, most of the shops having closed an hour ago...

Ron and Hermione were snogging in the Astronomy tower. He had gotten off duty an hour ago and Hermione had been waiting with a picnic basket. They snuck up to the tower for some time alone away from the prying eyes of the students and teasing of the faculty before Hermione had to go back to her duties in the library.

"I love you Herm..."

"Wotcher, Ron!" Tonks sharp voice interrupted as she tripped through the door. "Harry's gone off the castle grounds alone and is headed off towards Hogsmeade. We're back on duty!"

The couple sprang up immediately, jumping apart, feigning innocence as Tonks smirked at their disheveled appearance. Hermione recovered first and looked at Tonks in dismay.

"Why did Harry leave?" she questioned the Auror.

"Don't know, Remus only said she was upset and flew off towards the village in her animagus form. Snape and Dumbledore have gone after her since Remus is laid up with the full moon. Now let's get going Weasley before she gets herself into some serious trouble." Tonks spun on her heel nearly upsetting one of the telescopes, motioning for Ron to follow. "Where is the goblet?"

"In my quarters. I'll get it pronto!" Ron yelled running in the direction of the quarters he shared with the other male Aurors. "Meet me by the doors to the Great Hall."

"You're supposed to carry that bloody goblet with you at all times! This will cost you Weasley," she swore after him exerting her authority as his superior before racing in the other direction.

Hermione was left standing alone in the tower a look of consternation on her face as she swept away the remnants of the picnic with her wand. Shaking her head, she murmured softly to the air, "Oh, Harry, what have you done now? You know the danger out there." She felt left out and worried. She wanted desperately to help. Her first thought was to go down and aid with the search but her common sense told her to stay behind in case Harry came back on her own. Nevertheless, she wanted to do something to help her friend. Nodding, she headed off down the stairs to find Arsinoe. They had to translate that spell before something terrible happened. She only hoped it would not be too late...

"Severus, have you any idea what caused Harry to go out alone?" Dumbledore queried as the pair hurried down the path to apparate to Hogsmeade. "I thought she was supposed to be working on her advanced Potions studies for the exam."

"I had to cancel Headmaster," Snape shrugged avoiding the Headmaster's intent gaze. "This is my fault. I should never have taken my anger at her father out on Harry," Snape thought worriedly. "If anything happens to her it will be because of me. I was being such an ass dredging up all those painful memories. How was I to know she would pull one of her disappearing acts?"

"Severus, Lupin thought she was upset when he saw her come up from the dungeons. Then she just got even more so when she saw him returning with Arsinoe from seeing Sirius and Circe off to the village. Is there trouble between you three that might be causing her concern?"

"Nothing serious, Headmaster," Snape replied noncommittally. "Hmm...It seems Harry is angry with me and jealous that the Marauders are paying attention to other women. Not that I care for my sister spending time with Black, but this may just be the opening I was waiting for, assuming I can convince Harry of my affections. Damn, why did I have to go off on her like that? I'm thirty-eight years old. I should be able to handle being called names by her stupid prat of a father," Severus berated himself silently.

"Severus, we will need to be cautious. It will not do any of us any good if either you or Harry is spotted. I know you insisted on coming with me but I am concerned for your safety as well as Harry's."

"Headmaster, I am Harry's Protector and bound to her by blood. I dare say Lupin would have come in his wolf form if you had let him," Snape sneered. "My former associates would have deserved what Lupin could have done to them," Severus considered, enjoying the thought. If he had not been so concerned for Harry's welfare Snape would have grinned at the image of Remus attacking the Death eaters. Only Bella and Lucius would have had the nerve to face off with the werewolf.

"Very well then, let's go. Keep your eyes open for Sirius. He is probably in his animagus form," Dumbledore informed him as they reached the gates. Raising their wands they disappeared into the night...

Sirius, disguised as Padfoot, was part way up the street when his sharp ears picked up a loud scream coming from the opposite direction. 'Harry!' he thought instantly turning around. Breaking into a run, he headed back in the direction he had come from. A moment later, he caught her familiar scent, along with another scent. It was vaguely familiar and that of a woman. Dashing as fast as his four legs could carry him, the smells became stronger, and his stomach lurched. It was a scent he should have recognized sooner, a scent from his childhood and long years at Hogwarts. It was cousin Bella's perfume intermingled with the smell of anger and madness. Nearing the end of the street, he slowed down keeping to the shadows, ducking into the alley behind the Hog's Head. Slinking on his belly, he crept forwards as another wand flash lit the night sky. He could see his cousin's tall gaunt figure standing over another who was writhing on the ground in pain. Crouching lower, he gathered his muscles, preparing to attack...

Ron ran into the hall by the main entrance. He had collected the goblet from his room and flown down the stairs from the tower where the men slept. It had seemed like forever but was in fact only a few minutes. He was breathless when he reached the bottom, the other Aurors waiting.

"About time, Weasel," Draco sneered, "you are holding up the search."

"Shut up Malfoy," Ron spat, "or you will find out what happens to a guy whose girlfriend has six brothers."

"Malfoy! Weasley! That will be enough. We are on Ministry business and I will not have the two of you quibbling. Once we find Harry you can both duel out your differences or be put out of the Auror Academy," Kingsly Shacklebolt reprimanded his two trainees. "Have you brought the goblet, Weasley?"

"Yes Sir," Ron replied snapping to attention. He held the goblet out before him.

"Has there been any flames coming from it?" Tonks questioned briskly.

"No Ma'am. That is a good sign. It means she isn't in trouble." Even as Ron spoke, a bright flash came from the goblet and it lit with blue flame. He was so startled he almost dropped it, recovering himself in time and sat it onto the stairs. Without being asked, he concentrated and what he saw made his hair stand on end...

Dumbledore and Snape appeared at the top of High Street and looked down towards the end of the street. They knew Sirius had started from the other direction where the Hog's Head stood off on one of the side streets. Snape's stance was stiff and his muscles taught, his pale face drawn into a deep scowl. Dumbledore was on the alert and the look in his blue eyes indicated he was ready for any threat that might arise. The usual twinkle was gone. In its place, there was an icy blue. He motioned for Snape to follow, and drew his wand. The younger wizard obeyed without question. Without a word, they began moving slowly down the street, watching for any sign of danger. They spotted a large black dog loping towards them, intent of trying to find a scent, when the silence was pierced with a muffled scream. The dog glanced in their direction and turned back in the opposite way at a run as the two men sprinted after him...

"Oh Merlin!" Ron exclaimed. "Harry is under attack by a Death eater. She is under the *Cruciatus*."

"Can you tell where she is at?"

"In an alley somewhere but I'm not sure where. It's too damn dark even with the moon. Everything is in shadow...Hold on...I think I see Sirius bike!" Ron shouted.

"Come on, Sirius is at the Hog's Head on business," Shacklebolt called racing for the door. "Can you tell how many Death eaters are there?"

"No Sir, I only see the one, but I think it may be a woman," Ron answered racing down the path.

"Aunt Bella," Draco remarked, "she would have no scruples about torturing Harry where ever she found her. She hates Potter with a passion."

"Ron, is that goblet too hot for you to keep holding like that? It will do you no good if you burn yourself." Tonks nodded towards his hands.

"Its okay, the fire is cold," he huffed reaching the gates.

"Malfoy, Weasley, and Tonks you're with me. I want the others to stay here and patrol the grounds. Make sure there are no attempts to get onto the castle grounds," he directed the other Aurors who were staying at the castle. "All right then, let's go." They all pointed their wands into the night sky and vanished...

"My Master will be so pleased to see you again little Miss Potty," Bella cackled shrilly. "He will probably make me his first Lieutenant. Lucius will be so jealous." Her dark eyes sparkled wildly at the thought. "*Crucio!*" She hit Harry with another blast from her wand.

Harry screamed once again, turning her head in pain. That's when she caught a movement within the shadows. It was the outline of a large black dog, muscles tense, crouching to attack. She knew she had to keep Bellatrix distracted to give Padfoot his chance.

"Your...master...will never...have...me. I will send...him and Lucius Malfoy back...to...whatever pit...their...souls crawled...out of!" Harry spat back, now fighting through the pain. "And you...will...be given...to the...Dementors or...made to...walk through...the veil."

"Ha...ha...ha..." Bellatrix haughty voice mocked, "I will be the Dark...Arrrggghhh...", she screamed unable to finish her sentence as Sirius leaped onto her back, digging his sharp teeth into the nape of her neck. Blood and spinal fluid was spurting everywhere as Sirius massive jaws partially severed her spine and punctured her jugular vein as Dumbledore and Severus ran into the alley.

Harry rolled over and grabbed Bellatrix wand where it had fallen, and pointed it at her. "*Accio* wand," she yelled and her own wand sailed through the air from the fallen Deatheater's robes into Harry's hand. Bellatrix was lying on the ground paralyzed, unable to move the right side of her body from the neck down as Sirius transformed.

"My...Master will...kill...you for...this cousin," she slurred, choking on her own blood.

"Let him try," Sirius growled fighting down the overwhelming urge to kick her in the head.

"More likely he will come after you for your failure to capture Harry and getting caught in the bargain," Severus icy voice remarked from over Sirius shoulder.

"We need to get Bellatrix medical attention and have the Aurors place her in a secure location," Dumbledore said surveying her injuries. Pointing his wand in the air he shot up a signal of red sparks...

"Look!" Tonks gasped as they apparated onto High Street. "It is Dumbledore's signal. "They are over near the Hog's Head."

"The goblet has gone dark. They must have found Harry," Ron added as the four Aurors proceeded towards the inn at a quick pace.

"What else did you see Auror Weasley?" Kingsly asked crisply.

"There was a dark shadow and something flew onto Bellatrix back. Then the flame went out."

"My guess is that shadow was a certain black dog." Tonks grinned knowing her cousin would have been furious at any attempt to hurt Harry.

"Tonks, you go inside and alert the barkeeper and check on the situation upstairs. You two come with me," Shacklebolt instructed as they reached the inn.

"Yes, Sir," they all chorused.

Tonks disappeared in the front door of the inn, while the others made their way around the building towards the alley...

"Are you hurt, Child?" Dumbledore queried as Harry shakily rose to her feet, wand trained on Bellatrix.

"I'll be okay, Headmaster." Harry looked up into her mentors face, illuminated by the pale light of the moon, and noted the worry. "I was unarmed so I deliberately didn't fight the curse hoping someone would hear me scream. I see it worked."

"You should not have been here in the first place," Snape snapped.

"What are you doing here, Harry? Why did you leave the safety of Hogwarts?" Sirius demanded beginning to feel angry that she would have done something so stupid now that he knew she was safe.

"I would like the answer to that myself?" Kingsly Shacklebolt's voice came from the end of the alley.

All heads turned in his direction, and Bella saw her opportunity for escape. Reaching into her pocket with her unaffected hand, she drew out a small dagger and threw it hitting Harry in the side. Harry fell to the ground with a gasp as Bellatrix retrieved her wand.

"Harry!" Circe yelled in alarm from the rear door of the inn as a strange voice yelled at the same time.

"Stupefy!"

Bella lay frozen as the group sprang into action. Sirius was immediately beside her but Harry was getting dizzy and everything looked fuzzy. She could see Circe standing at the rear door with Tonks behind her with a stranger on her right. Harry assumed it was another Auror whom she didn't know but he seemed strangely familiar. Her mind was too groggy to focus on his face as it was hidden by the shadows.

"Harry, lie still, Honey. We'll get you back to Hogwarts."

"Don't touch that dagger Black!" Snape yelled as Sirius went to pull it out. "It is poisoned and pulling it out the wrong way will triple the strength of the poison."

"How would you know that?" Sirius snapped.

"I know because I created it for the Dark Lord. When the dagger enters the flesh, a small spring activates in the tip and sends out the poison. If you try to dislodge it the poison is charmed to pour out even stronger."

"Sounds like something you would make," Sirius hissed angrily. 'Snivellus if Harry dies I will make you suffer,' he thought, all his old feelings of animosity coming back to the surface.

"We need to get them both to hospital," Kingsley bellowed, securely binding Bellatrix before Sirius and Snape could tear into one another.

"We will get Harry up to Poppy. Severus knows how to handle this dagger since he is its creator. Kingsley alert the Ministry and take Bellatrix to the security ward in St. Mungo's," Dumbledore directed.

Kingsley immediately levitated Bella away from Harry and motioned for the other Aurors to form a security team around him. Harry saw a flash of hot pink hair rush from the inn. 'I must tell Tonks that she is a sitting duck with that hair,' she thought inanely becoming more light headed.

"What can we do to help?" the stranger questioned, stepping into the light.

"Justinian?" Severus questioned taken aback.

"Yes, Severus, it's me. I'll explain later."

"I should think so," Snape snapped. "I am sure Tiberius will be most interested."

"Severus, we need to get Harry back up to the school," Dumbledore's stern voice interrupted. "All explanations can wait for later."

"Yes, of course, Headmaster. Black can you take her on your motorcycle? You can go directly to the school without having to walk from the apparition point near the gates."

"I will need some help to balance her in front of me since she is too weak to hold on to my waist but it shouldn't be too difficult."

"I will levitate her so that you can adjust her properly but take care not to dislodge or move the dagger in any way," Snape told him as Sirius mounted the motorcycle.

"I think it may be best if we immobilize her once Sirius has her properly positioned," Dumbledore advised. "That should help to keep the dagger from moving."

"I agree, Headmaster," Snape replied gently lowering her in front of Sirius.

"Padfoot..." Harry's voice came out in a whisper.

"Shh...Honey, don't try to talk. I'll have you back at Hogwarts before you can count to three."

"Padfoot...listen to...me...please," she begged weakly. "I...shouldn't...have come...here. This...is my...fault."

"I said hush!" Sirius said gently but firmly. "We'll talk it when you're healed."

"But..."

"Hush, Child, Sirius is right," Dumbledore admonished, his tone brooking no argument. "Are you ready Sirius?"

"Yes, I'll get her straight up to the infirmary as soon as we arrive. Will we need the Healer to come and help Poppy?"

"That won't be necessary, Black. I have the antidote for the poison but she will be quite ill for a few hours depending on how much she has absorbed."

"What about the wound?"

"We will let Poppy determine if she will need any assistance from Healer McBride," Dumbledore stated matter of factly. "There are very few things she is unable to handle."

"I...like...McBride. He...needs to get...together with Minerva," Harry giggled as the faces of the three men swam in front of her.

"Severus, is this normal?" Dumbledore questioned blue eyes starting to twinkle at Harry.

"I'm afraid so, Headmaster. The poison also has a truth drug attached to it so that you may question your victim before they die. They will also become euphoric."

"Albus...you have...very...sexy eyes," Harry began giggling weakly.

"Thank you, Child, but I think we need to get you back to Hogwarts."

"But I...like...the way...Sirius has me...cuddled up to...him." Harry moved her head to try to see her godfather better, but his image was swimming in front of her. "Sirius...did you...know you're...twins?" Harry's eyes were opened wide and her pupils dilated.

"Headmaster, she needs to get back now!" Snape said studying her intently. "The poison is spreading and it affects the central nervous system. This euphoria only lasts for a little while and then she will start to become numb and nauseous."

"I understand, Severus." Dumbledore nodded pointing his wand at Harry. "*Immobulus!* I think that will help to keep her still without her being too stiff for Sirius to hold onto." Dumbledore nodded in satisfaction. "Sirius, we will see you back at Hogwarts." Sirius kicked the bike into gear taking off into the night sky. "Come, we need to get back to the school as quickly as possible. I am sure it won't be long before Lord Voldemort realizes Bellatrix is missing," Dumbledore stated. "I will also be most interested in hearing Justinian's story." Dumbledore's blue eyes twinkled merrily and Severus had the impression that he already knew most of the tale.

"Headmaster, I think Harry should be told as well. I have an idea she was here tonight because I was here with Sirius," Circe explained as they prepared to apparate.

"Then we shall wait till Harry is well enough to hear your explanation," Dumbledore commented as Severus glared at Justinian. "On three," Dumbledore directed as they all raised their wands. "One...two...three."

They disappeared into the night and arrived back at Hogwarts a few minutes later. Circe headed up to the suite of rooms she shared with Phaedra and Tiberius, taking Justinian with her. Snape went down to the dungeon to get the antidote for the poison but knew Harry was in for a rough night. Fortunately, the antidote could be administered for up to an hour following the admission of the poison into the bloodstream. He met the Headmaster and Black in the infirmary. Harry was beginning to get nauseous and Poppy was examining the entry point where the knife still sat in Harry's side.

"Madam Pomfrey, please do not touch the knife until after I have given Harry the antidote. We do not want any further poison released until then."

"I understand, Severus. I am merely checking to try to ascertain the internal damage."

"Harry," Severus spoke softly as he approached the side of the bed, "you need to drink all of this. It doesn't taste very good but you need to take it all. I will need to give you some more in about an hour." He raised her head and gently put the vial to her lips.

Harry swallowed the potion and immediately gagged, but didn't throw up. She flopped back onto the pillow weakly, green eyes looking up at Severus.

"I should go and tell James and Lily what happened. They will want to know," Sirius remarked quietly.

"NO!" Harry croaked.

"Harry, they're your parents. They will want to know that you've been injured."

"No...No...No," she shook her head becoming agitated. "I don't... want them... here," she started to sob.

"Sirius it would be wise to wait until she is calmer and I have had a chance to work on her wound," Poppy told him with authority.

"Very well," he sighed.

"I will need to dislodge the knife," Snape advised.

"Why can't Poppy do it?"

"Because of the trigger mechanism. I need to deactivate it and then pull the knife out by hand. Any attempt at using magic to remove it will just cause it to open the mechanism further."

"All right, Snape, but you had better know what the hell you're doing."

Snape glared at Sirius before his nimble fingers began feeling the edge of the hilt. Nodding he pressed on a small aperture and swiftly pulled out the knife. Harry cried out in pain as a gush of blood poured from the wound. Madam Pomfrey immediately moved to her side and began to heal the puncture while the two men watched.

"Where's Albus?" she asked teary eyed.

"I'm here, Child," Dumbledore's comforting voice came from the door. "I have been here the entire time," he added coming to her side. "I felt it would not be in your best interests to disturb Severus and Poppy while they tended to your injury."

"I screwed... up again, Sir. I not... only... endangered myself... I could have... caused... major problems... for the Order."

"I never said I didn't expect you to make mistakes." He stroked her head fondly.

"My mistakes... can get people... killed," Harry frowned. "Why... do I feel... so dizzy?"

"It's the poison trying to work against the antidote," Snape replied. "Lie back and close your eyes. It is going to be a rough night, but I will stay and so will Sirius."

"Why? I'm... sure, you would... prefer... to stay... in your dungeon... and Sirius would... much prefer... Circe's company. Remus would be... with Arsinoe... if he wasn't... in wolf mode... right now," she sobbed bitterly. "All I'm good for... is to be... your little... burden." Harry lay back closing her eyes trying to fight the tears sliding down her cheeks.

"Ah...it seems the green-eyed monster has struck our little Phoenix again, as I thought." Dumbledore chuckled amused.

"I see... nothing funny, Headmaster," she cried in anguish.

"Harry, didn't I tell you awhile ago that you needed to trust me when it came to Circe?" Sirius questioned.

"Yes."

"Then why don't you?"

Harry's eyes flew open and she looked at Sirius in disbelief. "How can you... sit here... and lie to me? I saw... you... kissing her... up stairs... in the Hog's Head!"

"I see; why did you come into Hogsmeade in the first place?"

"Severus was... acting... like a prat. He... refused... to tutor me. Then... I saw... Remus with Arsinoe. I only... wanted... to be... with someone... who cared about me..." her voice trailed off as she suddenly sat up and began to retch.

"That will be enough, gentlemen. Whatever your differences are with Miss Potter it can wait until the morning. Her wound is serious and if Severus is to be believed she will be feeling quite ill while the antidote works on the poison," Madam Pomfrey cut in. It pained her to see Harry so unhappy and hurting.

"Madam Pomfrey is right," Dumbledore stated firmly. "You two go on and settle your differences as I can see you are both angry with one another."

"Headmaster, I need to be here to administer the antidote and as I am also her protector I will not leave her side, especially while she is in acute distress."

"Albus, as her godfather I have every right to be here and I am her protector as well." Sirius glared running his hands through his hair.

"Very well. I can see you at least take your duties in the Protectorship seriously. I shall also stay, as I am your trust keeper. Harry needs time to recuperate. In the morning she should be given an explanation of all of your behaviors and that shall include Professor Lupin,"
Dumbledore's blue eyes reflected his annoyance with the two younger wizards.

"Yes, Headmaster," Severus agreed cowed.

"I will make sure Remus comes down and fill him in on what happened in the morning," Sirius replied. "He'll be able to rest here in the infirmary with Harry."

Harry might have been interested in this conversation except that her head was throbbing and she was beginning to feel the numbness in her limbs from the poison permeating her system. Her eyes must have reflected her fear as Severus noted the look of consternation on her face.

"Harry, I want you to stay awake. I need to see how much poison is still in your system. Don't be frightened. You received the antidote in time but you will need more. Can you tell me what you are feeling?"

"I'm...dizzy...and I can't feel...my legs. I think I need... to throw...up." Harry leaned over the bed clutching her stomach as a wave of pain ran through her abdomen."

"Madam Pomfrey would you be so kind as to bring in some of the anti nausea potion for Harry?" Snape called over his shoulder as he began to rub Harry's back. He knew she had vomited once already and there was nothing left in her stomach. He also new she needed another dose of the antidote sooner than he had anticipated. He needed her to keep it down.

"Here Severus," Poppy said coming from the dispensary carrying a vial of orange liquid. "Is there anything I can do?"

"No, but we will need to keep her awake until the feeling in her limbs returns. I want to be certain there is no further progression. Sirius, I need you to massage her legs. We need to keep the circulation going and keep them warm."

Sirius moved closer and sat on the bottom of the bed. Pulling the blanket aside, he did as Severus instructed. He was angry with Severus but knew his experience as a Death eater gave him an understanding of their traps and means of torture or intimidation. He had no choice but to trust in his skills. He wished Remus were there with them too. He considered going up and getting the werewolf but decided it would not be a good idea. He didn't really care that Severus was uncomfortable with Remus in his wolf form but he needed the man to remain concentrated on what he was doing. He felt helpless and frustrated just sitting and watching. Sirius promised himself that he would make it up to Harry. He also knew she needed to get her jealousy under control.

"Padfoot, I... didn't... mean it... you know."

"Mean what love?"

"When I... told you... not to go... and tell my... Mum and Dad. I just think they... have... too much else... to worry about... right now."

"Do you want me to go and tell them?"

"Later...I...um...need you...to stay here." Harry couldn't meet his gaze. She felt responsible and disgusted with her behavior earlier.

"I'll stay until Severus says he doesn't need my help and then I will go and tell them what happened," he replied gently. "Now try and relax. I see Severus has some more of the antidote for you to drink."

Gradually Harry began to feel her legs and the headache and nausea subsided. She was exhausted physically and emotionally and layback against her pillow finally allowed to drift into a deep sleep. She didn't hear when Sirius excused himself to go to the Shrieking Shack to inform her parents of what had happened to Harry. Nor was she aware of the gentle kiss Severus planted on her forehead after Sirius left the room. He believed Dumbledore had fallen asleep in the chair beside him. The Potions Master never saw the smile on the Headmaster's lips...

Harry woke to the sound of voices in the room but kept her eyes closed. She was confused for a moment and realized she was not in her room. Then the memories of the previous night came flooding back. She had gone to Hogsmeade to find Sirius after having an argument with Severus and becoming jealous of Remus. Then she had seen Sirius kissing Severus' sister. Her world was falling apart. Yet, Sirius had saved her when Bellatrix caught her off guard. He had left Circe to protect her. Surely, he still had feelings for her. It was all so confusing. She was frustrated and jealous and knew she had to come to terms with her emotions. Moving slightly in the bed, she felt a pull on her right side and recalled being stabbed and poisoned. 'Oh shit,' she thought, 'what on earth did I say to the Headmaster? Something about sexy eyes...Merlin I won't be able to look him in the face ever again.' Her thoughts were interrupted by a familiar voice.

"I want to see Miss Harry! I heard Mummy tell Uncle Tiberius that she was hurt last night!" Phaedra wailed.

"Phaedra, Harry will be fine. She's asleep right now and needs to recuperate." Severus was trying to placate his niece.

"I don't believe you!" She stamped her feet on the floor. "I want to see her for myself!"

"Little One, listen to your Uncle Severus. Harry was quite ill. She will recover but she needs quiet." Harry recognized Dumbledore's voice. "As soon as she is feeling better I'm sure Madam Pomfrey will let you visit."

"NO! NO! NO! I want to see her now. I brought my bunny, Mr. Hoppity-Hop, to make her feel better."

"Phaedra," Lily's soft voice came from the end of the ward, "how about if I bring her the bunny. I'm sure she will be happy to see it when she wakes up."

Harry had the distinct impression Phaedra was thinking this over when she heard the little girl speak again.

"I can't let you take my bunny. I don't know who you are."

"You can call me Augusta and this is my husband, Julian. We are friends of Harry's."

"Hello, Phaedra, it's nice to meet you." Harry heard her father respond, and peeked out from beneath her lashes to see him shaking her hand. She realized she still had her extended wear contact lenses in place and was grateful. She didn't want to alert them just yet that she was awake.

"How do you know Miss Harry?" There was no mistaking the suspicion in the child's voice.

"We knew her a long time ago when she was just a baby," Lily Potter told her gently.

Harry could see the child studying the couple intently and then give a mischievous smile.

"You look wrong. Who fixed your faces and why are your names different? Miss Harry told me her Mummy was Lily and her Daddy James."

"What do you mean, we look wrong?" James Potter questioned the child.

"Humph... nobody ever tells me anything so I have to have Mr. Hoppity-Hop listen when I'm in bed. He told me the bad wizard woke up Miss Harry's Mummy and Daddy and they came here to Hogwarts. But I saw Miss Harry's picture book and they don't look like you..." the child scrunched up her face thoughtfully. "You have to be them though. You are the only new people here since we came. So somebody had to fix your faces, like when Mr. Sirius turns into a dog. Didn't you like your names? I think Lily is a pretty name. It's a flower you know."

Harry heard Sirius snort with a short bark of laughter and let her eyes travel towards the sound. He was sitting with a very tired looking Remus, who lay on another bed. The Potters had looks of consternation on both their faces. Harry was enjoying the whole scenario.

"Little One," Dumbledore looked at Phaedra, giving her the full effect of his twinkling blue eyes, "why don't you come with me up to my office? You can help me to feed Fawkes and I will share some lemon drops with you."

"Mummy doesn't let me have candy in the morning," Phaedra pouted up at him.

"She doesn't have to know."

"We can go after I see Miss Harry," Phaedra tossed her head at Dumbledore before looking back at the Potters. "Did Uncle Severus give you one of his magic potions to make you look like that?"

"Phaedra, you are being rude and asking questions which don't concern you." Harry noted that Severus was trying not to lose his patience. "Does your mother know where you are?"

Phaedra shifted uncomfortably, knowing that her uncle knew she had most likely sneaked out of their living quarters. "Mummy and Uncle Tiberius are still asleep. Hazel brought me my breakfast."

"And where is the house elf now? Why isn't she watching you?"

"Um...she went down to the kitchen. She wanted to fix Mummy her breakfast so it would be ready when she got up."

Harry could tell Phaedra was lying to her uncle. What was worse, Harry knew Severus was aware of it too.

"Phaedra, what did you do to the house elf?" He was giving his niece the same dark glare that he gave his students. She avoided his gaze looking down at the floor.

"Phaedra, it's okay," Lily interceded, "you can tell us. You won't get into any trouble."

The little girl smiled up at Lily Potter. "I like you. You won't tell Mummy and Uncle Tiberius what I did, will you?"

"Not if you tell us the truth."

James was grinning, while Sirius was trying not to laugh. Harry sensed Severus was annoyed at their interference. Dumbledore shook his head, warning him not to interfere. Remus' twitched his lips but did not open his eyes.

"Well...I told her to go into the closet and count to two hundred so we could play hide-n-seek. When she closed the door and got to twenty I sneaked out to visit Miss Harry."

Harry couldn't contain herself any longer and opened her eyes laughing. Phaedra ran over to the bed and flung her body on to of her.

"Oomph," Harry grunted, shifting uncomfortably from the pain in her side, still chuckling merrily. "That was a very clever trick you played on your house elf. Worthy of any budding Slytherin, wouldn't you say so Severus?" Harry asked smirking at his dark glare.

"Miss Harry, I think Uncle Severus is mad at one of us."

"Actually, Phaedra, he is most probably mad at both of us. You for sneaking off and me for leaving the castle grounds alone last night."

"Ahem," Dumbledore cleared his throat looking at Harry over his half moon spectacles.

"Harry, we need to talk."

"Miss Harry, why does Headmaster Mr. Dumbledore, look so funny?"

"What do you mean by funny, Phaedra?"

"His eyes, they usually are sparkly like they were before. Now they look like they're kind of frozen."

"Well...you see, Phaedra, he is a bit angry at Miss Harry. She has a habit of getting herself into trouble," Harry explained unable to meet Dumbledore's intense gaze with one of her own.

"Doesn't he love you any more?"

"Of course he does. That's why he's mad at me."

"I don't understand."

"Hmm...The best way I can explain it is that when you do something wrong, like tricking Hazel, your Mum and Uncles get mad at you, right?" The little girl nodded in affirmation as Harry continued. "They get mad because they love you and you did something to either scare them..."

"Like sneaking out," Phaedra chimed in.

"Right, or something that disappoints them."

"Oh, do you think you'll get in trouble? Can you get detention now that you work here and don't go to school?"

"No, the worst thing that would happen is that I would be fired from my job, but..."

"Headmaster, Mr. Dumbledore, you aren't going to fire Miss Harry are you?" Phaedra questioned him in consternation.

"No, Little One," he smiled reassuringly, "and Harry knows that. She is also aware that we are disappointed that she didn't try to talk to us and ran off to Hogsmeade. She was upset with Professor Lupin and your uncle Severus."

"I still am. I am also more than a little upset with Sirius," Harry responded glancing at her godfather. "You see, Phaedra, Miss Harry and your uncle had a quarrel yesterday and then I got mad at Mr. Remus because I was jealous."

"You have no need to be, Harry," Remus spoke up weakly. "I told you that before." Remus was looking over at her with a weary expression, his golden eyes unblinking.

"Let's just say I may have misunderstood what I was seeing because I was upset with Severus."

"What did you and Severus argue about, Harry? You said last night that he refused to tutor you." Sirius questioned curiously.

Harry met Severus dark eyes. He was standing very still and Harry was reminded of a wax statue.

"Harry was late, as usual, for her lesson," Severus stated quietly. "I merely told her that if she could not be on time she obviously did not want to pass the potions exam and was wasting my time."

"So you kicked her out again, Snivellus?" James Potter remarked angrily.

"That will be quite enough!" Harry shouted. "As an empath I was more than aware that something else was bothering him." Harry glowered at her father. "Old memories die hard, and if you have ever been the victim of a bully, which I have, you would know that."

James was taken aback by the anger his daughter was directing towards him. He looked at Lily shaking his head. He had no clue as to what Harry was talking about.

"Harry, I have no idea what you mean," he told her perplexed.

"Unless I miss my guess Severus overheard you calling him Snivellus yesterday when he came up to Arsinoe's classroom. You caused him to dredge up all those old memories of how you and Sirius tormented him and got away with it! Now you've just done it again!"

"Harry, we never got along. I told you old habits died hard. I meant nothing by it."

"Miss Harry," Phaedra questioned, "are you going to tie them together like you did with Mr. Sirius?"

"Not this time, Honey," Harry said giving her an affectionate squeeze.

"I should hope not," James responded arrogantly.

"James..." Lily started but Harry held up her hand to silence her mother.

"Ha! I knew you were Miss Harry's Mummy and Daddy," Phaedra yelled in triumph at Lily's slip.

"Shush Phaedra; you have to keep that a secret. I will explain in a minute," Harry told her with a wink before redirecting her attention back to James Potter. "I shouldn't have to remind you that Severus is one of my Protectors. He has also been guarding me since I first came to Hogwarts. As much as he didn't like me, and believe me he didn't because every time he saw me he equated it with you, he still knew he had a life debt to you. He was there for me on many occasions as I am sure you well know. I think it is high time you apologized to Severus and thanked him for looking after me! I also do not want to hear you call him Snivellus ever again!" she said through gritted teeth. "As for our lesson problems, that is something he and I will just have to work out between ourselves."

James Potter studied his daughter. He could feel her anger and sensed the power within her. The only other time he had ever felt something like that was on the rare occasion he had seen Dumbledore angry. Slowly he moved over to where Severus Snape still stood, unmoving. He extended his hand.

"Severus...I was a real prat when we were in school. I meant what I said that time that I should have chosen you as my friend instead of Peter. I know that it wasn't just the curses, you gave as good as you got, sometimes even better," James smirked. "I just went too far that time I humiliated you after OWL's. I...well I never thought about what something like that could do to a person. I'm sorry. You helped Lily in Potions when we were in school and you looked after Harry. My arrogance only ended up hurting you and my daughter." James swallowed hard and everyone in the room knew what an effort it was for the proud man to admit his mistake.

"Apology accepted, Potter." Snape took James outstretched hand slowly, almost as if he were afraid the man were up to something sinister. After a reluctant handshake, he turned his attention back to Harry. "Harry, I will expect you back in the Potions classroom for your lesson on time this week. Be prepared to stay for a double session. You have to make up what we didn't do yesterday. Do not be late again or I will withdraw my sponsorship for the exam. Is that understood?"

"Explicitly." Harry tried not to grin too widely. She understood that this was Severus' way of admitting his mistake without losing face.

"Now will someone tell me why Miss Harry's Mummy and Daddy look different?"

"We're in hiding, Phaedra," Lily explained coming over to the bed and pulling up a chair beside the two girls.

"Why? The bad wizard knows you're awake."

"He wants to hurt them Phaedra, and use them to get to me," Harry answered. She did not want to tell her that Voldemort was also trying to capture her uncle Severus.

"Don't worry, Miss Harry will make him go away again. Then you won't have to hide any more and Miss Harry will be happy you're back home instead of in Heaven." Phaedra reasoned innocently.

Harry could feel everyone staring at her, and let her eyes drift out the window. 'How do I explain to this sweet child that when I send Voldemort away, if I even can, that I have to send my parents back too?' she mused wearily.

"Phaedra, would it be all right if I held Mr. Hoppity-Hop for a little while?" Remus soft voice asked giving Harry time to ponder a response. "I really don't feel well."

"Your wolf won't eat him will he?"

"No...Uh...he doesn't like rabbits," Remus replied. 'No he only goes after humans when not contained.' The werewolf contemplated sadly as Phaedra moved over to where he lay on the other bed. She gave him the toy rabbit. To her delight, he cuddled up with it.

"Now you will feel better," she said pleased with his actions. "Miss Harry, why do you look so sad? Are you unhappy that I gave Mr. Hoppity-Hop to Mr. Remus when I brought him for you?"

"No, Phaedra...I...have to tell you...something. I'm just not sure how."

"Is it something bad?"

"Kind of," Harry sighed. "It's about my Mum and Dad."

Phaedra glanced quizzically over at the Potters, who had both seated themselves beside Harry. "Is it because they are hiding from the bad wizard?"

"In a way...you see...the bad wizard's followers did some very bad magic to bring him back..."

"I know that. Mr. Hoppity-Hop told me all about it. Something called Necmancy."

"That's Necromancy, Phaedra," Severus corrected soberly.

"Right, Uncle Sev, that's what I said!"

"Anyway," Harry waved her hand to keep Severus from interrupting again, "he used the same magic to bring my parents back here too."

"But you helped to save them. So why are you so sad?"

"Phaedra, they can't stay here. In order for me to send the bad wizard away I have to send them away too." Harry's voice came out in a rush.

"Will they go back to Heaven?"

"Yes, Phaedra, we will," James Potter responded quietly.

"Hmm...Then you shouldn't be sad, Miss Harry, cause they will be happy and wait for you and the bad wizard won't be able to hurt anyone ever again."

"Out of the mouths of babes..." Dumbledore smiled benignly at Phaedra but before he could continue, the door to the infirmary suddenly burst open.

Tiberius Snape stood framed in the doorway, scowling at his young niece. Flanking him on either side was Circe Snape and the strange man that Harry had seen at the Hog's Head. She wasn't sure, but thought that Severus had called him Justinian. Mad Eye Moody was behind them and she could just make out his magical eye roving around the room.

"Phaedra," Circe gasped running over to her daughter, "you scared me half to death!" she exclaimed scooping the child into a hug. "What ever possessed you to trick Hazel like that? She is upstairs punishing herself. You know better than to wander the castle alone," Circe admonished, as the three men stepped into the room.

"I had to make sure Miss Harry was okay. I brought her my bunny but Mr. Remus needed it more." Phaedra looked at her mother guiltily. "I didn't mean for Hazel to punish herself."

"What did you expect, Phaedra?" Tiberius questioned with authority. "You know she is responsible for you when we are unavailable. She failed in her duty to protect and care for you."

Harry could sense he was controlling his temper. She knew he was more than a little relieved that Phaedra was safe. Phaedra squirmed beneath his intense gaze.

"Tiberius, I think Phaedra has learned her lesson," Dumbledore intervened, his blue eyes twinkling as he looked at the two girls over his spectacles. "I believe Harry has as well."

Harry merely smiled coyly back at Dumbledore meeting his intense blue eyes with her own.

"Well, Potter, you were caught off guard," Moody's gruff voice interrupted. "You are the luckiest damned witch I have ever met but I don't think I need to remind you..."

"I know, I know, constant vigilance!"

"Damned right, girl, and don't you forget it again. Now I think it's time I fill you in, Black. Circe and Justinian have decided to take the risks involved. I personally think it's bloody stupid but it was their decision. After what happened at the Hog's Head they decided it wasn't worth causing Potter any more grief."

Harry immediately turned her attention to the man who had entered with the Snapes and Moody. He was about six feet tall with a stocky build, golden blond hair, reminiscent of Lockhart's and soft brown eyes. He had a long aquiline nose and thin lips. There was something oddly familiar about him. 'I know I have seen him somewhere before...but where?' she considered frowning.

"Sir, forgive my rudeness, but do I know you from someplace?" Harry asked, scanning the man. He was hiding something, she was sure of it.

"In a manner of speaking, Miss Potter, you do. Allow me to introduce myself. I am Justinian Snape, a distant cousin of Severus and Circe from Canada. I am also Circe's husband. Phaedra is my daughter." He looked at Harry with a subtle smile, as her mouth dropped open in shock. That was why he looked so familiar. Phaedra had inherited her father's features, just as Harry had, although not as pronounced. "Up until last night I was believed by all in this room except for Circe, Dumbledore and Mad Eye to be dead. Your godfather didn't know anything until he was assigned to guard us. He was in Azkaban when Circe and I met and fell in love."

"You're my daddy?" Phaedra questioned excitedly.

"Yes, Phaedra, I am."

"I'm sure Harry will be most interested to hear your story, Justinian, but I believe she needs to get some rest. Perhaps it could wait until after dinner?" Dumbledore queried.

"Not on your life!" Harry exclaimed. "I honestly believed Sirius and Circe were having a tryst in Hogsmeade last night since they have been going there so frequently. I want to hear this, Headmaster."

"I too will be quite interested to hear about Justinian's remarkable survival," Severus glared at the other man who was sneering back at him.

"Me too!" Phaedra agreed with enthusiasm. "Miss Harry," she whispered a bit too loudly over her shoulder, "do you think that man really is my daddy?" The others in the room grinned as Harry nodded at Phaedra.

"I think all of you will find it most interesting tale," Tiberius stated with the glint of amusement in his eyes. "Circe and Justinian told me their story last night so I will excuse myself," he stated curtly. "Albus if I may have some time with you before lunch, I have some news to report."

"Absolutely, Tiberius. I am most anxious to hear what you have uncovered. Shall we meet in my office in one hour?"

Tiberius nodded and swept out of the room.

"Please everyone, make yourselves comfortable," Justinian requested, conjuring extra chairs by Harry's bed.

Remus and Sirius stayed on the other bed, but the werewolf propped himself up, looking at Justinian, his golden eyes exuding a spark of interest. Severus Snape did not sit. He leaned against the wall, face set in a mask, dark eyes glittering, with his arms folded across his chest.

"I believe we should have some breakfast while we hear your story," Dumbledore remarked.

Almost as soon as he said it, a table appeared laden with coffee, tea, scones, bacon, eggs, and fresh fruit. It was obvious that the house elves had been prepared for this. They all helped themselves. Even though Phaedra had already eaten she happily took a few extra pieces of bacon.

"If everyone is ready I will begin my story," Justinian began, putting his arm around Circe. "I met the British branch of the family when I came here to work on an exchange program within the Ministry of Magic. I worked in the Canadian Magical Law Enforcement division as an Undercover Auror. At that time, it was my job to try to uncover any information about a supposed group of dark wizards who were the former followers of Lord Voldemort. This was before he actually returned, mind you, but rumors were still running rampant. It was believed that they were planning on starting a following in Canada and it was my mission to infiltrate the group and learn as much as I could."

"I thought that they already had followers in the America's," Remus stated with interest.

"They did, but most disbanded when the Dark Lord disappeared. Anyway, I was successful. It was during this time that Circe and I started dating. What I didn't know was that Circe and Severus' father was a member of this group although he and his children were estranged. He saw this as an opportunity to get his children back under his control and punish Circe for abandoning the Dark Arts. He believed that Severus was still loyal to the Dark Lord's cause and had been spying on Dumbledore who had gotten him cleared following Voldemort's disappearance. Silinius, that was Circe and Severus' father, was having me watched by someone within the Ministry. I later learned that it was Lucius Malfoy, who was the leader of the group. Malfoy made some inquiries and discovered that even though I was a Snape, I am a Half-blood. My mother was a Muggleborn. Well, this was sufficient ammunition to get rid of me but Silinius wanted to make an example out of me to his daughter. He was furious that she was going to marry a man whose maternal lineage would pollute the Snape line. "

"Did they know you were a spy?" Harry asked, fascinated by the tale.

"Yes. Malfoy found out from someone he knew back in Quebec."

"How did you learn that you were being targeted?" Remus questioned.

"I found out purely by accident. There was to be a meeting one night at Silinius' home and I accidentally overheard Malfoy discussing their plans with a man named MacNair while they were in the loo at the Ministry. It was a set up to have me killed."

"So what did you do?" Harry demanded.

"I immediately went to see Circe. I was afraid to go to anyone in the Ministry since I had already been compromised. She took me to see Dumbledore, who contacted his old friend, Alastor Moody. It was decided that we let the Death eaters know that I had been found out, which was easy since I had no intention of showing up at the proposed meeting. We wanted them to believe that I was on the run and that I was going to bring Circe with me. We let them believe we were going to be married at a particular time and place, when in fact Dumbledore had already performed the ceremony."

"So you staged your own death?" Severus sneered.

"Yes and no," Dumbledore replied. "Justinian had a portkey. He knew he would be attacked but wanted to make certain Circe was safe and well protected. We both know how Silinius would have reacted if he believed Circe knew what was going on or found out she had already married Justinian."

Snape nodded, "go on, and finish the story."

"I had a car and knew they would come for me, so I was supposed to have an accident before they got there. It was all arranged but something went wrong. We were caught unawares and there was a duel. Silinius was killed by one of the other Death eaters when their curse went astray. The body that was later identified as me was just some poor homeless Muggle who happened to get in the way. The poor bloke never knew what hit him. I put my signet ring on his hand and portkeyed as they blew up the car. It was enough to satisfy the authorities and the Death eaters since the body was unrecognizable."

"I never heard the whole story until today," Sirius interjected. "Was Lucius Malfoy there when you were attacked?"

"No, or he may not have believed that I was killed. Two others were there with Silinius, Crabbe and Goyle. I think it was Crabbe whose curse hit Silinius. In any event, they were either too stupid or too scared of Malfoy to say anything about the Muggle."

"Where did you go after you escaped?"

"I was hiding at Alastor's home for a few days. Dumbledore arranged for me to disappear."

"I wanted to go with him but Dumbledore and Alastor forbid it," Circe added. "It would have jeopardized Justinian's safety. We were able to stay in touch through secret rendezvous' and Justinian was given a new identity. I was going to join him as soon as it was safe."

"Why didn't you?" James Potter inquired.

"A few weeks later I found out I was pregnant with Phaedra. Justinian didn't want to jeopardize either of our safety. We were finally going to reunite permanently four years ago but..."

"Voldemort came back," Harry finished for her.

"Yes. I wouldn't let Circe take the chance. He would have killed all of us. I couldn't let that happen. I knew Tiberius would keep them safe. I'm sorry, Severus, I didn't completely trust you. I thought that you were still one of the Inner Circle and didn't know if you knew that I

was actually a Half-Blood even though Circe told me you were devoted to Phaedra. Dumbledore told me otherwise when he reformed the Order and I became a member."

"What were you doing for the Order?"

"I was sending back reports about the Deathaters trying to recruit the students at Durmstrang. I was one of the Professors there. As an Auror, I knew how to alter my appearance so no one knew who I was. I also kept an eye on Karkaroff before he disappeared following the Tri-Wizard Tournament and the Dark Lord's return."

"What brought you here?" Lily asked with a tear in her eye.

"We finally thought we were safe after Harry defeated Voldemort, but Dumbledore wasn't so sure. It was arranged for me to come for a brief visit while Circe was in France on holiday this past summer. Sirius was to act as our bodyguard since he is an animagus. Moody reinstated him as an Auror after he came out of retirement and Sirius had been cleared of your betrayal and murder," he told the Potters. "It turned out that Dumbledore was right but I refused to go back. I have been in Hogsmeade at the Hog's Head watching the town and trying to find out what I could. Last night I saw what was going on and refused to sit idly by while Harry was being attacked. I saw Sirius go after the Deathater in the alley and went to help. Circe followed, blaming herself for Harry's being there."

"I knew you were getting suspicious, Harry, but it was actually working to our advantage up until last night. I'm sorry we got you so upset but if everyone believed Sirius and I were a couple it helped to divert attention away from Justinian. I know how close you are to your protectors and I really felt guilty having to deceive you."

"That's okay, Circe," Harry smiled. 'Merlin, I really feel like an ass. Sirius will never let me live this down,' she thought.

"Unfortunately, you have blown your cover," Severus stated quietly, "and put our current spy in a compromising position."

"You're right, of course, Severus," Justinian conceded.

Harry looked up sharply, realizing they were talking about Tiberius, but her mind was working. "Maybe not," she muttered looking at Moody.

"You have an idea, Potter?"

"Kind of, but it may not work."

"Harry, if it will help our cause, then tell us," Dumbledore said studying her.

"Phaedra, why don't you go with Dobby and have him bake something special for dessert tonight for your daddy?"

"You just don't want to talk in front of me!" she pouted.

"You're right. It isn't something little girls should hear, but I promise I will tell you another secret if you do as I ask."

"What kind of secret?"

"I'll show you a magical map," Harry stated, eyes twinkling, as the three Marauders chuckled.

"Really?" Phaedra questioned wide-eyed.

"Yes, but you have to do what I said."

"Dobby!" Phaedra yelled with excitement.

"Miss Phaedra, Miss Harry Potter," the elf stated appearing with a bow. "You have need of Dobby's help?"

"Yes, Dobby, I want you to take Phaedra and find Hazel. Then you will all bake a special cake for dessert tonight for Phaedra's family. They will be having a celebration."

"Dobby will be happy to!" The house elf beamed jumping up and down. "Come on, Miss Phaedra, Dobby will show you how to make your favorite cake." He took Phaedra by the hand and headed for the door when Phaedra stopped short and turned around.

"Mr. Remus, will you take care of Mr. Hoppity-Hop for me?"

"Of course, Phaedra. He will be quite safe in my care." The werewolf grinned.

Phaedra nodded and followed Dobby out of the room.

"Now, Lass, tell us what it was that you couldn't say in front of the child," Moody demanded.

"Well...it's not...too pleasant. I don't even know if it would work."

"Why Harry? What could be so bad that you are hesitant about doing it?"

"It involves a dead body." Harry was unable to look at her parents.

"It's all right, Harry," James comforted. "We understand."

"Is it possible to alter the features of someone who is dead?" Harry questioned.

"What ever are you getting at, Harry?" Severus scowled.

"I was just thinking that if we could find an unclaimed body in the morgue or someone without family then maybe we could alter it to look like Justinian," Harry shuddered. "Then Tiberius could bring it to Voldemort after he puts an Avadra Kedavra curse on it in case Voldemort decided to check his wand. He could say he killed Justinian and that should assure his place in the Inner Circle and keep him from being suspected as a spy. I just don't like the idea of desecrating a corpse."

James came over and laid a comforting hand on Harry's shoulder. "I think it could work but I understand how you feel. You wouldn't want to see that happen to someone you loved or cared for. However, if the person had no family it might just help them to rest easier knowing they may have saved some other lives."

"Your father speaks the truth, Lass, and yes it is possible to do what you asked."

"Well Alastor, as I see no other alternative, I will have to agree. Nevertheless, Harry, what you have asked borders on Dark Magic. It is something that is only shown when one is studying to be a Sorcerer."

Harry looked up at Dumbledore. "Albus, I would never ask you perform any kind of Dark Magic."

"It is only borderline, Lass. The spell is the same one we used on your parents. It is semi dark since they are actually dead even though their souls have been returned."

"Alastor is right, Harry," Lily soothed. "I don't believe that anyone who has gone on will mind. Especially if they were on the side of the light."

"Very well, we shall inform the Order tonight. Harry I will let you know the outcome after the meeting."

"I can't come?"

"I should say not, Miss Potter," Poppy stated coming from her office. "You need to give that wound at least two days to heal. You're not to move out of that bed for the next two days."

"What if I need to use the bathroom?"

"Then I shall walk you in and wait. You have a nasty habit of getting up when you are not fully healed! Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes, Ma'am." Harry rolled her eyes, giving in. She knew Poppy would stand for no nonsense.

"Excellent, now I must go and notify the members of the Order and speak with Tiberius. I suggest we all leave Harry to her rest."

"Absolutely, Albus. She had a rough night." Sirius grinned wickedly.

"I know what you're thinking, Sirius Black, so don't go rubbing it in."

"Oh, and what might that be?"

"That I acted like a real ass," Harry shot back.

"You said it, not me," he laughed. Harry threw the pillow at him but he ducked and laughed even harder.

"Severus?" Harry looked at the former Death eater.

"What Harry?"

"You have my permission to hex my godfather!"

"Indeed, it will be my pleasure," he pulled his wand as Sirius continued to laugh, ducking the minor spells that Severus directed at him.

James and Lily smiled at Sirius childish antics, reminded of his exuberance when they all attended Hogwarts.

"We had better go and make sure he stays out of trouble. Severus is enjoying this a bit too much," James smirked.

Harry sensed that he knew the two men would not harm one another, at least for Harry's sake. Remus looked on in amusement and started to rise from the bed but Poppy pushed him back down.

"You're not going anywhere, Remus. You need to rest and I dare say that Sirius Black will not provide you with adequate sleeping time to recuperate in time for tonight's meeting."

"Ah...Poppy...I will probably be indisposed for the meeting."

"Just the same, you will stay here for at least a few hours before you have to closet yourself in your room."

"Yes, Ma'am," he beamed with his still boyish smile. "Looks like you get some company today, Princess. I learned not to fool with Poppy years ago."

"Do tell? I think you want to stay because you know she'll feed you chocolate," Harry teased.

"You're right and if you're a good little Princess I might just share with you."

They both fell to laughing and were glad of each other's company. Harry continued to apologize to Remus about being jealous of Arsinoe. He told her not to get upset and that he was flattered she cared so much before asking Poppy to secure them a chessboard. They spent the next hour playing before Harry lay back exhausted. Her wound had been more severe than she had realized and she fell asleep after Poppy snuck a painkiller into her pumpkin juice.

Hermione and Ron came up while Harry was still asleep and did not want to disturb her. Remus proceeded to fill them in as to what had happened to cause Harry to go into Hogsmeade. He also told them that they would be informed of the other developments tonight since Dumbledore was calling for a meeting of the Order. They knew better than to question him further on the subject. Hermione told him that when Harry woke up to let her know they had finally deciphered the key to the translation of the spell. Arsinoe would soon have it ready for her to memorize and that it would be a good idea to start with the part that had already been translated as it was quite long. Remus agreed and promised to pass on the information before the couple left. Then Remus continued to enjoy his chocolate while he sipped a cup of tea, reading a book, until Poppy released him late in the afternoon. Harry did not awake until dinnertime.

Chapter 24 - Hippogriffs Quidditch and Christmas

The plans for the Yule Ball had been coming along nicely. Neville had arranged for sprigs of mistletoe to be placed at strategic areas through out the Great Hall and enchanted all the hearths to burn in red and green flames. He had gone with Hagrid personally to supervise cutting six giant fir trees that graced the hall every year. Professor Sprout had enchanted the centerpieces for the tables, which were all made out of holly and poinsettias, to play soft Christmas carols.

Remus was in charge of the decorations and had spent a good deal of time conferring with Dumbledore. He had stayed with the fairy lights so loved by the late Professor Flitwick but decided to decorate four of the trees to correspond with each of the four Hogwarts houses. The Slytherin tree was decorated in silver serpents and green balls with silver garlands. Hufflepuff was done in little badgers with yellow balls and garlands. The tree for Ravenclaw had small ravens nesting through out its branches with blue balls and bronze garland. Finally, the tree for Gryffindor had little griffins with red balls and gold garland. The other two trees, which graced the front of the hall, were also decorated. One was devoted entirely to Quidditch. It was covered in little brooms. Each broom was being ridden by a raven, badger, serpent, or griffin playing Quidditch. The elusive golden snitch could be seen disappearing among the branches while the quaffle flew about with tiny bludgers trying to knock the house symbols from their brooms. The hoops were located at the top of the tree and kept changing to reflect each house color. The last tree was decorated in miniature versions of the castle itself with its lights ablaze and the motto flashing on top.

Harry had been given the most difficult task of all, arranging for the music and planning the food. She had not been happy but for the first time in her life was glad that she was Harry Potter. She knew her name would carry a lot of weight when it came time to hire the musicians. She had contacted a string quartet that was affiliated with the London Wizard's Symphony Orchestra. They were delighted to participate. Three of the four had been graduates of Hogwarts, the fourth from Beaubaxtons. She had also hired the Weird Sisters. The students would have both classical and rock music for the dancing. The popular group was delighted to be asked back again as they all were alumni of the school.

Harry elected to talk with the house elves about the menu for the ball. Appointing Dobby in charge, with Winky as his second in command, they began the arduous task of deciding what to serve. There was to be both fresh and smoked ham, roast turkey, goose, and capons, a selection of fish or venison along with a variety of vegetables. For dessert, there would be French pastries, various puddings, and a cake made in the shape of the castle. She also had them order additional Butterbeer, wine for the adults, an assortment of Muggle soft drinks, and the necessary fruit juices and spiced rum for some punch. Flavored coffees and teas would also be served. The ball was to be held on December twenty-eighth.

Dumbledore had been delighted. His staff had done an exemplary job and it would help to alleviate the fears of the students, most of whom would be staying over the holiday due to the increasing severity of the war.

Voldemort had been active again and the attacks were growing more frequent. He had blown up a small train station in the eastern part of London creating a diversion while the Death Eaters attacked St. Mungo's in an attempt to free Bellatrix. He had been furious by her capture but her injuries had been too serious to be fully healed and she remained partially paralyzed. When he had found her of no further use, his anger had been compounded. Upon

learning that Harry had escaped through Bellatrix stupidity Voldemort had been furious with Bellatrix. Rather than use the killing curse, he tortured her to death, dumping her dismembered body in the center of Knockturn Alley, her head mounted on an iron spike, as a warning to all of his supporters. Anyone who cornered Harry and did not bring her to him immediately would be killed.

The Order and the Ministry had been active in their attempts to thwart the Dark Lord. They had been able to stop him from making a planned attack on the Millennium Wheel and the Tower of London. Unfortunately, an attack on the Leaky Cauldron and the crowded Muggle street that hid the entrance to the Pub had gone as planned although five Deathaters had been captured. Harry had been relieved to know that Tom, the friendly barkeeper had not been injured. The Aurors were being run ragged. However, the populace and the press was impressed with the way the Ministry, under the leadership of Arthur Weasley, was handling the attacks and bringing the Deathaters in. All Ministry of Magic law enforcement officials were working overtime in an effort to end the war. Unfortunately, Harry knew it was just a matter of time before she and Voldemort would have to face off in battle again, hopefully for the last time. She only prayed that things would go in her favor. She didn't fear death but she did fear that she would be killed before she could stop the Dark Lord's reign of terror. If she failed, countless generations would live under his tyranny, as he would be immortal.

These thoughts plagued her daily and her sleep had been disturbed by violent dreams. Fortunately, they were just that; her unconscious fears coming to the surface. Voldemort had tried to get into her mind but her ability at Occlumency had stopped him each time. She was tired and looking forward to the holiday recess and her protectors understood. Today was the last day of classes and tomorrow was Christmas Eve. The Great Hall would not be opened until the night of the ball. The staff wanted the room to be a surprise. Instead, the students were being sent meals up to their common rooms. There would also be a party for the younger students the afternoon after the ball so they would also be able to enjoy the decorations. There would also be a late feast on New Year's Eve and all students would be allowed to stay up to welcome in the New Year.

Harry was heading up to teach her Transfigurations class following her first year Potions class. It had been a disastrous morning in Double Potions. Mariah Flint and Morgan Blackthorn had tried to sabotage Lee Chang's Boil Cure Potion by adding additional porcupine quills before it was removed from the fire. The meltdown and acid green smoke and been made worse since there were too many quills. Lee had been covered in red boils and severely burned, and several other Gryffindors and Slytherins had been splashed with the mixture, resulting in ruined clothing and a number of boils. Harry reacted swiftly, pulling the students out of harms way with a summoning charm while Severus stormed in from his office and banished the noxious fluids and acid green smoke. Unfortunately, for Mariah and Morgan, they had chosen the wrong Gryffindor for their plans. Lee was well liked, even among the Slytherins. Their own house members had informed on them. Severus had been livid with anger. Harry dismissed the class and brought the injured students to the infirmary while Snape brought the two culprits up to Dumbledore's office. They had been shaking with fear from the look on Severus' face. Harry had taken the time to assist Madam Pomfrey heal the children and they were all released from the infirmary with the exception of Lee Chang. His injuries would take at least two days to finish healing and Poppy had praised Harry for her swift actions. If she had not acted so quickly Lee would have been scarred for life. Harry had been embarrassed by the praise. After promising to come and help more often to obtain the necessary credit towards her Healer's license she left to join Severus in the Headmaster's office.

Dumbledore was not happy with the two young Slytherins and Morgan had broken down under his stare. Mariah, while frightened, had been stubbornly defiant and tried to blame Morgan for the whole event. The two erupted into a shouting match, which the Headmaster silenced immediately. Of course, he already knew what had happened. He always did. Harry merely recanted the events. Snape had sensed something wrong from his office, which had prompted him to get up in the first place.

"Headmaster, I see no other alternative but expulsion," Snape sneered angrily.

Harry had not seen him this mad in a long time. The students had still been working together for the good of the school and this was not a good sign.

"Nevertheless, Severus, the final decision will be mine. I shall make note of your recommendation." Dumbledore looked at the two students over his half moon spectacles. "I wish to speak with Professor Potter. You two are to go back to your common rooms and stay there until Professor Snape sends for you."

"Y...Yes...Head...master," Morgan stuttered, flying towards the door. Mariah followed, glaring defiantly back over her shoulder only lowering her eyes when they met Dumbledore's.

"Harry, do you believe they should be expelled?"

"I think, Headmaster," Harry sighed, "that Morgan Blackthorn was put up to this by Mariah..."she pursed the lips thoughtfully before continuing, "and he should be given some sort of detention and appropriate house points deducted."

"And Miss Flint, what are your feelings there?" Dumbledore questioned seriously, blue eyes intense.

"She's very young, Headmaster. Perhaps she can yet be saved from the darkness." Harry looked over at Snape, shifting uncomfortably. His dark eyes were unreadable but she could feel his anger...and...distress.

"Headmaster, might I remind you that Miss Flint's father was a staunch supporter of the Dark Lord."

"I am aware of your concerns, Severus. However, Lucius Malfoy is also a follower of Lord Voldemort, yet Draco found his way back to the light, as you yourself did."

Severus lowered his eyes.

Harry's mind was whirling with memories. She could hear Snape yelling at Ron and her telling them, *'Most unfortunately, you are not in my house, but if it were up to me you would be on the train home tonight!'* This had occurred in the beginning of their second year when they had crashed Ron's father's car into the *Whomping Willow* after missing the train. Dobby had sealed the gateway to the platform to prevent her from returning to Hogwarts. She was also remembering how Hermione had almost been expelled in their sixth year when she had succumbed to Lord Voldemort and betrayed her to protect her family. Harry did not like Mariah Flint, but she also was at a loss as to what to do about her deliberate attack on another student. She did not want her personal dislike of the girl to influence her decision.

"Harry, do you wish to voice an opinion on this matter?" Dumbledore had seen the variety of expressions, which had crossed her face. Since the incident had happened in her class, he was interested to hear what she had to say.

"Headmaster, I think that as Severus is her Head of House this should be his decision along with yours. However, if I may make a suggestion, I think I may have a solution which might work." Harry glanced over at Severus who nodded his assent and she continued. "I think expulsion at this time is not a good idea. Her family is affiliated with the Dark Lord and like you said before, people can change."

"So what is your point, Harry?" Severus demanded curtly.

"I think she should be put on probation. It might be a good idea to make her work with the students who have Muggle backgrounds. Let's see if she is capable of forming her own opinions despite her present prejudices. If she persists in her behaviors and any other incidents occur then yes, expulsion would be necessary. We have all worked too hard on getting the four houses to work in unison to let one selfish child ruin it."

"Do you honestly believe she will change, Harry?" Dumbledore speculated.

"Severus and Draco did." Harry locked eyes with her soul mate.

"Severus, are you agreeable to Harry's plan?"

"If there is an appropriate detention to go along with it and she will have to lose house points." He scowled bitterly at his house having to lose further points. They were in last place for the house cup already, mostly due to the Flint girl.

"Very well then," Dumbledore beamed pleased with the outcome, "I believe fifty points from Miss Flint and twenty five from Mr. Blackthorn will do. Severus I leave it to you to determine their detentions and arrange for Miss Flint to work with the Muggle born students from all houses."

"Then I shall go and speak to the two of them now and make the necessary arrangements with the other Heads of House. I believe you finally appointed Lupin to head Ravenclaw?" Snape's familiar sneer crossed his lips.

"You asked Remus?" Harry perked up at this bit of information beaming at Dumbledore.

"Yes, although he has not yet firmly accepted the post but I believe he will."

"Severus, when you speak to him tell him that if he refuses I'll be very disappointed in him." She shook her head adamantly.

"Why don't you tell him yourself?"

"I have to go and teach my next class."

"I can have Minerva cover for you for a few minutes," Dumbledore smiled. "Go on with Severus. I believe Professor Lupin is teaching his third year class at the moment. He is showing them a certain hippogriff," Dumbledore explained, blue eyes twinkling.

"Good old Buckbeak," she laughed rising. "Well don't just stand there Severus, let's go!" Snape rolled his eyes following Harry out of the office.

They made their way through the castle in silence until they reached the second floor corridor when Severus finally spoke.

"You made a very adult decision in the Headmaster's office. I am proud of the way you considered your feelings towards Miss Flint."

"Was it that obvious that I don't like her?"

"Not really, but I have been watching how she likes to test you during class. You have been very patient with her. I can see you have been holding back."

"Severus..." Harry began tentatively, unsure of whether she should broach what was on her mind.

"What is it Harry? You know I don't like nonsensical questions."

"If I ask you something will you answer me truthfully?" She stopped and looked up at him.

"If it's within my power to do so."

"Did you dislike me as much as I do Mariah Flint?" The words came out in a rush and Harry wanted to kick herself for being so blunt. Severus just stared down at her making her feel like she was back in one of his classes. He was studying her so intently she had to drop her eyes. "Never mind, it was a stupid question," she finally muttered.

"Then why did you ask it?" he queried gripping her arm.

"I...guess I... just needed some kind of explanation."

"Very well then I shall answer your question," he stated holding her tighter. "I believed you to be like your father. I let myself be blinded by my dislike for him so I took out my petty animosity on you. I hated him, therefore I hated you."

"I see."

"No, you don't," he scoffed harshly. "I failed to judge you as a person. It was a mistake that will not happen again."

"Do you still hate my father?"

"I am trying to keep an open mind. Now let's get down and see Lupin. It would be unfair to keep Minerva waiting." He let go of her arm and wheeled about, black robes swirling as he strode purposefully down the stairs.

Harry followed in his wake racing to keep up. It was not the answer she had wanted to hear but it would have to do. At least Severus had been honest with her. She knew it had pained him to do so.

Reaching Hagrid's cottage they found Remus in the back paddock. He was explaining the nature of hippogriffs and their diet. He looked up in surprise as Harry and Severus approached.

"It seems we have visitors," he addressed the class. "Good day Professor Snape and you too, Professor Potter." He smiled mischievously at Harry. "What can I do for you both?"

"I need to have a private word with you. We have a message from the Headmaster," Snape answered. Remus arched his brow in surprise. "Give me a moment then." He turned to address the class. "No one is to approach the hippogriff without me being here. I want you all to line up and wait. I will then show you the proper manner in which to approach the hippogriff."

The students did as they were told as Remus stepped to the side to speak with Harry and Severus.

"The Headmaster has asked me to speak with each Head of House to set up a schedule for one of my Slytherin's to work with the Muggle born students," Snape advised briskly.

"I haven't yet accepted the position as head of Ravenclaw."

"I accepted it for you, Remus Lupin. You are one of the best teachers here and if I recall correctly you were almost placed into Ravenclaw yourself. You're smart, kind, and fair and those qualities are hard to find. Besides it affords you a permanent position here on staff." Harry crossed her arms over her chest, defiantly sticking out her chin practically daring Remus to argue.

"Harry it's not that I don't want to do it. You have to understand..."

"What, that you're a werewolf. Everyone here knows that. The student's parents all know it too and they sing your praises as a teacher. You think these kids don't tell them what an excellent teacher you are?"

"Have you considered what the Ministry will say, not to mention the Board of Governors."

"Arthur Weasley is the Minister of Magic and a great number of the Board just happens to be members of the Order. They will be delighted knowing you're not only teaching their children but also helping to protect them. Besides, maybe it will help people to understand that you aren't some kind of a wild animal. You're a human being that just happens to have a monthly affliction. Hell, you could say the same thing about most of the females in the entire school!" Harry exclaimed feeling the redness creep up her cheeks.

"Harry is right, Lupin, and if you attempt to argue with her I suspect she will have no qualms about hexing you into the next century. Especially if it is close to the time for her monthly affliction, as she so succinctly put it."

"Princess, I'm flattered that you have such faith in my ability."

"Listen, Remus, when I thought we had lost Sirius through that veil you were the only one who could offer me any true comfort. You never make rash decisions and you are a good

listener. If those aren't qualities to make you a good Head of House I don't know what is. Just try it. If you think you're not up to it I'm sure Albus will understand."

"Very well," he sighed, "I see there is no arguing with either one of you. Which student and exactly what happened?"

Severus proceeded to tell Remus about the incident in potions while Harry looked on. Remus looked thoughtful and nodded. He said he would select a student later on this evening after conferring with Dumbledore to determine who would be the best candidate and get back to Severus by tomorrow morning. Both men agreed that it should be someone that she was familiar with though and close to her own age.

While they were talking Harry's mind began to wander back to that fateful night where she and Hermione had helped Sirius make his daring escape on Buckbeak. The hippogriff must have sensed her mood and she looked up suddenly to see his large orange eyes looking over at her. Walking over to the paddock, she addressed Remus' students.

"Since Professor Lupin is otherwise occupied at the moment would any of you like to meet Buckbeak?"

"Who's Buckbeak?" A young boy named James Portsmouth questioned. He was in Gryffindor.

"The hippogriff, of course, Mr. Portsmouth." Harry grinned.

"Professor Lupin said not to go near him." Sally McAllister from Ravenclaw remarked nervously.

"How about if I demonstrate? This way when he comes back you will have an idea of what will be expected and can ask him any questions you may have."

"Sounds neat, Professor!" James Portsmouth stated enthusiastically.

"Is there something special you have to do?" Another Ravenclaw girl, Salina Broommaker questioned.

"Yes. When you approach Buckbeak, you have to bow. Hippogriffs are very proud so you don't want to insult them."

"What happens if you do?" Tyler Skyseeker from Gryffindor asked curiously.

"You see those talons? They may just make mincemeat out of you."

"Ooo..." the girls all gasped, as the boys looked nervously over at the giant beast.

"Now as I was saying, you need to wait for the hippogriff to make the first move. They consider it the polite thing to do. You will walk up slowly and bow."

"Then what?" Sally McAllister asked wide-eyed.

"You wait," Harry replied. She did not see that Remus had moved over to the paddock again and was watching along with Hagrid, who had slipped out his back door. Snape had returned to the castle. "If he bows back, you can touch him."

"What if he doesn't?" Salina asked timidly.

"Then you get out of the way, and make it snappy because those talons are as dangerous as they look. Does anyone want to volunteer to give it a try?"

The group of third year Gryffindors and Ravenclaws looked decidedly nervous. As Harry expected there were no volunteers.

"Why don' yeh show 'em how it's done, Professor?" Hagrid's booming voice came from where he was standing with Professor Lupin. "Yeh 'ave the experience."

"Hagrid, Professor Lupin, I was not aware that you were watching."

"Yeh was doin' right well so we figured we shouldno' interrupt."

"I agree with Hagrid, Professor, why not show them?"

"Er...I have to be getting back. Professor McGonagall is minding my Transfiguration class. I need to go and relieve her."

"Don't worry about it Professor," Remus grinned wickedly. "Professor Snape said he would tell her that I requested your assistance since you are so familiar with Buckbeak."

"I see..." Harry smirked. She was going to kill Remus for this.

"Go ahead, Professor. Show us what to do." James Portsmouth begged.

"Yeah, let's see. Most of us have never seen a real hippogriff before. I'm Muggle born and never even knew they existed until today." Cassie Carlson from Ravenclaw told her.

"It seems I have been voted honorary Care of Magical Creatures instructor for today," Harry laughed. "All right. It's done like this." Harry turned to face Buckbeak. Approaching slowly she bowed and waited. The hippogriff bowed back with a shrill squawk of recognition and Harry moved over to his side, stroking the soft feathers. "See, he is really a darling when you get to know him."

"Why don't you show them how to ride him, Professor?" Remus was clearly enjoying watching her with the hippogriff.

"Go on, Harry. Ol' Buckbeak 'asn't 'ad a good turn round the grounds fer awhile," Hagrid teased. "He ken use the exercise."

"Go on, Professor. I'll volunteer to try if I can see how it's done," James Portsmouth said excitedly, the other students nodding in agreement. They were clearly excited to see Harry Potter fly on the hippogriff.

"I can see that you will all give me no excuse to say no," Harry smiled mounting Buckbeak. "Hagrid, if you will release his tether for me, please?"

"Right, are yeh all set?"

"Sure am," Harry grinned at the gentle half giant. They were both remembering the first time she had ridden the huge animal.

"Then off with yeh." He gave Buckbeak a sharp slap on the hindquarters and they took off.

"Yahoo!" Harry screamed into the wind as the giant half eagle half horse flew over the grounds in a large circle. Harry was exhilarated and noted that Professor McGonagall was watching from her classroom as they flew past the castle. A thin smile was playing about her lips. Harry took Buckbeak around a second time before landing him back in the paddock. The students were ecstatic and clapped with enthusiasm as she dismounted and gave Buckbeak a dead ferret to eat.

"Mr. Portsmouth, I believe you volunteered to be the first to try and approach Buckbeak," Remus remarked to the young man.

"Yes, Sir. Will I be able to ride him?"

"That is entirely up to Buckbeak."

The boy did as Harry had shown him. The hippogriff was unsure at first but then he bowed and it was clear that James was thrilled.

"Excuse me, Remus," Harry whispered, "but I have to get back."

"Did you have fun?"

"Yeah, but you owe me big time for this," she teased under her breath. "I'll see you at lunch in the staff room."

Remus nodded and went over to help Hagrid. He was showing James how to mount the hippogriff. Harry was almost to the castle when she heard the boy shout with glee as Buckbeak's shadow passed overhead. She smiled to herself. Obviously, she wasn't the only one who would have a story to tell later on. Reaching the transfiguration classroom, she could hear Minerva assigning the homework for the recess. There were still a few more minutes to the class and since she was in such a good mood Harry decided to give the students a little treat. Deftly pushing the door open a crack, she transformed into her snake form and slithered in hoping to make an impression on the Slytherin first years.

The class was startled at first and moved out of the way not sure what to do. Minerva simply told them to stay in their seats. She knew it was Harry and looked on amused. Harry glided up to the desk and slid up into the chair, which the older woman had vacated. Harry hissed at her. Minerva didn't understand Parseltongue but had a suspicion as to what Harry had said, so she replied briskly.

"You're welcome, Miss Potter. I thoroughly enjoyed covering your class today. They are an extremely bright group."

The students' expressions were priceless, as their jaws all dropped at once and Harry transformed back to herself. They all started clapping at once.

"That was brilliant!" Morgan Blackthorn exclaimed.

"But a serpent is the symbol of Slytherin house," Charles Ogden, a first year Gryffindor gasped.

"I am also a Phoenix, and who knows, maybe I will be able to do a Griffin one day too," Harry responded. "Snakes are not the enemy. You are reading too much into my form. This school is made up of all of its houses. If you have ever noticed the gargoyle outside of the Headmaster's office, you would have noted that it is a Phoenix. Slytherin House has suffered over the years but originally we were all one just as we are today. I don't ever want any of you to forget that. When the Dark Lord attacked the school, we all worked together and one day soon, we may just have to do so again. It's all about unity. Do you all understand that? You are separated into the houses since that is where your talents are. Gryffindor's are the bravest. Ravenclaw's the brightest, and Hufflepuffs are the most loyal. Slytherin house are the most ambitious. There is nothing wrong with cunning and ambition so long as it is put to the right uses. It should never be allowed to consume you with hatred or prejudice in order to obtain your goals."

"I'm sorry, Professor. You're right of course," Charles apologized.

"Now since it is time for lunch I hope you all enjoy the holiday parties and have a good Christmas. I will expect your assignments to be done when you return. Class dismissed."

The students filed out of the classroom wishing the two Professors 'Happy Christmas.'

"You couldn't have explained it any better, Harry," Minerva approved, "however I'm not certain how Albus will feel about your showing the students your other form."

"I know but it was necessary in light of today's events. It may also throw Voldemort for a loop. If you get my drift."

"Understood." Minerva McGonagall nodded thoughtfully. "Shall we adjourn to the staff room for lunch?"

"That is the best idea I have heard all day," Harry stated. "That wild flight on Buckbeak made me hungry."

Professor McGonagall had been right. Dumbledore reacted with mixed emotions to her transformation. It worried him that Voldemort would now learn about her second form. Nevertheless, Harry reiterated her feelings about house unity, especially in front of the younger students in view of the afternoon's incident during Potions. Dumbledore agreed that it would certainly help to promote cooperation amongst the younger students, the Slytherins in particular. He knew better than to press the issue. They were in the middle of this discussion when Hermione suddenly burst into the staff room, her face flushed with excitement.

"Harry, Professor Dumbledore, come quickly! We have cracked the final code on the translation of the spell. The key Arsinoe found worked. Professor Darkmoon is deciphering the rest of it now!"

"Well, that is good news," Dumbledore beamed, standing. "Tell Arsinoe that we are on our way."

"Yes, Sir," she replied running from the room.

"Are you all right Love?" Sirius had seen Harry's expression at this news. She had gone visibly pale, a deep frown etched into her forehead.

"Harry, you knew this day would come," Remus added softly. "It is better to be prepared for what you will have to do."

"There is no shame if what you are feeling, Harry. It will be awhile yet before you will have to face the Dark Lord and undo that which should not have happened in the first place," Snape told her soberly.

Harry merely nodded, grateful that her parents did not come down to the staff room that day. They had gone back to the Shrieking shack since they had no need to eat. James and Lily only joined the group occasionally in order to keep abreast of any developments but with the holiday fast approaching they wanted to decorate their temporary home.

Harry's parents had insisted that Harry, Sirius and Remus come and spend Christmas day with them. James had also asked Severus to attend along with the rest of the Snape family. Justinian had been confined to the castle since his return and was glad of the diversion. Harry had been reluctant to spend Christmas with her parents since she had been invited to the Burrow. It had also angered her that Lily and Molly had had a major row over this. Molly was the only mother Harry had ever known and she was looking forward to dinner in the Weasley home. However, Lily had won the argument by stating that Molly would have Harry for many years, and sobbing, she told the other woman that the only other time she had spent Christmas with her child was when Harry was an infant. She only wanted Harry to have some good memories of them before they had to be returned to the afterlife. It was the first time that any of them had ever known Molly to cave in.

Unfortunately, no one had asked Harry where she wanted to spend the holiday. If either woman had not been so emotional, they would have realized that either everyone could have gone to the Burrow or that Harry could have spent several hours in both places. As it was, Harry was considering staying at Hogwarts and having a quiet afternoon to herself. She had really wanted to spend time with Ron and Hermione one last time as a trio, before they married and became a permanent couple; leaving Harry on her own.

"Harry, are you coming?" Dumbledore interrupted her reverie.

"What? Oh sorry, I was just thinking," she said standing. "I'll see you all later." She fled the room, Dumbledore following in her wake, a look of consternation etched into his old features. He caught up with her in the hallway.

"You're troubled, Child." It was not a question. "Do you have something you wish to discuss?"

"Not really. It's something I will have to work out for myself."

"Very well, but if you should change your mind you know my door is always opened," he remarked dismissing the subject. He knew better than to press Harry. She would only close off further.

Neither spoke again until they reached Arsinoe's office. She and Hermione were pouring over an old stone tablet, Arsinoe writing swiftly on a long parchment. She looked up as they entered.

"Albus, this is fantastic. It is a set of detailed instructions on how to perform the reversal spell. I must tell you though, that it was Hermione who discovered the final key."

"It was just a fluke, Professor," Hermione blushed. "All I did was remark that the circles on the tablet reminded me of the full moon."

"Yes, but it made sense. It is from the Temple of the Moon. My people were not correct. The reversal can only be done when the moon is dark, in other words the new moon and not the full moon."

"That is interesting," Dumbledore mused. "The spell to raise the dead is done under the new moon also."

"Yes...that is why it must be performed under the same conditions. You need to speak to the serpents of the light as well as the serpents of the dark." Arsinoe's eyes glittered. "I am just confused as to why."

"Well that should be simple." Harry spoke for the first time. They all turned their eyes on her. "Serpents are active during periods of darkness. It is when they hunt just like real snakes and dragons but all are capable of moving about in the light. A true serpent is neither good nor bad, just like the ancient serpent gods. I will be tapping into both light and dark magic which has not been done for centuries."

"Harry, you're a genius. We never thought of that!" Hermione beamed.

"Yes, but there is another problem," Arsinoe frowned. "It only seems to be the instructions for doing the spell. This does not appear to be the spell itself."

"Are you certain?" Dumbledore queried dismayed.

"As far as I can tell the tablet merely ends in a series of designs and not in any form of language." Arsinoe turned the tablet around for them to look at.

"Perhaps there is another tablet that needs to be discovered," Dumbledore remarked thoughtfully. "I shall contact Bill and Charley Weasley and ask them to return to your people immediately to institute a search." The old man looked weary and defeated. Harry's heart went out to him as she glanced down at the tablet.

"Headmaster," she gasped taking a deep breath, "I don't think that will be necessary." She was staring at the tablet a look of shock on her face.

"What is it, Harry? You are looking at the tablet like it is going to leap up and bite you." Dumbledore was studying her over his half moon spectacles, blue eyes reflecting his concern.

"These designs...they aren't designs...not really," she stammered still studying the piece of stone.

"What do you mean?" Arsinoe questioned.

"I don't know how your ancient ancestors did it but this is a language that has never been seen in writing. The spell is right here. It has been cleverly written in Parsel tongue to hide it. They must have done it when the other spell to raise the dead was misused."

"Harry are you sure?" Hermione questioned doubtfully.

"Yes, I can read this."

"How is that possible?" Arsinoe demanded. "You do not speak Nahuatl."

"I told you it was somehow written in Parseltongue. These odd designs are a series of sounds. I can hear them in my head when I look at them and know what they mean. I don't know how they did it but it is all there as plain as day." Harry looked up at them green eyes wide with amazement. "If I had seen the tablet sooner I would have known this from the beginning."

"Harry, there was no reason for you to look at the tablet," Dumbledore remarked.

"We all assumed that it was written in Nahuatl or ancient Egyptian."

"In a sense it is. The serpents to be summoned are from both cultures."

"Hmm...That would reinforce the theory that the two cultures, although centuries apart, had some kind of connection," Arsinoe mused.

"Oh, this is just so exciting. What does it say, Harry?"

"I can't tell you."

"But you said you could read it," Hermione stated confused.

"I didn't say that I couldn't read it, I said I can't tell you what it says. It is meant for only the eyes of a Parseltongue and there is a curse on it should I divulge its contents to someone who is not."

"What kind of curse?" Dumbledore queried.

"My soul will be condemned to be taken by *Am-Mut* and forever denied its place in the afterlife."

"Ah, the Eater of Souls, I understand Harry. Perhaps this is why the Dementors have such a strong effect on you for that is what they do. You are wise not to mention what is written on this tablet. My ancient ancestors wanted to preserve the reversal spell from those who would continue to do harm by sending the good souls back thereby insuring the victory of all that is evil. Legend says that the two spells were originally used in times of war to raise an army to fight for the righteous. Somehow it was misused to try and stop the powers of the light."

"Can you imagine an army of Deathaters scattering all across the world," Hermione shuddered.

"That is very probably what Voldemort had in mind. He would be unstoppable. Any of his followers who have died could be raised as his slaves and would therefore be immortal. He is just too consumed with stopping Harry right now. The Deathaters who have been killed were all cremated except for the ones he deemed unfit to serve. Otherwise he might well have begun to put some such plan into action already," Dumbledore stated matter of factly. His blue eyes were the color of steel, a look of disgust and anger on his features.

"Yet he is still recruiting followers," Hermione whispered.

"But we now have the power to end this once and for all." Harry's green eyes flashed. "Arsinoe I need to memorize this spell."

"You make take the tablet to your room so long as you lock it up safely."

"I won't need to. I have a better idea." Harry drew her wand and pointed it in the direction where she thought her room would be. "*Accio Pensieve.*" A few moments later Harry's *Pensieve* flew into the room and into her hands. Placing it carefully on the desk beside the tablet, she reread the spell several times before placing the wand to her head. She then extracted a long silver thread and placed it into the swirling mass reflected in the bowl. "That should do it. I will study it over the next few nights until it is committed to my memory."

"Arsinoe, if you and Miss Granger are finished with the tablet I will see that it is safely locked up in my office."

"Thank you, Albus. I shall leave it in your safekeeping over the holiday. I know my grandfather will approve."

"Are you going home for the holidays?" Harry asked.

"Yes, but I will be back for the ball. I will be leaving within the hour."

"Is it possible to apparate that great of a distance?" Hermione questioned with interest.

"No, I will apparate into London and then take a long distance Portkey to New York. Then I will take another to Southern California. From there I can apparate home."

"Will it take very long?" Harry questioned.

"It should be about two hours in all, depending on the Portkey transfer sites," Arsinoe explained. "I will be back here the evening before the ball on the twenty-seventh."

"I know I need not remind you to be careful, Arsinoe," Dumbledore warned, "and do give your family my best regards."

"I will, Albus. Now if you will all excuse me I need to go and get ready for my trip. Have a good holiday, Harry, and try not to worry. I know this is difficult for you."

Harry nodded and flashed a wan smile before leaving the room with the Headmaster and Hermione. Dumbledore excused himself as he wanted to speak with Tiberius on Order business and Hermione went back to work in the library. Harry returned to her room with the Pensieve...

Harry was relaxing in the staff room following dinner. She had been taking a good deal of ribbing from her friends and colleagues about her wild ride on Buckbeak that afternoon.

"So, Harry, I heard about your bit of excitement on a certain hippogriff today," Sirius teased.

"I have no idea what you're talking about," she answered trying to keep a straight face and failing miserably.

"Aye, she sure knows 'ow ter get that big ol' critter ter take off," Hagrid laughed.

"Humph, more likely he shot up like that because you gave him a good whack on his flank. It's a damn good thing I knew what to expect having gone through it a few years back." Harry pretended to glare at the half giant.

"I don't know, Princess, it seemed to me that you were quite enjoying the ride."

"No thanks to you, Remus Lupin."

"I wish I had been there. I heard you weren't even holding on part of the time." James looked at his daughter with admiration. "Do you do as well on your broom?"

"Better than you ever did," she shot back playfully.

"Oh really, maybe we could do a little one on one over on the Quidditch pitch sometime."

"Just name the time and place. I guarantee to give you a run for your money."

"Oh, are we betting now?" Sirius eyes lit up at the prospect.

"Why not? Better yet maybe we could get enough people together to have a game of Quidditch," Harry challenged her father, green eyes dancing at the prospect.

"How about tomorrow?"

"Will we have enough people?" James asked.

"I think I can scrounge up a few on short notice. That is if the Headmaster will let one or two students play." Harry looked over at Dumbledore.

"So long as the students are not allowed to bet I don't see any problem."

"In that case, I will need to get some players together."

"I claim Sirius for my other chaser and Remus for my keeper," James laughed.

"So you want to play against me again?" She looked between the two Marauders.

"Still think we can't beat you, Love?" Sirius laughed.

"What about you, Remus? You generally don't like to play."

"You know that doesn't mean I don't know how. I am a fairly good Keeper."

"Humph, some Protectors you are," she teased. "In that case," she glanced down the table, "Severus would you like to play Beater for me? Ron of course will act as Keeper."

"You're on, Harry," Ron called up the table from where he was sitting with Hermione.

"Sorry Harry," Severus said giving the three Marauders a wicked sneer, "but James just recruited me for the other Chaser spot."

"Ron, would you go and ask Ginny to play in one my Chaser positions?"

"I'm on it, Harry. I'll try to get Bill, Charley and the twins to come too. Maybe we can make up two full teams!"

"Right, that will make it a great match," she called as Ron raced out the door. He was enthusiastic to play again.

In the end, they were able to find enough people to play. The only student turned out to be Ginny. The game was planned for ten the next morning. Harry's team consisted of Ron, and Harry in their old positions as Keeper and Seeker, along with Fred and George taking up their former spots as Beaters. The Chasers were Ginny, Draco, and Tonks. Harry hoped she wouldn't have too many accidents due to her clumsiness.

James Potter's team was made up of his two former Marauders and Severus along with Bill Weasley and Kingsley Shacklebolt acting as Beaters. Charlie Weasley had agreed to play in his old position as Seeker. Everyone agreed it was going to be a fun match. Rather than wear the school's Quidditch robes Harry's team decided to wear white and James' team would wear black. It would be a simple matter for everyone to charm his or her robes the appropriate colors. They would use the Quidditch balls and protective gear from the school's Quidditch supply shed. Madam Hooch would act as referee.

What Harry and the others didn't know was that Dumbledore had secretly asked Hermione and Lily to hang up notices in all the common rooms about the match. They had billed it as A Hogwarts Christmas Quidditch Match and invited all the students to attend. They had also contacted Arthur and Molly Weasley who were delighted to come. They would return to the Burrow with their children and Hermione following the match. Ginny, being the only student involved had been sworn to secrecy when she discovered the notice on the Gryffindor notice board.

Christmas Eve dawned crisp and cloudy with the hint of snow in the air. Harry was excited. She hadn't been in a real Quidditch game since last year. Today promised to be great fun and she liked the idea of being opposing seeker to Charlie. Like her, he had turned down a position as a professional player and had been one of Hogwarts best players. He played to win but so did Harry. When she went down to the staff room for breakfast, she was surprised to see a group of students standing in the hallway chattering about the upcoming match, Colin Creevy among them.

"Good luck today, Harry. The whole school will be at the game, just like old times, huh?"

"What, how did you know I was playing Quidditch today?"

"It was posted in all the common rooms last night, Professor." A fifth year Hufflepuff told her animatedly. "I can't wait to see you play again and against the legendary Charlie Weasley! My older brother graduated Hogwarts with him and told me all about how good he was."

"I see...uh...well thanks. I hope you all enjoy the match." Harry practically dove through the door to the teachers lounge.

"Ah...I see you've heard about the match," James laughed. "A bit nervous now are we?" He was deliberately teasing her.

"No more so than usual," she countered.

"Don't let him fool you, Harry, your father was always too nervous to eat before a game too," Lily admonished.

"Must run in the family," Ron grunted, unable to eat himself. "Did you know the Slytherins are running bets against us?"

"What are the odds?" Harry demanded.

"Eight to one in favor of the older team," Ron pouted.

"Then we'll just have to show them that we're better."

"Right on, Potter," Draco remarked. "It seems to me they're all out of shape. Getting too old for the fast pace of Quidditch," he sneered at his godfather.

"You will be quite surprised then, Draco," Snape sneered. "I never taught the house team all my nasty little tricks."

"Oh no, here we go with all the baiting from the opposing teams," Lily sighed. "Some things never change."

"Well Harry is a cinch to catch the snitch," Ron grinned, his faith in his friend evident in his face.

"Don't count on it little brother." Charley Weasley's cocky voice came from the door. He had just entered with the twins and Bill.

"I wouldn't be so sure of myself if I were you, Charlie," Harry baited him.

"You forget I've seen you play, Harry."

"And you forget that we have played many a time in your parent's field."

"How about a little side wager then?"

"Like what?" Harry asked suspiciously.

"Oh...I dunno, how about the one loses the snitch buys the first round after the game at the Three Broomsticks?"

"You're on and the losing team should it happen that way buys the next two rounds," Harry countered.

"That's my girl! Generous to a fault," James laughed as Lily slapped his arm playfully.

"Ah...a fool and his money are quickly parted." Harry patted her father's hand playfully. "Now if you will all excuse me I wish to go and confer with my team mates. I need to review our strategy." Harry rose and motioned for Ron, Draco and the twins to follow; turning to them once they were out in the hallway. "Come on we have to find Ginny and Tonks. I'll be damned if we are going to let them beat us too easily."

"What? You think we're going to lose, Potter?" Draco sneered.

"Not if I can help it, and we all know how most of them play. The ones we will have to watch out for are my dad and Kingsley Shacklebolt. They're the unknown factors. We also have to remember to call my parents by their assumed names."

"Not a problem," Ron agreed. "After all, it is Weasley."

"We'll keep them busy, don't worry, Harry." She didn't like the way the twins were grinning.

"Just don't cost us any penalties and do your best to keep Tonks out of trouble. She's our weakest link," Harry said as they made their way through the castle.

Tonks and Ginny had already eaten and the group met them in the main hall. They all agreed to go to the changing area beneath the stands and plan their game. Meanwhile the other team was doing the same thing in the staff room...

Harry could hear the crowds in the stand as they waited for the doors to open onto the pitch. She and Ron had formed a quick plan. Remus was a weak Keeper so they needed the Chasers to try to score fast and frequently. Harry also warned the twins to do their best to keep the quaffle away from her father. They had all seen his trophies and knew he had been one of the best Chasers in Hogwarts history. Finally, the doors swung open and the two teams took to the field.

"I want a nice clean game," Madam Hooch announced smirking as the captains shook hands. "Mount your brooms!"

They all rose into the air, Harry and Charlie both moving into position halfway up the stands. Harry barely heard Dennis Creevy, who was doing the commentary. She had her eyes scanning the area intent of getting to the snitch before Charlie. As she scanned the sky, she noted that Mr. and Mrs. Weasley were sitting with Dumbledore when she was suddenly distracted by Dennis.

"Julian Weasley is in control of the quaffle...and Ron is moving in for the block...Ron Weasley missed...ten points for the black team!"

"Damn! Come on Ron, don't let them throw you," she muttered.

"Nice block by the twins," the crowd was on its feet. Fred had hit the bludger towards Kingsley, who had nearly been knocked off his broom. "This game is going to get rough folks!" Dennis announced with glee. "Let's see how long the old timers will last!"

Harry was trying to follow the game while scanning for the snitch but suddenly she saw Charlie take off up the field. She had an idea that he was merely trying to draw her out, and was right. He stopped when she did not follow grinning at her over his shoulder. It got colder as the game wore on, and Harry could see Severus and Draco racing up the field both trying to get control of the quaffle when Tonks flew up on the other side. She never saw the bludger Bill fired off at her and took a direct hit to the shoulder, spinning wildly on her broom. Harry almost went to her rescue when she saw Sirius speeding up the pitch with her father, the twins in pursuit. That's when everything seemed to happen at once. Sirius was able to get hold of the quaffle and pass it to James before the twins fired off another bludger. The black team scored off Ron again. The score now stood at seventy to twenty in favor of the black team. At the same time, Bill knocked a bludger towards Ginny but she dodged and it crashed into Ron. He was knocked to the ground leaving their goals unattended. He was unhurt but his broom was broken. Harry had to find the snitch! Scanning the pitch again, she let herself drift. That's when she spotted it. The snitch was behind Charley over near the Headmaster's box. She had to keep him away from it. Taking a deep breath, she took off in the opposite direction.

"Harry Potter has spotted the snitch," Dennis yelled in excitement as Harry pretended to reach out in front of her. "Charlie Weasley is trying to catch up and is in hot pursuit.

Harry could sense the excitement and suddenly dove towards the ground coming up behind Charley. He realized she had duped him. The snitch was now on the move and Harry could see it buzzing high above the Slytherin box. The crowd was roaring as she pointed her broom up but Charley was catching up fast when the snitch took off again towards the opposite side of the field. Charley was directly on her tail.

"Give it up, Harry," he yelled.

"No way!" she screamed back. "The snitch is mine!"

They were neck and neck now and the snitch was directly in front of them. Both were reaching out for it and Harry knew Charley had a longer reach. Hunching her body forward to gain momentum the snitch flew directly between them both. They collided and began tumbling to the ground, barely getting control of their brooms as they fell. The crowd was roaring in her ears and Harry was aware that Charlie had his hand over hers as they landed in a heap.

"You okay, Harry?" he asked with a grin.

"Yeah, never better." She was grinning like a Cheshire cat.

"Nice game," he said removing his hand.

"Thanks," she laughed back and held up her hand for them all to see. The little glittering ball was tight in her grip

"Harry Potter has caught the snitch!" Dennis exclaimed. "The white team wins one hundred and seventy to seventy!"

"Guess we're buying all the drinks, Huh?" Charlie teased.

"It sure looks that way," she said as he hugged her in congratulations after helping her up. Both teams gathered around. "Too bad I lost five galleons though."

"What?! You mean you bet against us?" Ron gasped in dismay. "Why did you do that?"

"Ron when have I ever won in any of the betting pools?"

"Never, now that you mention it," he laughed.

"Exactly," she laughed as everyone joined in, "and truth be told if we hadn't collided Charlie would have caught the snitch," Harry admitted sheepishly. "So I will still buy the first round."

"Here, here!" The black team cheered as they hoisted Harry onto Sirius shoulders with Remus, and Severus beside him. Her father leading all the players from the field.

After they had cleaned up the two teams went over to the village accompanied by Molly, Arthur, and Dumbledore. After toasting each other and having several drinks to celebrate the holidays the Weasley clan departed with Hermione for the Burrow. The others went back up to the castle.

Harry was tired and still had some wrapping to do so she excused herself early and went back to her quarters. It had been a good day and her parents had beamed at her with such a look of pride that she felt ashamed for not wanting to spend Christmas with them.

Settling down on her bed, she surveyed the gifts she had bought. Dumbledore would love the fifty pairs of warm socks she had gotten him. He still insisted that was what he always saw when he looked into the Mirror of Erised yet no one ever gave them to him. There was also a big box of Muggle M&M's with a big Yellow M dispenser. It had arms and legs with a smiling face. Dobby was to receive a white shirt, knickers, and a pair of socks along with some shoes. She had bought Severus a small Pensieve of his own to store any memories he wished to keep. Remus was to receive a Wizard's trunk. It was fully furnished with three rooms. There was also an empty room with a heavy wooden door and stone floors, should he ever need a safe place to transform. Sirius loved the winter snow so she had gotten him a Muggle snowmobile, which he could charm later on to his likes. She had shrunk it down so he could open it just as Dumbledore had done with his motorcycle.

Harry had gotten Phaedra a set of children's dress robes after begging Dumbledore to allow her to come to the ball for the first two hours. He had been reluctant but had finally given in when he had seen how much it would mean to Harry. She had sent Circe a home made gift certificate entitling her and Justinian to one weekend of baby-sitting on the weekend of their choice. This way they could have some time alone together. It had been Harry's way of apologizing for being such a prat and having caused so much trouble. She had given Arsinoe and the other teachers gift certificates for their favorite shops in Hogsmeade. Hagrid had been a bit of a problem but she had finally found something she knew he would like. Dumbledore had helped her to secure an Abraxan; one of the giant winged palominos, which was large enough for him to ride. It had been expensive but Hagrid had been her first friend in the

Wizarding world and she wanted him to know how much she had always appreciated him being there for her.

Harry wasn't sure what Hermione would do with her present and hoped she would not hex her. With her nuptials coming, she wanted to give her something funny and useful at the same time so she had gotten her a copy of the *Witches Kama Sutra*. It was charmed to be disguised as a cook book should anyone ask to see it other than its owner. She had bought Ron a pair of tickets for the Quidditch World Cup scheduled for the following summer. It was to be held in France and she had arranged with Moody and Kingsley to make certain that he was given the time off. The other Weasley brothers were sent various articles of clothing. She had gotten Ginny new dress robes for the ball. Mr. and Mrs. Weasley were to receive a new owl, since their old owl, Errol, had recently died. She had also sent them a new hand for their clock with Hermione's name on it.

Finally, she had been forced to find something for her parents. Harry had known there was nothing she could buy for them. Her solution had been to write down her feelings in a letter. The letter expressed her feelings about them. Slowly placing it on the bed, she read it final time.

Dear Mum and Dad,

I am writing this to you since I know there is no gift I can buy that you can take with you. I wanted you to know how I really feel about the both of you. I know that most of the time I have been acting like a real prat but that is because of the enormous task, which we all know I must undertake. You did not ask for the dark magic that brought you back to me after all these years. Yet you have never complained about my behavior. You accepted me and accepted what I would be forced to do. You have tried to comfort me in my pain and I turned away. Please understand that I must continue to do so even though I don't want to. If I let myself get too close, Voldemort will win. Every day that I see you my heart aches with the knowledge that what is right is not always what is easy or what we may want. Fate has dealt us all a dirty hand and likes to play cruel games. You were torn from me as a baby and again when I was sent back in time to that fateful night at sixteen. Now it seems we must face that awful blow for a third time. I keep trying to hold my head up high and pretend that I don't want to curse up at the four winds and whatever gods that could be so cruel to do this to us. I cry myself to sleep at night when I think about what my final act will do to Padfoot and Moony. It is killing me with worry about how they will react to your loss for a second time or how they will look at me. Molly Weasley told me that your being here, for whatever time we are allotted, will give us the closure we have sought for so long and allow us to go on. I can only pray that she is right because if she is not I think I will go crazy. I don't think I could bear to be left all alone again or to see the hollow look in Sirius' eyes and hear the hidden pain in Remus' voice. Did you know that I'm an Empath? Yes, of course you must; but did you know that I can feel the ache in your hearts too? I know when Mum wants to hug me and how much she hurts when I shun her. I can feel your desire to tell me how proud you are of me but I just hurt you by shrugging it off instead of hugging you too. I know how you both want to tell me you love me but I won't let you. You see, I know it's there but what you may not realize is that I too want these things. That is why I let you stay for my transformation lesson and took such delight in seeing Prongs. He's my Patronus and always will be. It's why I let Mum softly stoke my feathers and take pleasure in the comfort of my song when I became my Phoenix. It is why I finally allowed Sirius to tell you I had been seriously injured. The little girl inside of me wanted the comfort that only her parents could give but I still had to push her aside. It is why I played that Quidditch match so that you could have something personal to take back with

you. Something you were truly a part of. It is why I will wear a rose colored robe for Mum the night of the ball and why I shall give Dad the first dance. These will be my memories as well. I will carefully preserve them in my Pensieve and within my heart. It is why I can only say I love you in a letter and why I have to say thank you. Thank you for having me, thank you for finding a way to hide me and thank you for loving me enough to give your lives for me. You died so that I could live. I promise that your deaths will not have been in vain and that I will always do what is right even if it isn't easy. I love you.

Your Daughter,

Harry James Potter

Harry finished reading the letter. Silently folding it she placed it into an envelope, the tears running down her cheeks. She then put it with the other gifts to be delivered by the house elves. Turning off her light, she curled up in a fetal position and cried herself to sleep. The one thing she really wanted for Christmas was the one thing she had to deny herself. The comfort and love of her parents.

Chapter 25 - The Yule Ball

Looking back on it Harry had been glad that she had spent Christmas at the Shrieking Shack with her family. They had gone out of their way to make her feel comfortable and loved without being pushy. Her mum had made everyone's favorite foods, making sure to include Severus and Phaedra's favorite desserts along with something chocolate for Remus.

James had acted the charming host. He did his best to make the Snape's feel comfortable, spending a good part of the afternoon discussing the latest advancements in potion making. He had also delighted Phaedra by transforming in the magically enlarged living room pretending to be one of Father Christmas' reindeer. Lily had put a collar of bells around his neck while Phaedra rode on his back, handing out the presents. Of course, they had almost toppled over the tree but thanks to Remus quick wand action, that disaster was averted. Harry wondered idly if her dad would have done the same with her had he lived.

Lily and James had opened Harry's gift privately earlier in the morning. They realized it was something personal and understood that whatever was in the envelope Harry had intended for their eyes only. By the time Harry had arrived at the appointed hour through the secret tunnel her father had greeted her glowing with pride. She could tell her mother had been crying. Harry had been concerned that she had somehow hurt her mother's feelings. However, James, seeing the look on Harry's face quickly dispelled that notion. He explained that it had been the best gift they could ever have received. Her mother had been crying from happiness. Apparently, Lily had been worried that Harry had resented their having died, blaming them for the hard life she had suffered with the Dursleys.

Sirius, Remus, and the Snapes, who were seated in the living room, had also liked their gifts. Sirius had lost no time in charming his new snowmobile. Severus was pleased with the new Pensieve, actually going as far as teasing her about sneaking a peek to satisfy her insatiable curiosity. Remus had been humbled by Harry's generosity and concern for his welfare. It was obvious how much he appreciated her understanding about his condition.

Everyone had been startled when Fawkes had suddenly appeared in a burst of blue flames carrying a note from Dumbledore. At first, they had been concerned that something had happened. However, they all laughed when Harry had read the short missive. Dumbledore had been delighted with his fifty pairs of warm socks and the candy. He wanted them all to know that for the first time in his long life someone had finally gotten the hint and given him what he had really wanted. He also let Harry know that Hagrid had cried like a baby when he received the large winged Palomino, naming him Goldie. Dumbledore didn't have the heart to tell him Goldie was a girl's name.

Phaedra had been chagrined at first that Harry had not given her a toy until Harry explained that the dress robes were for the Yule Ball. She had leaped into Harry's lap beaming with delight that she was going to be allowed to attend the ball even though it was only for two hours. She had promised to be very very good and immediately asked all the men to dance with her. Circe just rolled her eyes and Justinian laughed. Phaedra was going to be quite a little flirt when she got older.

Harry had also been pleased with her gifts. Her parent's had given her a gold signet ring depicting a griffin standing on its hind legs brandishing a ruby encrusted sword. Her father explained that it was the Potter family crest and that the ring had been his. He had charmed it to fit on Harry's finger. Sirius and Remus had put their heads together gave Harry a tapestry

similar to the one which used to be in Grimmauld Place. Only this one showed the Potter family tree. Remus had traced it back with a little help from James. Sirius had gotten it custom made. Tiberius, Circe, and Justinian had bought Harry a new gold cauldron to use for her Potion Masters exam in the spring. Phaedra had insisted that they fill it with Honeydukes best chocolates.

Nevertheless, it was Severus' gift which everyone caught everyone's attention. Harry was actually speechless when she opened it. He had painted a portrait of Harry without her glasses. Her face was set in a look of triumph as she brandished her wand, hair blowing in the wind, emerald eyes flashing as storm clouds gathered around. A small break in the clouds showed a bright beam of sunlight cascading down upon her. Her three protectors were standing behind her off in the distance with the castle as a backdrop. The painting had a small brass plaque on the bottom with the title of the portrait, *The Ray of Hope*. They had all known Severus liked to draw and would occasionally paint but the portrait was incredible. It was charmed to show the movement of her facial expressions and the wind rustling her hair and robes. The light also glistened with the subtle nuances one would expect with a break in the clouds. Ironically, Sirius was the first to speak, breaking the spell.

"Severus, you missed your calling. This portrait is incredible."

"I merely wanted to give something to Harry so that she could see how we all felt about her," he replied turning to Harry. "Do you like it?"

"No glasses?" she questioned trying to keep her voice light. However, she could feel her cheeks burning and would not look him in the eye.

"You hide behind them too much. I wanted to show how remarkable you look when you are faced with what for most would be insurmountable odds. Your eyes are the mirror to your soul. They reflect the power and grace inside just as the Headmaster's do."

"I agree, Severus," Remus said as he studied the painting. "I think you have captured her perfectly."

"I'll say." James eyed the other man shrewdly. 'He's in love with her. I wonder if Harry feels the same way. I know they're Soulmates but that doesn't always mean love. She's bound to him by blood through the Protectorship but does she truly understand what that means,' her father mused considering the possibilities. 'I will have to watch this situation closely and have a little talk with Dumbledore.'

"James, it's time to eat. The turkey will get cold," Lily interrupted his thoughts, "and I know Phaedra and Moony are looking forward to dessert along with Severus. It's chocolate mousse, strawberry shortcake, and peach cobbler."

"Can I have dessert first?" Phaedra begged helping to break the spell.

"No you may not," both her parents stated emphatically.

Everyone had laughed and they all moved in to the elegant table Lily had set. Even though she and James had no need to eat they sat down with their guests enjoying the dinner conversation. Since Phaedra was present, they didn't mention the war, talking about old friends and life at Hogwarts instead.

The only problem came at the end of the evening. Tiberius suddenly announced that he needed to leave. The adults were aware that the Dark Lord was summoning him. Each of them hoped that Voldemort was not going to cause any mayhem. Harry especially worried that Voldemort would murder someone on the holiday. She took Tiberius aside before he disappeared into the hidden passage.

"Tiberius, be careful. My scar isn't burning but that may not mean anything."

"I will be my usual self in the Dark Lord's presence, Harry. As you know I am in his good graces right now since he believed our little ruse about Justinian."

"I know, but you know how quickly his moods can change. I do hope he isn't planning on killing anyone tonight."

"It is always possible but I think he is merely going over some kind of plan. Now I had best be going. You know what he will do if I am late."

Harry merely nodded, allowing him to disappear down the tunnel. The Dark Lord punished lateness with the *Cruciatus*. At least he had been pleased when Tiberius had presented him with the body of the poor man they had transformed to look like Justinian.

Tiberius had told the Dark Lord that he had surprised Justinian and used *Avadra Kedavra*, telling Dumbledore that they had both been attacked by Deathaters in Hogsmeade. Voldemort had believed the story after he had probed his mind and saw him perform the curse. What he didn't know was that they had stood up the man and Tiberius had directed the curse at a corpse. Voldemort had also gone as far as to check his wand. Seeing that he did indeed fire the killing curse at the man he believed to be Circe's half-blood lover the Dark Lord had laughed with delight. Harry knew the ruse had worked when her scar burned and she could feel Voldemort's happiness. She silently said a thank you to the deceased Auror. He had died in battle and had no family. Moody thought that the man would be proud to have helped.

After Tiberius had left, the group had become more subdued until Sirius started to sing. Everyone joined in as he murdered a number of Christmas Carols, the funniest being a game with the Twelve Days of Christmas. He directed them all to add a silly verse as they went around the room. The song included a Werewolf in a Whomping Willow tree, two animagi, five magic wands, seven cauldrons boiling, nine Moon Calves dancing, and twelve Doxy's drumming. Harry had laughed so hard that tears were running down her face.

The party had finally broken up at about nine o'clock. When Harry had emerged from the tunnel, she discovered it was snowing. Sirius was ecstatic and she knew he would be riding on his new snowmobile in the morning...

The Christmas night snowfall had turned into a full-blown blizzard. It had been snowing for almost two days. Harry was frantic that the musicians would not be able to make it for the ball. Dumbledore however, reassured her that they would be there as he had arranged for them to floo to the Three Broomsticks. Hagrid would pick them up by a thestral drawn sleigh to bring them back to Hogwarts.

She was in the Great Hall inspecting the decorations that the staff had worked so hard on when Sirius came in from the rose garden. "Harry, come and see the garden. It's fantastic!" he called.

"You just want to get me into the garden for a quick snog," Harry teased.

"No, really," he laughed, "come and look! Dumbledore decided to add a few touches of his own."

"Really, what did he do?"

"He's created a winter wonderland," Sirius crowed pulling her out of the large glass doors. "Isn't it beautiful?" His eyes were shining with delight as he grinned from ear to ear.

"I think the Headmaster has outdone himself," Harry gasped looking around.

The garden had been transfigured so that there were miniature Christmas trees, complete with fairy lights, holly bushes, and poinsettia plants instead of the usual roses. Ice sculptures of reindeer, snowmen, and gingerbread houses adorned the scenery. The reindeer had been magically charmed to shake their heads blinking their eyes when a person passed. The snowmen were waving and smiling as they tipped their top hats.

"Thank you, Harry." Dumbledore's voice came from behind her.

"I guess the roses weren't up to your liking this year?" she asked turning to face him. The twinkle in his blue eyes was unmistakable and he was smiling warmly.

"I thought that since you all did such a wonderful job with the hall that something more interesting was warranted. We will go back to the roses for Valentines Day. I am sure Miss Granger and Mr. Weasley will be happy with them for their wedding."

"I know Hermione is looking forward to having the doors open during the reception. How are the plans coming for the Valentine's dance?"

"We are having it the day before the wedding so that we can maintain security for the wedding reception. Miss Granger does not have a big family and those who were invited are aware that she is a witch. However, Arthur is the Minister of Magic so there will be a good number of people present who work at the Ministry along with all the Weasley family members and friends."

"That will take some very heavy duty magic to do the decorating for both affairs."

"Well, Harry, as you know Severus and I will be doing the dance decorations," Sirius reminded her, "but the wedding is being done by the house elves on a plan devised by Hermione and Professor McGonagall."

"Hermione is using house elves?" Harry chuckled.

"She insisted on paying them," Dumbledore replied with amusement.

"Did they agree?"

"No, they told her it would be their honor to do it for free. Winky reasoned with her saying it would be a wedding present from all of them."

"I still can't believe she agreed." Harry shook her head in amazement.

"I just hope she doesn't try and send them some clothes," Sirius remarked. "They will become basket cases."

"I'll talk to Dobby. If she does we can donate them to an orphanage or some other group for the needy," Harry told them thoughtfully. "Hermione will not need to know."

"That is an excellent idea," Dumbledore agreed. "Now if you will both excuse me I do have some duties to attend to. I am meeting with Alastor regarding the increased security measures he wishes to institute for the wedding." Dumbledore then strode off leaving Harry alone with Sirius.

"Now what were you saying about a bit of a snog?" Sirius asked taking her into his arms.

"Why Sirius Black, I do believe you lured me out here expressly for that purpose."

"And why would I do something like that?" he questioned pretending to frown.

"Why don't you tell me," Harry countered, cheeks flushed, green eyes sparkling.

"Hmm...Now let me think," he began playfully, "could it be because you are such a talented young witch? No, maybe it's because you're so pretty. Or maybe it's because you seem to have been avoiding me lately?"

"I have not! I have been busy with the ball and you know it."

"Ah...but now you have finished with the decorating so maybe you could spare me a few minutes of your time?"

"Perhaps," she answered coyly as he steered her over to one of the benches and sat down beside her. She looked up into his eyes with a grin. "Why do I think you're the devil in disguise?"

"Because I'm Sirius Black the Casanova of Hogwarts and animagus extraordinaire," he countered with a smirk, "and everything I said before is true."

They stared at each other for what felt like an eternity before he gently lowered his head, pressing his lips to hers. She felt his tongue press against her teeth. Her lips parted with his as they locked into a heated embrace. They separated slowly some time later, arms still wrapped around one another. Neither spoke right away, each content to sit and cuddle. Harry finally broke the silence.

"Sirius, I have to go and get ready for the ball."

"I know," he replied gently kissing his way down the side of her cheek to give her one last kiss on the lips. "Dumbledore told me he asked you to open the ball. May I have the pleasure of the first dance with you?"

"I'm sorry but I've already promised it to someone else."

"Oh?" he questioned taken aback.

"Are you jealous?" She smiled up at him flirtatiously.

"That would depend on who it is."

"I think I will just let you think about that for awhile. It will be interesting to see how you react. If you aren't too upset I promise to give you the next dance though," she smirked rising.

"And if I am upset? What then?"

"Maybe you could have a duel for my honor," Harry laughed slipping away from him. "If I were you I would come prepared." She then darted back into the Great Hall, leaving him alone in the garden.

'Damn, is there someone she fancies that I don't know about? Maybe she's seeing George again...or maybe Charley Weasley. They had a great time on the Quidditch Pitch and at the Three Broomsticks after the match," he fretted to himself. "I will just have to wait and see but I'll be damned if anybody hurts her..." Sirius continued to worry as he made his way through the castle to find Remus. He wanted to ask him if he had seen Harry with anyone other than her three protectors lately...

Harry was in a good mood as she prepared for the evening's events. She had indeed purchased a gown in a deep rose color. The material was iridescent and reflected the light as she moved. She had also bought coordinating dress robes in pale ivory trimmed in the same material as the gown. Her shoes were simple pumps in the same shade of ivory with a matching handbag. She put the pearls Sirius had given her two years ago around her neck and on her left hand chose to wear the gold signet ring from her parents since the serpent ring was on her right. Harry decided not to carry her usual wand. Instead, she chose the wand she had received at her graduation made from the antlers of a stag. The inner core was another one of Fawkes feathers, which he had given up expressly for this wand. She placed it carefully inside of her robe pocket.

Next, she tackled her hair. Even though it had grown out it still had a mind of its own. She finally decided to put it up in a simple French twist but left a few tendrils loose around her face in wispy curls. Harry then coordinated her make up to match surveying her appearance in the large floor mirror.

"My dear, you will be the belle of the ball!" The mirror exclaimed in satisfaction. "All the men will be asking for you to dance."

"Then maybe I should put on some different shoes," Harry replied thinking that her feet would be hurting tomorrow from the heels.

"Nonsense, you will be dancing on air if I know this school."

"Anything's possible," she laughed turning away from the mirror. Taking out her new wand, she gave it a wave to extinguish the lights. It felt different from her holly wand and she could feel its power. "Whoa, this will take some getting used to. I will have to do some practicing with it," she muttered leaving the room. Harry made her way down to the Great Hall and

entered through the back by the dais rather than the main doors. As one of the staff, she was to be there before the students were allowed entry. She looked around as she entered the room.

Ron was already there with Hermione. They had arrived back the night before via

portkey due to the inclement weather. They were wearing coordinating robes in deep burgundy, Hermione's trimmed with soft velvet. Draco and Neville would be meeting with Ginny and Luna once the students were allowed in. Draco looked resplendent in dark grey trimmed with silver. Neville wore robes in deep brown trimmed with tan. All the Aurors were on duty tonight and would be intermingling with the students and staff through out the night. Some of the Order members were also there including Bill and Charlie along with Mad Eye Moody for additional security. Harry noted that Tonks looked quite pretty in a royal blue gown with matching robes and she was using her real appearance and hair color. McGonagall was in her usual tartan and Professor Sprout had on pale green with a dark green trim.

Her protectors had not yet arrived when she entered. Dumbledore came over to greet her. He looked resplendent in gold robes trimmed with white satin. Little stars twinkling on the material. He wore a hat to match.

"You look beautiful, my dear," he beamed. "May I have the pleasure of the first dance to open the ball with you or has some younger man captured your fancy?"

"I'm sorry, Headmaster. I have already promised the opening dance to someone as well as the second dance. Would you like to take the third?"

"It would be my pleasure. Which of your Protectors has been the lucky choice to open the ball with you?"

"None of them," she pursed her lips slyly.

"Indeed?" Dumbledore was clearly taken by surprise. "Is there someone new in your life?" he asked pleasantly but Harry sensed an underlying concern.

"You might say that," she smiled coyly. "However, I'm sure you will approve."

"If you have chosen him then I am sure I shall." Dumbledore smiled. Harry could sense him trying to probe her mind but her Occlumency skills were in place and he withdrew.

"Harry, we missed you at Christmas but Mum was glad when you called that night to say you had a good time with..."

Hermione interrupted him with a sharp poke in the ribs before he could mention her parents. "What Ron was starting to say was that Molly was glad you spent the day with their cousins from Australia."

"It turned out to be a wonderful afternoon but I still missed you guys." Harry hugged her friends affectionately. "Did you both like your presents? I didn't get to talk to you on the floor since my time was limited."

"Liked is not the word!" Ron was clearly elated. "How did you ever get tickets to the next Quidditch World Cup?"

"That was easy. It was one of the few times being Harry Potter actually paid off," Harry giggled. "What about you, Hermione. Did you like the cookbook?" Harry's cheeks flushed scarlet.

"I...er...found it very interesting. Molly liked the recipes too." Hermione's blush crept all the way down her neck as she referred to the charmed sex manual.

"I purposely made sure no one but you could read the important parts," Harry whispered to her friend. "I knew Molly would ask what I gave you so I made sure you could have it open and not be embarrassed." Both girls began to giggle conspiratorially and Harry was relieved that Hermione wasn't upset with her. "Actually, Harry, I had wanted to buy it for myself but was too embarrassed to do it."

"Well if it makes you feel any better I went and bought it using a concealment charm. I didn't want to be seen buying it myself. I get enough strange looks as it is."

"Now what are you two going off about?" Draco sneered, coming over to them.

"Oh, just girl talk." Harry rolled her eyes innocently.

"More like plotting some kind of scheme," the blond Slytherin grunted.

"I would think that would be more in your line of work, Draco," Hermione retorted.

"That's what we Slytherins are noted for, Granger. While you Gryffindors are out risking your necks we in Slytherin are making the plans on how you should do it."

"Yeah, more like bloody bad ones from the look of it," Ron chimed in. He still was not altogether friendly towards his partner but things were improving with Ginny and Molly's help.

"Wotcher, Harry, you look gorgeous. You too, Hermione," Tonks interrupted diffusing the situation before anything started.

"Thanks, Tonks," Harry replied. "You look pretty good yourself. It's nice to see the real you for a change."

"Ah...but is this the real me?" She wiggled her eyebrows mischievously.

"Do you even know what you really look like anymore cousin?" Draco sneered.

"Naturally, I look like the good looking side of the family. The Tonks side that is," she answered enjoying giving him a little dig about her Muggle relations.

The door opened again before Draco could reply and Arsinoe entered. She looked stunning in her native dress robes. Her dark eyes were sparkling and she had left her black hair loose around her shoulders. She moved with an easy grace and Harry was reminded that one of her animagus forms was a jaguar. She immediately came over to greet them.

"Good evening. You all look wonderful. I have never been to one of Hogwarts Balls. Are they as fun as the Headmaster has told me?"

"Depends on what you think of as fun," Draco answered looking her up and down in blatant admiration.

"I wouldn't let Ginny see you looking at Miss Darkmoon like that," Hermione warned. "She just might lose her temper."

"What? Can't I admire a beautiful woman?"

"Thank you, Draco," Arsinoe laughed. "I am sure once Miss Weasley gets here she will be the only one you look at for the rest of the evening."

"Damn right." Draco shook his head in agreement. "You lot all look nice but in my book none of you can put a candle to Ginny." It was obvious by his dreamy expression that he was in love with the youngest Weasley. "She is the sweetest smartest most beautiful witch in the world even if her brother can be a git at times," he snickered, looking at Ron.

"Ah...young love...I remember it well." Dumbledore looked at them all over his half moon spectacles, blue eyes twinkling. "Mr. Weasley and Miss Granger if I may have a few minutes of your time? I have a few suggestions from Alastor about the security measures for you upcoming nuptials I would like to discuss." He winked at Harry who understood that he really wanted to prevent Ron and Draco from going at one another.

"Of course, Professor Dumbledore. I'm sure he will be taking the utmost of precautions with so many important people and my Muggle relatives attending," Hermione stated following the Headmaster. She tugged on Ron's sleeve to follow.

"Harry, did you see what the Headmaster did to the rose garden?" Neville called over from where he was chatting with Professors Sprout and McGonagall.

"Yeah, isn't it wonderful?" She nodded giving her friend a smile. "You and Professor Sprout did great arrangements too."

"Thanks." He looked genuinely pleased.

The stocky little woman beamed beside him as the door opened again. Harry's three protectors entered accompanied by her parents and the Snapes. Phaedra immediately flew over to Harry.

"Miss Harry, you look like a real Princess!"

"So do you." Harry hugged the little girl. She had on the forest green velvet dress robes Harry had purchased her for Christmas and her mother had pulled up her golden curls on a cascading ponytail secured with a red ribbon.

"Are you excited to be at your first ball, Little One?" Arsinoe inquired.

"Oh...yes!" Phaedra jumped up and down. "I am just going to dance the night away!"

"Well for two hours anyway," Justinian reminded her coming over with Circe. She was resplendent in black velvet trimmed with dark red.

"Good evening, Harry." Circe gave her a quick hug.

"You look beautiful, Circe, and I like the way you and Justinian coordinated your robes." He had chosen to wear robes in the opposite colors of his wife.

"Thank you, Harry," Justinian answered kindly.

"Now if you will all excuse me for a second I see three people who are just standing there looking a bit shell shocked," she said indicating Sirius, Severus, and Remus. "I think I had better go and shake them out of it."

The others nodded in assent as Harry moved over towards where the three men stood by the door. Tiberius had moved off to speak with Mad Eye and Dumbledore but not before giving her a rare smile in greeting.

"Harry, you just get prettier by the day." James beamed. "I see you don't have your glasses on."

"No, I have my contacts in for the night."

"I think you look absolutely beautiful tonight dear," Lily hugged her daughter quickly. "That color becomes you."

"Thank you, Augusta. I think your gown is stunning," Harry replied keeping to her parent's anonymous identities. Lily was wearing pale blue satin trimmed in royal blue adorned with small crescent moons. "Julian looks handsome as well." Harry winked at her father. He was wearing navy blue with matching silk trim around the neck and cuffs.

"We need to see Albus for a minute, Harry. I hope you don't mind?"

"Not at all, Julian, I understand perfectly." Her parents moved off so that she could have a private word with her three protectors.

"Even though I am sure you have heard this before you do look beautiful this evening, Harry," Severus complimented her with a thin smile.

"I think she looks better than beautiful," Sirius eyed her boldly. He didn't want to be outdone by Severus.

"Scrumptious is more like it," Remus laughed.

"Remus," Harry grinned, "I don't think that is such a good word coming from a werewolf." She hugged him affectionately as he gave her a lopsided smile.

"I like your robes. You have all outdone yourselves," Harry said with admiration. Remus had chosen to wear deep chocolate brown trimmed with gold, which complimented his eyes. Sirius was wearing a deep charcoal gray similar to Malfoy's but trimmed in light grey silk. Severus, as always, was in black with black satin trim.

"That's because we are here with the belle of the ball," Sirius quipped. "We wanted to make sure you had eyes only for us."

"Do I detect a note of jealousy?"

"We are merely looking out for you, Harry," Severus remarked stoically but his dark eyes were glittered passionately. "I understand you have chosen your partner to open the ball."

"Ah...so you are all wondering who it will be?"

"Well, Princess since it isn't one of us we were curious."

"And who do you think I have chosen?"

"You seem to be on good terms with Charlie Weasley," Sirius scowled.

"I believe you have asked the Headmaster." Severus nodded in his direction.

"What about you, Remus? Who do you think I am going to dance with?"

"My guess is Ron. He is your best friend after all. We all know he doesn't like to dance so it would be a good prank on your part."

"Well you will all just have to wait to meet my first love," Harry chuckled wickedly. "I do hop you all approve of him. It would break my heart if you didn't." She let her eyes slide over the expressions on the three men. Remus looked worried, Sirius was openly scowling and Severus features looked as if they were set in stone. Harry was secretly delighted at their discomfiture. She felt it was only fitting for them to feel a bit jealous for a change in view of some of the things they had kept from her.

"Attention, everyone," Dumbledore clapped his hands for attention. "I wish to welcome all of you tonight and thank you all for your help to make this event possible. I do hope you enjoy yourselves as much as I will. Now if you will all take your places it is time we opened the doors to allow the students in."

The staff all took places at one of the round tables in the front of the room. The band and string quartet came forward from where they had been waiting and took seats at the table designated for their use to have access to the dais where they had set up. The security staff took places at various points of the room. Dumbledore nodded to Mr. Filch who then swung open the double doors and the students flooded in. They all had various expressions on their faces from anticipation to anxiety. This was especially true for the fourth year boys and Harry knew they were dreading having to dance. She noticed Draco and Neville taking a seat over at a table with Ginny and Luna who had come in together. Bill was in the back of the room and she realized that Fleur was there with her too. Tonks was sitting near the front with Charlie Weasley. The other Aurors had dispersed through out the room. Once everyone was seated around the dance floor, Professor McGonagall stood.

"Welcome to all of you and I hope you enjoy the evening. Various entertainments have been arranged but we shall have dinner before the dancing starts. Now, the Headmaster would like a word before we eat." She sat down as Dumbledore stood up, blue eyes twinkling as he surveyed the room.

"Good evening students, staff, and to all our invited chaperones. In these dark times, I hope this will give everyone a spot of brightness to help them forget for at least a little while what is going on outside of these grounds. Tonight we are celebrating the Yuletide and I wish you all many happy seasons to come. Now with that said, tuck in and have a good time!"

The hall erupted into cheers and excited conversations as the food appeared on the tables. Everyone oohed and aahed at the splendid feast that had been prepared. Dumbledore looked over at Harry from where she was sitting across the table from him. His features were set into a smile, blue eyes eyeing the fare with delight as he reached for a large helping of turkey.

"Headmaster, will you be opening the dancing with Harry?" McGonagall asked thoughtfully.

"Alas no, she has chosen another. I shall be interested to know which of you three she has selected."

"None of us," Sirius scowled. "She did promise me the second dance though."

"And I have the third."

"May I have the fourth, Miss Potter?" Severus asked formally.

"I have a special dance planned for you Severus, but yes you may. I shall speak with the string quartet to have them prepared."

"Indeed, and what dance would that be?"

"You'll see. Suffice it to say your uncle has been practicing with me following some of the potions lessons you were not able to do with me."

"Then I shall look forward to our dance."

"Remus will you dance with me too?"

"I'm not a very good dancer." Remus looked up shyly.

"That's okay; I will enjoy dancing with you anyway."

"Than I will be happy to dance with you, Princess. Just let me know when you're ready."

"I will," Harry answered happily, looking around at her family.

"Harry, I understand you are a protected witch," James stated matter of factly. "It is most unusual. I believe such a thing has not been done in many years."

"So I was told. It seemed like a good idea at the time, although Sirius was not happy about it."

"That is understandable. It puts you in a unique position. Wouldn't you agree?"

"I suppose so," she shrugged aware that Dumbledore was giving her father a warning look. 'I wonder if there is something about this that Albus has not told me.' Harry considered watching the interaction of the two men. 'My dad must know something that I don't.'

"Harry, how do you like teaching here at Hogwarts?" Lily cut in. She was not fully aware of what this Protected Witch Status was herself being a Muggle born but she knew her husband understood something that Harry didn't. She did not want James to start anything with Albus during the ball.

"I love teaching. It is fun and often challenging."

"I understand Professor Snape has been working with you towards becoming a full Master of Potions. You must have done very well while you were in school."

"I did my best," Harry replied casually. She knew her mother was aware of how she and Severus had not gotten along and was merely trying to change the subject away from the Protectorship.

"How do you feel about your Protectors in general," James questioned stubbornly. He was not about to let Lily change the subject.

"They've always been there for me. Sirius and Remus were my father's best friends and at one time, my dad saved Professor Snape's life. I would think he would have approved of them given the circumstances." Harry knew she could not openly acknowledge her father and deliberately spoke to him as if he were a stranger.

"I'm sure he did." Lily gave James a dark look. "What was it like to kill a basilisk?"

"Bloody scary," Harry smiled at her mum, "but meeting Tom Riddle was even scarier."

"What was he like as a boy?" James wanted to know. He understood Lily was not going to let him continue with the questions he had about the Protectorship and Dumbledore's eyes held a real look of disapproval. Sirius and Remus shifted uncomfortably while Severus wore a closed expression.

"Tom was actually a very handsome young man. Cold as ice though and evil even then. I kind of wondered what went wrong. The Headmaster told me he was a brilliant student."

"Ah...Harry we may never know," Dumbledore said sadly. "He was an angry young man and thrived on being the center of attention."

"Humph," Severus snorted, "he still does. He has no feelings for anyone but himself and destroys everything he touches."

"I think it's rather sad. He could have been one of the greatest wizards of the time but his desire for power outweighed his need to admit he needed someone to love. What is the saying? Absolute power corrupts absolutely." Harry remarked.

"He would tell you that he is the greatest wizard that ever lived, Princess."

"No, Remus, he thinks he is. He is actually very weak."

"How can you say that, Harry, after all he has done? He has ruined more lives than any other dark wizard in history," Sirius stormed. "Look what he did to all of us."

"Sirius calm down. You are missing my point. He uses and takes. He has no idea how to give and that is what drove him over the edge. He doesn't want others to have what he was never able to attain. He has no understanding of how to love. If you can't love then you have no power. Not in the end anyway. Even if he were to win the war how long do you think it would be before his own followers rose against him? Ten years, twenty maybe? To him they are just

objects to do his bidding and in time they would come to realize that. Eventually he would go after their families too."

"Enough of this dark talk," Dumbledore interrupted. "This is supposed to be a happy night and you are all talking about the one thing we wish to put aside for the evening."

"I apologize, Albus, I didn't mean to get you upset." Harry lowered her eyes.

"It is all right, Child. You were right about what you said. That is one of your biggest differences. Now, how about you open the ball? I for one am anxious to see which young man has caught your fancy."

"I already told you, it's my first true love." Harry noted that her three Protectors shifted in their seats as Dumbledore rose tapping on his glass.

"Attention everyone," he addressed the room. "Now that we have all finished our dinner we will start the dancing. It is tradition here at Hogwarts that the first dance is always a waltz but don't worry there will be rock music too." The students all clapped and the Weird Sister's waved jovially from where they were sitting while the string quartet took their places on the dais. They would alternate every fifteen minutes. Dumbledore continued as the applause died down. "Tonight I have asked Miss Potter to open the festivities with the partner of her choosing. So if you will give her a hand while she makes her choice.

Harry glared at Dumbledore as the students yelled, "Speech! Speech!" She put up her hands for quiet knowing she would have to say something.

"Tonight is a night for us all to remember, each of us in our own way. I hope we will all look back on it fondly with warmth and happiness. It is a time for sharing of friendships and finding new loves. A time to look to the future and know that on this day we were all a part of something special. For some of you here it will be your last Yule Ball and I hope you will remember it fondly. For the younger students it is a time to make new friends and get to know one another better. But listen to me, I am rattling on like the Headmaster," she grinned as the students all laughed, "so how about we get going and have some fun." They cheered as she moved onto the dance floor. Her father waited until she signaled him. "I have decided to dance with someone who holds a special place in my heart and hope that one day we will be able to dance together again under the stars," Harry could see Sirius still scowling as she made this statement and Remus just looked down at his plate. Severus jaw had set in his perpetual sneer. 'And they think I get jealous?' she laughed inwardly before continuing aloud. "I have selected a waltz from Johann Strauss so if the quartet is ready..." The leader nodded his head as they brought up their instruments. "In that case, I would ask my partner to come forward and we shall start the dancing."

James slowly rose to give Harry a moment to steady herself and walked over to his daughter. Harry grinned wickedly as Sirius nearly fell off his chair, Remus jaw dropped, and both of Severus brows shot up. None of them had ever considered she would dance with her father. Dumbledore was beaming with delight and the staff and those who knew who Julian really was were clapping wildly. She could see her mother wiping a tear from her face and Hermione was crying openly. Even Draco looked pleased.

The music started and James took Harry in his arms and moved her gracefully around the room. Someone had dimmed the torches so that the stars in the enchanted ceiling shone

brightly overhead. Neither of them spoke. They didn't have too. James knew she loved him. He was just so happy to hold her and dance. Harry also was happy. For one night at least she could be her father's little girl. She could have something to remember that was all her own and not someone else's memory of him. She could see the joy on her mother's face as the Headmaster escorted her to the dance floor to join them. Sirius and Remus were both grinning from ear to ear and even Severus had a thin smile, his dark eyes watching her with admiration. Tonight at least she could just be plain Harry. Not the girl in the prophecy or the one who would defeat the Dark Lord but just Harry.

All too soon the waltz ended and James looked down at her as Lily came to join them. He didn't say anything just kissed her gently on the forehead before he handed her to her mother for a hug. He then took his wife in his arms for the next dance. Sirius had come over from the table taking Harry into his arms for the next dance.

"You might have told us you had asked James to dance with you," he grinned sheepishly.

"It was too much fun to watch you squirm. You're always telling me not to get jealous so I just told you the truth. I chose my first love to open the dance."

"You're right, you know. They say a girl's first love is her father."

"You should have seen your expression," she giggled. "Who did you think I was going to dance with? You damn near fell off your chair."

"I...ah...thought maybe you were seeing Charlie Weasley."

"Sirius, Charlie is a nice guy but I think he rather likes your cousin Tonks." Harry nodded to where they were dancing together. "I did feel a bit sorry for Remus though. He looked so worried and sad."

"I thought he would go crazy earlier when I told him you said you were dancing with your love. He growled and got that wolfish expression in his eyes when he is angry and that doesn't happen too often."

"Poor Remus. I should have let him in on the secret," Harry remarked feeling badly for the werewolf. "What did Severus say about the whole thing?"

"He just said you had every right to dance with whom ever you wished but when we left the dungeon I heard him smash something."

Harry threw back her head and laughed. She was more relaxed than she had been for a long time and was thoroughly enjoying herself. She did the next dance with Dumbledore as promised. The quartet then took a break and the Weird Sister's started with a slow dance so she danced with Remus. He had lied about being a bad dancer and Harry suspected it was just his shyness and wariness of getting too close to people that kept him off the dance floor.

"I'm proud of you, Princess. I know how hard this whole thing has been for you."

"Remus, this was something I had to do. I owed it to them and more importantly I owed it to myself. I still have to keep my distance but for one night I just wanted to be me."

"I understand and I'm sorry I was jealous."

"Yeah, I heard you went wolf on poor Sirius today," she teased.

"Sometimes my other half has to let off a little steam," he whispered wickedly.

They both returned to the table then the music ended. Severus joined them a few minutes later. He had been dancing with Circe. James and Lily were still on the dance floor as was Sirius. He was dancing wildly with Hermione. Harry was surprised to see the healer, Dr. McBride, but realized he was a member of the Order and must have been invited too. He was paying a good deal of attention to Professor McGonagall who was blushing like a schoolgirl. Draco and Ginny seemed to be having a good time while Neville had just sat back down with Luna. She looked as spacey as ever. Harry laughed when she saw Phaedra dancing with Ron. He hated to dance, especially to fast rock music, but was not about to say no to the little girl.

"Harry would you like something to drink?" Severus asked leaning over so she could hear him over the loud music.

"A Butterbeer would be nice."

"Lupin, may I get you something also?"

"I'll have the same," the werewolf nodded.

"I shall be back shortly then," Severus said excusing himself.

"Are you having a good time, Princess?"

"For a change, yes. I haven't been this relaxed in ages," she admitted ruefully. "I just wish this whole night could go on forever."

"I know." Remus patted her shoulder gently. "How are Hermione and Ron's wedding plans going?"

"Ron is a nervous wreck every time he thinks about it. I just told him to think of it as being in a game of Quidditch. You're nervous when you first start out but then you relax as the game goes on. I told him once he has a few drinks at the reception he'll be fine."

Remus laughed in amusement. "What about Hermione. How has she been?"

"Worried about all the plans. She frets that something will go wrong."

"What did you say to her?"

"I told her it wouldn't matter. No one would probably know and that she would be married anyway. We ordered our dresses the other day."

"Are you going to wear robes?"

"No. The bridesmaids will be wearing traditional Muggle gowns but we have fur trimmed cloaks to wear over them since it will be February."

"Ron selected dark brown dress robes with brown trousers and white dress shirts for the men."

"That sounds nice. I like you in brown. It makes your golden eyes stand out."

"I would rather they didn't."

"Why, they're so beautiful."

Remus blushed giving her a small smile. "They weren't always this color. They were actually more of a hazel than gold when I was little."

Harry nodded in understanding. "Remus can I ask you a personal question? You don't have to answer if you don't want to."

"I can guess what you are going to ask."

"Oh and have you suddenly become a seer?" she teased.

"No, but I can see the look in your eyes and I can sense your anxiety."

"Then what is it you think I want to know?"

"You were going to ask me if I remember being bitten."

Harry frowned. "I won't deny it. Do you?"

"Some of it. I remember thinking the wolf was a dog and I wanted to play. Then all I remember is running when he started growling and chasing me. After that I woke up in St. Mungo's. My father looked defeated and my mother was crying. I was too young to understand why."

"I'm sorry. I didn't want you to dredge up a painful memory. I shouldn't have asked." Harry took his hand in hers.

"It was a long time ago, Princess. You have nothing to feel bad about. I accepted what I am a long time ago."

"If it's any consolation I want you to know that I think its kind of cool you're being a werewolf. I just feel badly knowing how painful it is for you when you transform."

"Would you love me less if I weren't a werewolf?" he questioned curiously.

"No, I would love you even if you were a vampire."

"That's more Severus speed," he joked as the other man returned with the drinks.

"I am not a vampire."

"He's just teasing, Sev. You would scare the crap out of any self respecting vampire with that glare of yours," Harry laughed giving him a peck on the cheek.

"I have no idea what you are talking about, Miss Potter," he stated putting on his most feared expression.

"You're right, Harry. He would scare any self respecting vampire away. Hell, he even scares me," Remus chuckled as Harry eyed Severus coyly.

"I believe you still owe me a dance, Harry." Snape remarked as the band again changed back to the quartet and Sirius plopped back into his chair.

"Then give me a minute. I have a special dance in mind for you tonight. Your uncle Tiberius taught it to me."

"So you told me before," he said standing to help with her chair. Harry went over to the musicians and had a rapid conversation. They seemed to like what she said and were shaking their heads in understanding.

"Now what is she up to?" Sirius wondered out loud.

"I'm sure we will find out shortly, Black. What ever it is she seems rather pleased."

"She did say she had a special dance for you, Severus. What ever it is your uncle helped her cook it up."

"That's what worries me," Severus frowned.

"All set, are you ready to dance?" Harry asked coming back to the table.

"I shall be honored." Severus took her hand escorting her back onto the floor.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, we have had a special request for the next dance. If you will please clear the floor for Miss Potter and her partner, Professor Snape," the lead musician announced. "They will be dancing the Tango!"

"A tango, Harry?" Severus eyes locked on hers glittering with undeniable excitement.

"I heard it is your favorite dance."

"I hope you're up to it." He arched his brow, sneering, but she knew he was pleased.

The music started and they began to dance. She followed his lead without a problem as he guided her through the steps of the passionate dance. She lost herself in the number as they weaved and dipped. The room was silent as they moved and all eyes were on them. Tiberius was actually smiling and Circe just shook her head amused. Harry's parents were watching with unabashed interest. Hermione was looking at Ron with a dreamy expression. Sirius had to take a large gulp of his drink to quell his own passions as he watched their synchronized movements. The Headmaster was enthralled and Remus had to suppress the urge to howl as the dance called to his inner beast. When the music finally ended Harry and Severus were locked in the final pose as the room erupted into applause. He gently released her and they walked back to their seats.

"Now that was fun," Harry breathed taking a sip of her Butterbeer.

"You certainly looked like you were enjoying yourself," Sirius scowled.

"Is that why you have your robes pulled over your thighs?" Harry asked feigning innocence. It was one of the few times she had ever seen Sirius blush. She was aware he was trying to overcome an erection. Remus was pretending to look at the ceiling.

"I think you all need a cold drink," James laughed. "Come on lets all go outside and cool down. You too Lil. I hear the garden is fantastic."

"Excuse me," Draco said politely as he came over to their table with Ginny. "I don't mean to interrupt but if Harry doesn't mind I would like to dance with her."

"So long as Ginny says its alright."

"Sure, Harry go ahead. I promised the next dance to Bill anyway," she replied waving to her oldest brother.

They all rose and Harry went to dance a fast Polka with Draco as the others went outside.

"So Potter, do you think my godfather would teach me and Ginny how to tango?"

"I'm sure if you ask him he would be happy to oblige. It's his favorite dance according to his uncle Tiberius."

"You two really had everyone going when you were out there. Ginny was holding her breath."

"I think she was just wishing it was the two of you."

"We both were," Draco admitted with a smile.

"You know, Draco, you're not half bad when you aren't acting like a spoiled prat."

"Neither are you, Potter."

They had finished their dance and Harry was on her way back to her seat when Justinian approached her.

"Harry, have you seen Phaedra? Circe wants to put her to bed but she can't find her. She's gone to check the bathroom but I know she's worried."

"I'm sure she's fine, Justinian. She has a habit of getting into mischief though. I'll go and check the garden. Why don't you go with Draco and check the halls and alert the Aurors just to be on the safe side."

Justinian nodded nervously and Harry went outside. She stood for a moment looking around. 'Now if I were Phaedra where would I go?' she considered. Nodding to herself with a grin she headed through the garden to look at the different sculptures. The garden was warm as the temperature was magically controlled all year and spells kept the ice from melting. Nearing the display of Santa and his reindeer, Harry heard the little girl talking to someone. She immediately quickened her pace.

"Do you like it here?" Phaedra asked.

"It's warm and I don't have to hide underground as much." Another voice replied.

"What do you do for food?"

"I hunt. There are plenty of mice and shrews to eat."

Harry stopped dead in her tracks. She suddenly realized that she was listening to the little girl talking with a snake. Phaedra was speaking in Parseltongue. Creeping closer she looked through a display of fir trees and saw the child sitting down on a bench with a small garden snake at her feet.

"Yech, I don't think they must taste very good. I like to eat strawberries."

"What are strawberries?" the snake questioned.

"They're fruit. They are really yummy with cake and whipped cream."

"I don't know what that is either."

"It is something sweet that humans like to eat," Harry addressed the snake as she came out of the bushes. "I see you have met my friend, Phaedra."

"Yes, the small one has been talking with me. I have never talked with people before. I did not know you could understand my language."

"Only a few of us can. It is very rare. Have you lived in this garden long?"

"I was hatched nearby. I know no other place."

"Miss Harry, I didn't know snakes could talk English."

"They can't Phaedra. It seems you are able to speak Parseltongue just like me." Harry explained quietly.

"But I heard him talk English!"

"No, in your head you hear the English but you are actually speaking the snake language."

"I do not know what you are saying," the snake hissed.

"I was explaining to Phaedra why she can understand you," Harry hissed in Parselmouth.

"I must be going now," the snake hissed back. "I am on the hunt tonight. It is time to feed."

"I would suggest you try over by the far edge of the garden. I heard the grounds keeper saying he had found a new mouse burrow that way," Harry informed the snake.

"Thanks," it replied slithering away.

"Wait till mummy and daddy hear I can talk to the snakes just like you!" Phaedra beamed.

"Phaedra, you can't say anything about this. Not yet, anyway."

"Why?"

"Because they may get upset at first. Some people think only dark wizards are able to talk to snakes."

"But you're not a dark witch and you can talk to them."

"I got the ability from the Dark Lord when he put the curse on me."

"Did I get it from him too?" she asked fearfully.

"I don't think so. I have an idea you may have picked it up from me with your telepathy but I'm not sure."

"That's okay then, right?"

"Yes, but I still don't want you to say anything. At least not until I have time to think about this. It would be best if no one knows since it may get back to the Dark Lord."

"Will he be mad?"

"Maybe but I don't want you to take the chance of him finding out. In the meantime don't be afraid. This can be our secret until I can figure out what to do."

"Okay, Miss Harry. I won't tell and I won't talk to the snake any more."

"You probably won't see him. Most of the time the snakes are only out at night. Now let's go and find your parents. They have been looking for you. It is time for you to go to bed. Everyone forgot the time and you actually got to stay for an extra hour."

"Okay, Miss Harry. I'm tired anyway."

She took Harry's hand and they walked back inside together. Circe was understandingly happy that Phaedra was safe. Harry told Circe not to be angry. Phaedra had just been attracted to the lights and was sitting on one of the benches. She never mentioned the snake. Harry was about to go over to her table when she realized that the others were not yet back. She hadn't seen them outside so she surmised that they had gone the opposite way. Heading back in that direction she could hear voices and stopped to listen when she heard her name.

"You three have got to say something to her," Lily cried exasperated. "She should have been told from the beginning!"

"Lils, there is nothing to be getting excited about. It is a very ancient ritual and Harry agreed to it."

"Yes, but she was never told the entire truth."

"Listen Lily, we all decided among ourselves that it should be her choice. We never intended to keep her in the dark like this forever. I just felt she was too young at the time. She was barely seventeen for Christ's sake." Sirius agitated voice reached her ears.

"Sirius is right. I will talk to Dumbledore," James soothed his wife. "Harry is of age and should be made aware of what the entire ritual can entail."

"I still think it stinks!"

"Lily, Harry is a young lady. She may be a bit shocked since she was raised by your sister and her family but she is also a witch," Severus stated smoothly. "This is a part of her heritage. The choice will be hers."

"What do you think, Remus?" Lily's worried voice questioned.

"I think Harry will be angry more at Dumbledore for not telling her the full facts about a Protectorship. She may be a bit shocked but she has a good sense of responsibility and will realize that this was kept from her because it was believed she wouldn't be able to understand it. She knows there is nothing like it in the Muggle world."

"But it can affect her whole life and yours as well."

"We did not agree to this lightly, Lily. It is an honor to be asked and we all understood the various outcomes. It was one of the few things we all entirely agreed upon." Snape's cool voice responded.

"Very well, but I think she should be told and soon!"

Their voices dropped at that point and Harry could no longer hear what they were saying. Obviously it had to do with her Protectorship. Whatever it was she was not going to wait to find it out from the Headmaster. She was going to go and find out what she could with a little help from Hermione. There must be something somewhere in the library. Hermione had said she had read about it but she must have missed something or she would have told her. Taking a deep breath Harry proceeded the rest of the way up the path to where she knew they were sitting.

"Hey, I have been looking for you everywhere," she called rounding the path. She hoped she sounded convincing.

"Sorry, Princess, we got to talking and didn't realize you would be looking for us so soon. You seemed to be having such a good time dancing."

"There is only so long one can dance. I would dearly like to have some cake and coffee. It should be time for the elves to be putting it out."

"I'm right with you on that, Love," Sirius chuckled. "I could do with a bit of a snack."

"When aren't you hungry, Black? Between you and young Mr. Weasley the food budget must have tripled," Severus sneered as they all walked back to the ball.

They spent the remainder of the evening relaxing and chatting. Harry danced with her protectors and Ron after cornering him over by the dessert table. She deliberately took the last chocolate brownie and said he couldn't have it till he danced with her. Ron, always liking a good brownie, agreed. The sweet was left with Hermione for safekeeping. Harry would seek out her friend tomorrow and try to find out what was going on. In the mean time she wasn't going to let it worry her.

Finally, it was time for the last dance of the evening. Her mother looked at Harry and then glanced over towards her husband. Harry took the not so subtle hint and spent one final dance in her father's arms before she would have to deal with what she knew was coming.

Half way through the dance James grabbed Lily and danced with the two of them. He smiled happily at his two girls. Her parents knew that soon Harry would have to face the ordeal of having to say good-bye and how much it would hurt her. Their only solace was that each knew they would watch out for her until it was time for them to meet again...

Chapter 26 - To Have and to Hold from this Day Forward

Harry had to wait until after the New Year's Eve celebrations to approach Hermione for help in locating further information regarding the Protectorship. Hermione and Ron had been busy with Moody and Dumbledore discussing security measures and transportation needs for the guests. Therefore, Harry had decided to wait until after the winter recess had ended and the new term began to begin her search. She had also felt they would be less obvious with the bustle of activity going on around them by pretending to be working on Harry's various studies in Potions and Transfiguration.

Harry had finally been able to speak with Hermione two days into the new term. She had a free morning and decided it was time to try to find out what Dumbledore was keeping from her. Following breakfast, she made her way to the library on the pretext of looking up some more information on a specific potion. Unfortunately, Severus had overheard her and questioned why she did not just use his books.

"Harry, you know you have full access to my extensive library downstairs. Why not use one of my manuals?"

"Oh, I would rather not take them from your office. I think what I'm looking for can be found in *Moste Potente Potions* anyway. I figured I would just take it back up to my room. I don't like taking your book from the office. I always worry that I might spill something on it or something," she lied, trying to sound casual.

"I see," he sneered dismissing the subject with a wave of his hand.

Harry was relieved that he didn't bother to ask her what potion she wished to look up and immediately left the Great Hall in pursuit of Hermione who had already gone upstairs. Once she had gotten to the library she had to wait a few minutes while Hermione helped one of the fifth year students locate a book needed to review for his upcoming OWL exam. As soon as she was finished and checked the book out for the student Hermione turned to her friend.

"Harry, I'm glad to you came up. I need to speak with you about something."

"Can it wait till later, Hermione? I need you to help me first. I think Dumbledore has been keeping secrets again," Harry told her in hushed tones.

"I guess so..."Hermione faltered, "but I really need to speak with you today."

"Okay, I promise to see you after my last class before we go to dinner."

"All right, now what is this about Dumbledore?" she whispered.

"I think there is something he didn't tell me about the Protectorship."

"What? Why would you think so?"

"I overheard a conversation my parents were having during the ball. My dad seemed really upset about my not being told something and my mum was really unhappy about it."

"Do you have any idea what it could be? I read about it before the ceremony and everything you told me was just what I found out."

"Well there must be something else. Where did you find the information?"

"It's over here." She motioned for Harry to follow her into the stacks. "There is a whole section on it in these books," Hermione explained pulling various reference books from the shelves. She handed Harry copies of *A History of Magic, Modern Magical History, and Olde and Forgotten Bewitchments and Charms*. "These are the books I read."

"Right, let's just look over them again to make sure I understand everything." Harry didn't want Hermione to know she believed her friend had missed something. The library was quiet so Hermione had the time to help. She realized Harry was concerned so she happily sat down at one of the tables. Each of them took a different book and began the task of reviewing the information that Dumbledore had given Harry just prior to her seventh year at Hogwarts. Just as Harry heaved a deep sigh of disappointment Hermione jumped up.

"Harry, look at this. I only read the history books. How could I have been so stupid?!" Hermione berated herself in disgust.

"What did you find Hermione?"

"I never cross referenced with the bibliography. I should have looked up some of these law texts." She turned the book she had been reading around and Harry scanned the page. Only two books were listed but they immediately caught her attention. The titles inscribed were, *Ancient Blood Magic, by Albus Dumbledore and Wizarding Laws and their Relevance: A Guide to Ancient Rituals Upheld by the Wizengamot and the Ministry of Magic, by Geoffrey S. Coffin Esq.*

"Let's go then!" Harry felt a knot grow in her stomach. "We need to see what they say."

"Harry, I don't have either one of them here," Hermione said, disappointment showing on her face. "Dumbledore came down three days ago and took the one he authored. He said he wanted to see about updating some of the information."

"Now why don't I believe that?" Harry scowled. "What about the other one?"

"It isn't in our listed reference library but I could order it with the Headmaster's permission."

"No, don't let Albus know about this. Can we send for them if I give you the money? I don't want anyone to know about this yet. Especially if it turns out that I'm wrong about what I heard."

"That won't be a problem. The publishers are listed."

"Good. I will donate them to the library when we have finished with them."

"Thanks Harry. That would be wonderful."

"Do me a favor though, find out if Ron knows anything other than what we were told? His family is pureblood and he was raised with a lot of this stuff."

"I'll ask him but I really don't think he knows any more than we do. He isn't really into legal things or history."

"Just the same, he may know a bit more just from being raised in the magical world. Under no circumstances is he to ask his father or mother though. I think it would be best if this was just kept between us for now."

"Okay, I'll see what I can find out."

"Thanks Mione. I appreciate this. Now I have to get going. I have a second year Transfiguration class this afternoon with the Gryffindors and Hufflepuffs."

"I'll see you later, then. Don't forget I need to talk to you later too. It's kind of important."

"I won't forget."

"Then let's get together after dinner. Ron is on duty tonight so we can spend some time together instead of your having to come up after your last class."

"Sounds great," Harry called over her shoulder as she hurried off to her class.

Hermione sat down at her desk in the library and mulled over what Harry had just told her. She was also concerned with what she had been meaning to talk with Harry about later in the evening...

Harry entered the Great Hall for dinner following her last class of the day. It had been a grueling session of third year Potions with Ravenclaw and Slytherin. An argument had erupted during the class between two of the Slytherins and a Ravenclaw student. The Ravenclaw had challenged their judgment over the proper order of ingredients for the burn potion. One of the Slytherins had pulled his wand after the Ravenclaw had snidely criticized the Slytherin, telling him all the inbreeding had affected his brain. Harry had to jump in and stop what almost amounted to an all out duel. The students had both lost house points and were given a weeks worth of detention. Harry had also confiscated their wands for the rest of the class. Nonetheless, Harry was tired and looking forward to a quiet evening with her best friend.

"Good evening, Harry," Dumbledore greeted her warmly as she took her seat. "I understand from Severus that you had a bit of a problem today in Potions?"

"Not really," Harry glared at Severus, "although I'm starting to feel as if I'm teaching Defense Against the Dark Arts rather than Potions." She had informed both Severus and Remus about the detentions immediately following the incident since it was policy to inform the students Head of House.

Dumbledore's eyes twinkled merrily. "Now you know how it feels to be on the other side of the desk when the students have disagreements."

"Humph...are you insinuating that I used to have such outbursts as a student?"

"Frequently," Snape drawled. "It's a wonder you and Draco never hexed each other into oblivion."

"We never went that far," Harry smirked, "and never in your class. You were always too busy looking at me down your nose."

"It seems someone is in a bad mood tonight," Sirius laughed. He was sitting beside Remus who was busy picking at his food.

"I'm just tired is all," Harry sighed. Placing a piece of shepherd's pie on her plate she turned her attention to her other protectors. "How are you feeling Remus? You look paler than usual."

"Full moon tomorrow night Princess. I just need a good night's rest."

"Do you still have that muscle rub Severus made up for you?"

"Yes." He smiled wanly.

"Don't worry Love, I'll see that he takes a nice hot shower and give him a good rub down after dinner. He's already taken his potion." Sirius gently patted his friend on the shoulder.

"Will you both be going out tomorrow night?"

"Afraid not, Harry. The snow is still too deep but Prongs will be coming up to our rooms to keep us company."

"All right then, so long as Moony isn't all alone."

"As I recall you had wanted to do some additional potions with me tomorrow evening," Severus commented without looking up.

"You're right of course. I still am having trouble with the refinements you showed me for the Veritaserum."

"If you would prefer we could go over them tonight instead."

"No. Hermione and I will be spending the evening together. We have a bit of catching up to do and I could use a bit of relaxation." Harry glanced up to the other end of the table where Hermione was having an animated conversation with Neville and Arsinoe. She gathered it had something to do with the native plants from Mexico.

"Aren't you on hall duty tonight Harry?" Dumbledore questioned.

"No, I switched with Professor Sprout. She had an early class this morning and I didn't."

"It was good of you to do so." Dumbledore nodded his approval.

The rest of the meal was spent discussing minor issues and mundane trivia. Harry really was a bit tired. She figured it would be nice to have an evening without worries and would at least get some sleep afterwards. She was relaxing over a cup of coffee when Hermione signaled her and they went upstairs to Hermione's quarters. Hermione lit the fire while Harry curled up in one of the soft chairs.

"Will Ron be staying in here with you once you two are married?" Harry asked curiously while Hermione poured them each a glass of wine.

"Yes, at least until he finishes his duty here as an Auror," Hermione answered sitting down in the chair opposite the one Harry occupied. "Then we will need to find a place to live. Molly wanted us to stay with her for awhile at the Burrow but Ron nixed that almost immediately."

"Why not? It would give you both some time to save some money and look for a nice little house."

"That's what I told him but he said he would feel uncomfortable there."

"Uncomfortable? Hermione he grew up at the Burrow."

"Well...he said...he...um...would feel weird...doing it...with his folks in the same house." Hermione blushed profusely.

"You could use a silencing spell on the room," Harry giggled. "I'm sure with all those kids in the house Molly and Arthur did."

"I told him that but he just wants us to have our own place."

"I guess he has a point," Harry grinned, "after all how would you feel about having sex in your parents' house?"

"Probably about the same way he feels," Hermione agreed with a toss of her head.

The two girls sat quietly for a few minutes sipping their wine. Hermione shifted uncomfortably in her chair. She wasn't sure how to broach the subject she needed to discuss with Harry. Harry noticed that her friend seemed nervous about something and began to grow concerned.

"Hermione is something the matter?"

"Well...kind of. That's why I needed to talk with you."

"What is it? You know you're my best friend. You should be able to tell me anything."

"It's just...well...I've been talking with my folks about the wedding..." Her voice trailed off.

"What's wrong? Don't they want you to marry Ron?"

"Oh no, they really like Ron. It's about security."

"What about the security? I happen to know that Moody and Dumbledore have been working really hard on it."

"They have...but...my folks...they think it will be too much of a risk for you to be in the wedding party." Hermione's words came out in a rush.

"I see. How do you feel about it?"

"Harry...I really want you to be there...but they're my parents. I don't want them to worry any more than they have to. So I'm asking you as my friend if you will drop out."

Harry couldn't say anything. Hermione's words had stung her to the core. Her best friend was afraid that she posed a security risk. The same friend that had followed her into danger any number of times and helped rescue the younger students in the last battle with Voldemort. The same friend that had argued with her fiancé to have Harry as her Maid of Honor when Ron had wanted her to stand with him instead. The same friend Harry had fought to prevent from being expelled when she had succumbed to Voldemort's plans. She just stared at Hermione in disbelief.

"Harry...you can still come to the reception. It will be held here so you won't have any problems with anything happening."

Harry finally found her voice. "Does Ron agree with this decision?"

"He doesn't know. I thought we could just keep this between us and tell him it was your idea."

"I don't think he will accept that but since you feel I'm such a threat I'll do it. I know when I'm not wanted." Harry's voice was barely above a whisper and her fists were clenched with anger. She downed her wine in one gulp and stood up to leave.

"You'll still come to the reception though, won't you?"

"I'm sorry, Hermione. I'm afraid I'll be busy working on my spell to defeat the Dark Lord on that day," Harry replied over her shoulder as she fled the room, Hermione calling after her.

"Harry wait! Please don't be mad."

Harry ignored her and ran up the hall towards her own quarters fighting the tears stinging her eyes. Slamming the door, she flung herself on her bed sobbing uncontrollably...

"What the hell was that?" Sirius questioned looking at Remus. They had just heard the loud bang from the opposite hallway.

"It was Harry's door," the werewolf replied. His extra sharp hearing was enhanced even more with the full moon so close. "Something must have happened." He rose slowly from the bed. Sirius had been rubbing him down to help his aching bones as the transformation drew ever closer. "We should go and check it out."

"I'll go. You need to rest."

"No. If there is a problem with Voldemort even a werewolf can be helpful." He gave Sirius a lopsided grin.

"Only if they're not in the way of something silver," Sirius said, reminding Remus of when Lucius shot him with the silver bullet.

"Then I'll just have to rely on you to make sure of that Padfoot. Now let's go and see what is going on."

"Come on then. I can see there is no stopping you," Sirius remarked leading him from the room.

Remus stiffened when they reached Harry's door. She had been so upset she had forgotten to put a silencing charm on the room. Remus sharp hearing detected her muffled sobs.

"Padfoot, she's crying. Something must be wrong."

"You don't suppose Voldemort has hurt someone that she knows?"

"There's only one way to find out," Remus responded, rapping on her door. There was no answer so he knocked again.

"Go away, Hermione," Harry's called out shrilly. "We have nothing more to say to one another."

"Harry, it's us. Moony and Padfoot," Sirius proclaimed in response. "Can we come in?"

"Not now. I would rather be alone."

"Please, Harry. Has something happened with Voldemort?"

"No...Just please...leave me...alone."

"Sorry, Miss Wings," Sirius answered pushing open the door to her sitting room. "I want to know what you are so upset about."

"It's...none of...your...business. I'm fine...now just leave...the both of...you," she choked as they entered her bedroom.

"Princess, please tell us why you're crying. If you're hurting we are too." Remus sat down beside her on the bed and gently rubbed her back.

"We're your protectors Harry. If something has happened you should be able to tell us. If Voldemort has done something..."

"Sirius, I told...you it...is not...Voldemort. Please...just...let it...go."

"Princess whatever is troubling you we will find out eventually anyway. Why not just tell us now? Maybe we can help."

"Harry, please calm down and tell us." Sirius turned his puppy eyes on her. "Is someone hurt?"

"Only...me," she sobbed bitterly.

"It's not a young man is it?" Sirius growled sitting down beside her on the bed. "No one has tried to seduce you have they? Because if they..."

"No!" she exclaimed cutting him off. "You know I haven't gotten involved with anyone other than you, Moony, and Sev."

"Harry, has Severus done something to upset you?" Remus asked cautiously.

"No, he's his usual self these days. Romantic one minute and cold as ice the next." She looked at them with a bemused smile.

"Well at least you got a smile out of her," Sirius said tussling her hair. "Now as your godfather and your protector I demand to know what is so troubling so I can fix it."

"There is nothing to fix." Harry answered wistfully.

"Harry, at least tell us what has you so unhappy. You look worse than I do after the full moon." Remus winked at Sirius. 'Maybe if we try and coax it out of her she will be more responsive,' he thought to himself.

"Remus is right. Sometimes it helps to talk about what is bothering you," Sirius remarked cupping her chin. "Even if it's something we can't fix at least you may feel better."

Harry just sighed and stared off into space. "It's chilly in here," she said absently.

"That's easy enough to fix." Sirius pointed his wand at the fireplace. A moment later it was ablaze with warmth.

"Humph, I can do better than that," Remus scoffed. "Dobby," he called to the air, "could you get us all some hot chocolate?" Almost immediately a small tray appeared on the table beside her bed containing three cups of steaming hot cocoa topped with whipped cream.

"Thank you Dobby," Harry responded. The house elf appeared with a pop.

"Your very welcome, Miss Harry Potter." He bowed. "Dobby doesn't like to see you so unhappy. Dobby knows what Miss Hermione has done and Dobby thinks it is wrong!"

"That will be quiet enough, Dobby," Harry admonished. 'Damn he did that on purpose!' she considered.

"Dobby is sorry Miss Harry but Dobby is only looking out for you. You is a great and powerful witch and a good friend to Miss Hermione. Dobby is thinking that she should not treat you in such a fashion."

"Dobby, did Harry and Hermione have a fight?" Remus questioned studying his fingers nonchalantly. He could already see his nails beginning to get a bit longer. He would transform within the hour.

"Dobby cannot say, Professor. It is for Miss Harry to tell you what Dobby knows."

"Harry, you should listen to Dobby. Hermione is your friend and if you two have had an argument maybe we could at least help you to sort things out," Sirius remarked seriously. 'Damned Hermione, I never really liked her all that much. She's such a know it all. She never takes the time to consider how she will affect other people. Harry was right when she said Hermione had a lot to learn when it came to dealing with people,' he mused.

"You can go Dobby," Harry interrupted his thoughts.

"Yes Miss Harry. Is you very angry with Dobby?"

"No and don't go punishing yourself. You meant well."

The house elf smiled and disappeared with a loud pop. Harry merely sat staring into the fire and sipping her cocoa.

"So what did the two of you argue about?" Remus golden eyes met hers.

"We didn't really have an argument. Hermione just asked me to drop out of her wedding party is all." Harry could not meet their eyes.

"What!" They both gasped in unison.

"What do you mean she asked you to drop out?" Sirius ranted. "You don't just kick someone out of one of the most important days of your life without a reason!"

"Her parents think it will be too much of a security risk. They're afraid that my presence will trigger an attack by the Death Eaters if not Voldemort himself."

"Why those stupid arrogant Muggles," Sirius began, only to be interrupted by Remus unnaturally calm voice.

"Does Ron know about this?"

"No Moony, he doesn't. She asked me not to say anything."

"I see." Remus jaw was set and his eyes were those of an angry animal. A member of his pack had been hurt and he was going to do something about it. Turning abruptly he raced from the room with the unnatural speed of a werewolf.

"Shit!" Sirius swore aloud.

"Padfoot, you have to stop him. Where is he going?" Harry worried, following Sirius to the door. "It's too close to his transformation. He'll never forgive himself if he hurts someone, potion or not!"

"I'll find him, Harry." Sirius immediately transformed. Picking up Remus sent he went racing after him.

"Oh hell," Harry shook her head. "I'm not going to sit here and wait!" A moment later a large Phoenix was flying through the corridor in pursuit of a large black dog.

Remus Lupin was seething. He could feel the fury of the wolf as he tore down the stairs to the main floor of the castle. Racing out the double doors his keen senses caught Ron Weasley's scent on the wind. The werewolf knew he was patrolling the grounds this evening. Running in the direction of the Quidditch Pitch he followed the scent, now intermingled with that of Tonks, towards where his sharp senses detected their presence. The two Aurors saw him running towards them and headed in Remus' direction, concern marking their features.

"Wotcher, Remus, what is going on?" Tonks asked breathlessly.

"I need to speak with Ron," he replied. The werewolf had not even broken into a sweat following his run from the castle.

"Has something happened to Hermione or Harry?" Ron demanded worriedly.

Before Remus could reply a loud bark came from behind him. This was followed by the shriek of a Phoenix in distress. All eyes turned in the direction of the castle. Padfoot was galloping swiftly in their direction with the scarlet bird following. They recognized the Phoenix as being too small for Fawkes and rightly assumed it was Harry. The two transformed as they reached the group.

"Remus, please stay out of this," Harry begged. "It has nothing to do with Ron."

"Miss Wings is right, Moony. This is something she needs to resolve with Hermione."

"I think Ron needs to be aware of what is going on," Remus replied coldly.

"Please, Remus, it's too close to the full moon. You're letting your anger get the better of you." Harry was growing distraught at the thought that he would transform and possibly lose control despite the Wolfsbane Potion. "At least let it wait until tomorrow."

"Harry, I am well aware that the moon will be up shortly. However, I feel this needs to be resolved now!"

"Will someone please tell us what in bloody hell is going on?" Tonks insisted eyeing the trio in front of her.

"Harry, mate, what is Remus going on about?"

"It's nothing, Ron. I was just upset about something and Remus felt the need to defend me." Harry looked at Remus imploringly.

"Harry, I'm your best friend. If it's something he feels I could help with then just tell me."

"No! It's just something between Hermione and me. We'll work it out."

"Moony, come on back inside. Prongs will be coming soon and he'll be wondering why we're not in our room." Sirius placed a gentle hand on his friend's shoulder.

"Very well, if that's what Harry wants," Remus agreed. He looked soberly at Harry.

"I do, Remus. It's better if you don't get involved. It will only make the situation worse."

"Then I only have one thing to say." Remus turned to Ron. "I'm sorry, Ron, but I will be unable to be a groomsman in your wedding. I know this is short notice but there are some rather extenuating circumstances."

"What? Why not?!" Ron gasped in confusion. However, Remus was already heading back towards the castle accompanied by Sirius and Harry.

"It seems to me that maybe Hermione knows what is going on," Tonks speculated. "Maybe you should ask her."

"I'm meeting her as soon as we get off duty in half an hour," Ron stated as they resumed their patrol. "Maybe something happened with Voldemort that Hermione doesn't want me to know."

"If it did I will expect you to report it immediately to either myself or Kingsley," Tonks advised. "It may have something to do with her parents. Remember what happened when you were in school."

"How can I forget? If it weren't for Harry she would have been expelled and her memory modified." Ron grimaced as he recalled how his fiancé had fallen victim to Voldemort's imperious curse, betraying Harry, causing her subsequent abduction during the Quidditch match with Slytherin...

Harry had returned to her room and prepared for bed as soon as she knew Remus had calmed down. Sirius stayed with him and they continued to discuss what had happened. Remus and Sirius were both angry with Hermione and felt that Harry's presence would actually be beneficial. They couldn't understand why Hermione would feel otherwise. Prongs arrived a short time later and agreed with them. James also felt that Harry needed to speak with someone who could look at the situation from another angle. Ironically enough he suggested that Severus, being a former Death Eater, might just be able to give Harry a better insight into Hermione's way of thinking. Sirius and Remus were amazed that James would even make such a suggestion but agreed with his reasoning. Once Remus transformed Sirius headed down to the dungeons and apprised Severus of the situation. He had no idea that at that same time Ron had gotten off duty and was on his way to speak with Hermione...

Hermione answered the familiar knock on her door with a smile. Ron greeted her with a brief kiss and made himself comfortable on the sofa. He couldn't help but notice that Hermione looked upset.

"Hermione, what's the matter?" he inquired putting his arm around her shoulders affectionately.

"Nothing really," she answered sulkily, avoiding his eyes.

"Yes there is. I can tell. It wouldn't have anything to do with what happened to me earlier with Professor Lupin would it?"

"Professor Lupin? Whatever are you talking about? I haven't seen Remus since dinner." Hermione's stomach did a flip. 'I wonder if Harry saw him and told him what happened,' she pondered thoughtfully. 'It never occurred to me that she would speak to him about...'

"Hermione, are you listening to me?" Ron interrupted her thoughts.

"I'm sorry, Ron, I was a bit distracted. What were you saying?"

"Remus came and found me on duty about an hour ago. He was really upset about something having to do with Harry. He dropped out of the wedding. Sirius and Harry dragged him off before we really had a chance to speak. All I got was that something had happened with you.

It has nothing to do with Voldemort does it?" Ron studied her nervously. "Whatever it is you can tell me."

"Oh, Ron," Hermione sighed, "Harry and I had a bit of a tiff earlier this evening."

"Harry can be moody at times. What brought it on?"

"I'm afraid it was my fault," Hermione began uncertainly.

"Mione, you and Harry are best friends. She's going to be your Maid of Honor for Merlin's sake."

"No, Ron, she's not." Hermione twisted her hands nervously.

"Bloody hell, Mione, what happened with you two? Why did Harry drop out of the wedding?"

"Ron, you have to understand..."

"Understand...what is there to understand?"

"It's...my parents," she faltered trying to find the right words.

"Your parents, what have they got to do with this?"

"We...we've been talking...and well...we all agreed."

"Agreed?"

"Um...yes...Ron I love my mum and dad...and well...I just couldn't say no."

"Say no to what Hermione?" Ron asked in frustration. "What the hell isn't she telling me?" He frowned to himself.

"They...they felt that...Harry...well they think she'll be an added security risk," Hermione blurted out. "And well...you know...it's my wedding...I don't want anything to go wrong," she finished in a rush. Ron was staring at her in disbelief.

"So...you told her you didn't want her there?" His ears were growing red with anger.

"No, no, no! I told her to drop out of the wedding party and just come to the reception here at Hogwarts!"

"You kicked her out of the wedding party?!"

"Well...no...I mean...yes...sort of."

"Hermione, how could you? Harry is our best friend. If it weren't for her you would have been expelled!"

"You think I don't know that? But..."

"There are no buts! Why wasn't I consulted about this?"

"You?" she asked in confusion. Ron was growing angrier by the minute.

"Yes, me. I love your parents too. However, do I have to remind you Hermione Jane Granger that this is my wedding too? I wanted Harry to stand up with me! You were the one who insisted she be the Maid of Honor instead," he fumed.

"I know, Ron. It's just that my parents are scared and this seemed like the easiest solution."

"Well I think it stinks! Harry has had little enough good in her life and she was really looking forward to this wedding. She didn't get to spend Christmas at the Burrow and this was the last thing we would have done together as a trio," Ron ranted getting up to pace furiously.

"Ron, calm down. I only did it for us."

"For us? There was no us involved. You didn't even ask me. For what it's worth to you Hermione I would feel safer with Harry there! She's as good as ten bloody Aurors put together. Voldemort would think twice about doing anything if he finds out she's at the ceremony. Do you think he's a fucking idiot? Harry would die before she let anything happen to either one of us!"

"Ron I..."

"Maybe there shouldn't be a wedding? Maybe I don't know you as well as I thought I did," he yelled irately. "To do something like this to our best friend and behind my back. I'll never forgive you, Hermione. Never! The wedding is off! You can keep the damned ring. Maybe it will remind you of what we all once stood for!" Ron stalked to the door.

"Ron wait!" Hermione called desperately, tears streaming down her cheeks. Her words fell on deaf ears as the door slammed shut behind him...

Harry was tossing and turning in bed when she heard a soft knock on her door.

"Damn," she muttered to herself, "what is going on now?" She flung back the blankets of her bed and padded softly to the door. "Who is it?" she questioned irately.

"Severus. May I come in?"

"Has something happened?" Harry questioned, opening the door for him to enter. "Has the Dark Lord done something? I haven't felt anything in my scar."

"No, there has been no problem with the Dark Lord," Severus remarked calmly. He seated himself on the settee and directed his wand towards the dying fire causing the embers to spring to life.

"Severus, I'm very tired and it's not like you to come up here unless something has happened," Harry said curling up in the opposite chair.

"I have just had a very interesting conversation with Black..."

"Oh great, does everyone always have to interfere in my life?" she cut him off in annoyance.

"I am merely here at the suggestion of your father. It was James' idea that I speak with you about the situation with Miss Granger," Severus told her bluntly.

"My father has no business butting in where he doesn't belong! Who told him anyway? Oh let me guess, it had to be Sirius and Remus."

"I see you are as astute as ever," he sneered. "Perhaps it would be best if I left since you seem so bent on being as stubborn as usual when it comes to your pride." He rose to go.

"I am not being stubborn. You have already gotten me out of bed so you may as well say whatever you came up here to say," Harry snapped.

"How kind of you to admit that I might have some insight into the situation," he smirked, dark eyes unreadable. 'Granger really hurt her feelings. What did the idiot girl think would happen, that Harry would just say fine?' Severus mused as he sat back down. He studied Harry intently for a few minutes as she stared defiantly into his unrelenting gaze. He arched his brow in amusement knowing she still refused to give in to his intimidation.

"Well? What do you have to tell me?" she demanded.

"Your stubborn Gryffindor pride becomes you."

"Sev," she blushed, "you did not come up here to discuss my pride."

"No, I came up here, as you so eloquently put it, to discuss Miss Granger and her ridiculous attitude. Your father felt that perhaps I could give you some insight into how she feels."

"I know how she feels damn it. She's scared. I am an empath you know!"

"Ah...but have you considered things from her point of view? She is a Muggle born after all and many of the guests at the wedding will be Muggles."

"I know that," Harry answered irately.

"Now consider how she must feel. She has to worry about them while at the same time a member of her wedding party is the prime target of the Dark Lord. Does she risk his making an appearance just to have her friend standing beside her? Or should she ask her friend not to be in the wedding."

"She should have enough confidence in her friend that she should understand her friend would never deliberately endanger her family. Plus the fact that she not only asked the same friend not to be in the wedding party but to forgo attending the actual ceremony," Harry answered beginning to shake with outrage.

Severus arched his brow with a frown. Black had neglected to tell him that little piece of information. He contemplated it for a moment and then continued smoothly.

"Logical, but then again that is how Miss Granger thinks. Everything is black and white. In her mind there is no gray."

"What do you mean?"

"Look at it this way. She wants you to share in her day but knows that the Dark Lord will stop at nothing to harm you. He would care nothing for her or her Muggle relatives. In addition to that fact he also wants her and Mr. Weasley out of the way. Not to mention that she has already betrayed you once while under the *Imperious*. So rather than subject anyone to the danger and assuaging any suspicion of the same thing occurring again, she simply believed it would be wiser if you weren't there. She never stopped to consider your feelings. Nor, as I was led to believe, did she take the trouble to speak with young Mr. Weasley. In her desire to please her parents and alleviate their fears she didn't take the time to look at the entire situation. In other words she ignored the gray areas having to do with either of your emotions."

Almost on cue, they were suddenly aware of a door slamming up the hall. A moment later, there was a sharp knock on Harry's door. Severus looked at Harry and she shrugged. Getting up she went to see who would be calling so late.

"Ron," she gasped opening the door, "what are you doing here at this hour?"

"I'm sorry, Harry. I don't mean to disturb you mate but I need to apologize for Hermione's behavior. What she did was bloody disgraceful," he scowled angrily.

"Well come on in. It's chilly in the hall and you are probably as tired as I am." Harry swung the door wider so that he could enter. Ron stopped short when he saw Professor Snape sitting on the settee.

"Oh, sorry, I didn't realize you had company Harry. I can talk to you later."

"Do not let my presence disturb you Mr. Weasley. I was just leaving." He nodded to the younger man. "I shall speak with you tomorrow, Harry, sleep well." Snape let himself out, black robes billowing behind him.

"Does he know what happened?" Ron questioned.

"Yes. Sirius and Remus told him. I didn't mean for this fiasco to happen Ron."

"It isn't your fault, Harry. I only stopped by to tell you the wedding is off anyway," he remarked flatly. Harry could feel the hurt and anger flowing off him.

"What! Why? Ron, what is going on?"

"I was so furious with Hermione that I broke the engagement. She had no business doing what she did without even asking me," he explained bitterly.

"Ron, answer me a question."

"What is it?"

"Do you love Hermione?"

"You know I do mate. She is just so bloody mental at times."

"And you are a stupid git! Ron, don't let this keep you and Hermione apart. We'll work it out. Hermione's scared Ron. You can't blame her for that. She didn't stop to consider how either one of us would feel."

"Then why didn't she come and talk to me first?" he asked, running his hands through his thick red hair. "She should know that we would have listened to her arguments."

"She also knew you would have been just as upset as you are now. We both know that she is an only child and has trouble making friends. She's more insecure than either of us realizes."

"Maybe you're right, Harry, but what can we do now?"

"It's late. Go up to bed and get some sleep. Give Hermione time to think. I'm sure she's as upset as we are, probably more so. In the morning go and bring her some flowers or candy and tell her you're sorry for acting like a prat. Then we'll all talk about this. Just don't ruin your lives over one little incident. Marriage is about compromise, Ron, and learning how to live together."

"Umm...I guess your right Harry. Mum and dad have had some real rows over the years but they really love one another."

"I know. Now let me get some rest. It's been a stressful day for all of us."

Okay but there's one more thing. Will you talk to Remus for me? If Hermione and I can get through this I really would like him to be in our wedding."

"I'll try, Ron, but he was madder than I have ever seen him."

"I know, mate, but I know he'll listen to you." Ron clapped her on the back. Her reasoning comforted him to some degree. He only hoped Hermione would forgive his angry outburst...

Ron and Hermione were back together and snogging like nothing had ever happened by the next afternoon. Hermione was reluctant to approach Harry but did so with Ron. She still asked Harry not to be in the wedding. However, this was a source of deep hurt for Harry. She agreed but explained that she would still be unable to attend the reception. She was used to being a *persona non grata*. It had certainly happened often enough while she was in school. The Granger's were relieved that Harry would no longer attend. Unfortunately, for Ron and Hermione, Molly Weasley was not. She was furious and immediately sent a howler to Mr. and Mrs. Granger. Ginny too, stood up for Harry, told Hermione she was nothing but a selfish bitch, and refused to speak with either one of them. Remus didn't help the situation any either. He still refused to be in the wedding and planned to spend the afternoon with Harry. Phaedra was utterly confused by the whole situation while Draco laughed and taunted Hermione on being the only cowardly Gryffindor he had ever seen. Luna and Neville remained silent but both thought the whole situation was ridiculous.

As the days wore on and Valentine's Day grew closer, Harry just stayed in her room when she wasn't teaching. Even Padfoot's presence could offer her no real solace. Finally, Dumbledore called her to his office. Harry was not surprised. She headed up to see him with a heavy heart. When she exited the moving stairs Dumbledore was waiting for her.

"Come in, Harry. Would you like some tea?" he asked, indicating she should sit in one of the chairs in front of his desk.

"No thank you, Headmaster." She sat down heavily unable to meet his eyes.

Dumbledore studied his young protégé soberly. She was pale and drawn and he suspected she was barely sleeping. She looked listless and he could tell she was unhappy. Dobby had informed him that she had barely been eating. Severus and Arsinoe had also been to see him. Harry had lost all interest in her tutoring sessions. She was merely running on automatic. In all trials she had faced the only time he had ever seen her feeling so isolated and alone had been when Sirius had fallen through the veil in the Department of Mysteries. Fawkes had also sensed her mood and perched on her shoulder. He sang softly but even this seemed to have no effect.

"Child, is there anything you wish to tell me?"

"No." Her response had been immediate and totally flat.

"Would you like to talk about it?" he asked gently ignoring her negative response.

"There's nothing to talk about. I have lost my friends." Harry had no tears left to cry and merely took a deep shuddering breath. "I have been and always will be alone."

"Harry, you have never been alone," Dumbledore soothed. Inwardly he was growing more worried. Harry was giving up. "Tell me what you are feeling."

"Anger." The word had fallen from her mouth before she could stop it. "I know now what caused Tom Riddle to go dark and a part of me doesn't blame him at all. "I can understand Hermione but I expected better from Ron."

"Mr. Weasley is caught in the middle. He is in love with Miss Granger and had to choose between his best friend and the woman he wants to spend the rest of his life with."

"At least he may have a life," Harry replied bitterly, finally meeting the Headmaster's eyes. He had never seen the coldness in Harry's eyes that he saw now. It chilled him to the bone.

"Harry, you said that you knew why Tom went dark. What do you believe was the cause?"

"Loneliness and isolation. No one wanted him for himself. They only wanted his power. Therefore, he made the only intelligent choice he could make. He gave it to them. It was better than feeling the pain. That's why it makes him feel so good when he hurts others..." her voice trailed off to a whisper. Fawkes began to sing louder but seemed unable to comfort the distraught witch.

Dumbledore was growing even more disturbed. He sensed that Harry was at a crossroads. She was trying to determine whether to do the right thing or the easy thing. He had lost that battle with Tom many years ago. He did not want to lose Harry to the darkness too. Dumbledore knew she would be infinitely more powerful than the Dark Lord. Even he would be unable to stop her once she started down that path. What happened here in this office would determine her future.

"Child, you have every right to feel angry," he began carefully. "You have always been there for your friends. Indeed, you love them as if they were your own siblings. Unfortunately, siblings do not always see eye to eye."

"It hurts to know that they don't think of me the same way. I always thought they did."

"They do."

"Funny, I don't believe that. I don't believe that at all."

"Why?"

"They would never treat a blood relative so shabbily. The Weasley's are a close-knit family. Hermione is close with her parents too. I have no blood ties to either of them so therefore I am expendable. Remus is a werewolf, yet they were very unhappy when he refused to be in their wedding after Hermione asked me not to. They have more concern for his feelings than they do mine." Harry was so intent on what she was saying that she did not immediately realize that some of the Headmaster's gadgets were actually shaking on their shelves. Her hurt and anger were manifesting themselves in unintentional magic. She was losing control.

"Harry," he placed his wrinkled hand on top of hers, "what would you do if they suddenly came in here and apologized asking you to be a part of their ceremony?"

"I would say no. I wouldn't be able to believe they did so of their own choosing."

"Your empathy would tell you if they had or not," Dumbledore reasoned.

"Only if I was leaving it open to their emotions. I am quite adept at blocking the feelings of others."

"I know this. I want you to let down your guard and tell me what I am feeling right now."

Harry studied the Headmaster quizzically but did as he asked. Her lip twitched nervously.

"Headmaster, why are you so afraid of me?" she was genuinely puzzled.

"I am not afraid of you, Harry. I am afraid for you."

"I don't understand, Sir."

"You are letting yourself fall into the darkness and I don't know how to help you. You are being consumed by anger and hurt just as you tell me Tom was."

"I'm lost, Albus, and I can't find my way back. I'm not even sure if I want to."

"Harry, I want you to think about all the people in your life who love you and have stood behind you in the battle for the light then tell me what you feel."

Harry sat chewing her lip. She did as the Headmaster instructed. Images flashed through her mind. Ron and Hermione on the train going to Hogwarts with her for the first time. The troll in the girl's bathroom, the Philosopher's stone, Ginny taken into the chamber of secrets.

Remus teaching her the Patronus charm, Sirius in the Shrieking Shack, Severus belittling her in Potions...on and on the memories came. Some were good, many were frightening, but all were with people she had come to love in one form or another. Yet, she still felt hollow inside. Something was missing.

"What do you feel now, Harry?" Dumbledore asked kindly.

"Like I'm on the outside looking in," she sighed. Harry hung her head miserably. "Why can't I have someone to love?"

"But you do, Harry. All those memories..." he ventured cautiously, "were they not of the people you care the most about?"

"Yes, but why do I feel so lost and alone? I need someone to tell me they care...no...I want someone to tell me they care. I want them to shout it to the wind..." her voice trailed off.

"Ah...your greatest fear Harry. Is it not to be alone?"

"Yes..."she whispered.

"Your anger is not about being asked to drop out of the wedding. Your anger is that you feel they have left you all alone. You wanted to be in the wedding because they are a part of you and you love them. You feel as if they are closing you off and going out of your life, leaving you all alone."

Harry didn't reply. She just sat listening to Fawkes sing, gently stroking his scarlet feathers. She was vaguely aware of a cup of the Headmaster's special hot cocoa appearing on the desk in front of her. When she looked up there were tears in her eyes. Harry had thought she couldn't cry any more.

"Why don't they care any more? Why can't they trust me to be there for them?"

"They do, Harry. Hermione is afraid but it is not just fear for her parents and Ron's family. It is her fear for you. Although, I dare say she does not yet realize this. If Voldemort comes it will be for you. In her own way she is trying to protect you."

Harry reached out for the cup in front of her. She was shaking and had to grip the cup with both hands to keep it from spilling. The cocoa was hot and the scalding liquid burned her throat causing her to close her eyes. She could feel the Headmaster gently probing her mind. She didn't try to stop him. She could feel his comforting thoughts as he gently charmed her exhausted mind and body to sleep. She was unaware of the gentle flick of his hand as he levitated her to his sofa, placing the blanket over her before sitting down at his desk to think...

"Come on, Mione, or we'll be late," Ron said as he quickened his pace towards Hogsmeade.

"Ron, we still have half an hour before the train comes in with my parents."

"I know, but we also have to pick up the robes and dresses." He clasped her hand excitedly. "I'm so glad you changed your mind. Harry will be so happy and I hope Remus will agree to be in the wedding after all."

"I just couldn't break her heart like that. It was wrong of me to even suggest she drop out. You were right, Ron. I love Harry as much as you do. She must have felt as if a brick wall had fallen down on her," Hermione admitted shamefaced.

Ron knew how hard it was for Hermione to admit when she was wrong about something but he knew better than to make an issue of it.

"What time do we have to pick up the robes and dresses again?" he asked even though he knew the answer.

"Right after lunch, Circe and Professor Snape will meet us in Hogsmeade with Phaedra and Ginny. I will pick up the dresses for Harry and Luna while you pick up the robes with Draco and your brother Charlie. He said he would meet you at the twins shop in Hogsmeade. Draco and Tonks are on duty in Hogsmeade already so they'll meet us there as well."

"It's a shame Neville had to work and Remus still doesn't know that Harry will be in the wedding," Ron commented. "It's a good thing I didn't cancel his robes. Do you really think he will still agree to be a groomsman?" He really liked the werewolf and felt badly that he had dropped out of the wedding.

"Of course. He was angry because I was acting like such an idiot. He is Harry's Protector after all. Her being upset so close to the full moon compounded the whole situation. His werewolf instincts reacted to his pack member's anguish," Hermione explained logically.

"Right, how come Luna couldn't come?"

"She had a Herbology test and didn't want to make it up. I really think she wanted to spend some secret time with Neville afterwards though." Hermione grinned knowingly at Ron who laughed back.

"I still can't believe that we will be married in just two more days." Ron beamed at Hermione as they crunched through the snow towards the village.

"Actually, it will be a bit of a relief. All this planning and arguing was really getting me down. I still feel bad and I hope Harry forgives me," Hermione stated growing anxious. "What if she thinks I only changed my mind to pacify everyone and don't really want her?"

"Mione, we're talking about Harry. She loves us both and she is an empath after all. She'll be able to feel that you're being sincere."

"You know, Ron, sometimes you are really pretty smart," she teased, her mood brightening once again. Picking up some snow, she playfully slipped it down the back of his robe and took off at a run towards the village, laughing as he chased after her up the road...

Dumbledore had been working for over two hours as Harry slept on the sofa in his office. He was worried, and Fawkes had perched himself on the old man's shoulder.

"Yes, Fawkes, our little Phoenix is at a crossroads," he muttered absently stroking the bird who trilled softly in his ear. "I fear she has been so deeply wounded that her anger will cloud her judgment." He looked over at the sleeping form with a sad smile. "I have done all that I can but if she succumbs to her anger..." he was interrupted as Harry moaned softly in her

sleep. He looked up sharply, concerned that she may be dreaming. 'Could Tom have broken through her defenses?' he thought, blue eyes studying her with concern. She seemed to be getting more and more restless as another moan escaped her lips...

The dream had started out innocently enough. Harry could see her friends chatting excitedly about the wedding. At first, she had felt a stab of pain but then she realized they were talking about her. She was to be in the wedding after all! Hermione and Tonks were discussing how to surprise Harry with the news without making her feel that Hermione was only doing this to pacify all the objections and arguments. Her friend had felt guilty enough and didn't want Harry to think that this was simply a peace gesture. The small group of women was moving up the street towards the joke shop.

Professor Snape, a decidedly bored expression marking his pale features, accompanied them. He was holding his niece by the hand and had just signaled his sister, Circe, that he was taking the child over to Honeydukes. Harry knew Phaedra had probably coerced her uncle into getting her some candy.

"Ah...the child too," she muttered with a feeling of anticipation, "and the Mudblood. A cold thrill ran down her spine. It was then that she realized she was standing in an alleyway. This was no dream. She had linked with Voldemort in her sleep having forgotten to occlude her mind. He was as yet unaware of her presence. Glancing up the street she became aware of another group of people. Ron, Charlie, Draco and Mr. Granger were talking with the twins while they waited for the women. "This is my lucky day," Voldemort snorted. "I may not have the Potters but I have others she cares about." He motioned with his wand and she was aware that he had summoned some of his Death Eaters. Very subtly, he positioned them at either end of the street. He would stay in between. Looking towards Honeydukes a grotesque smile twisted his lips. "Soon, Severus...soon you will pay dearly for your betrayal. As will your uncle. The fool thinks I believed that charade about Justinian and will answer my summons when I call him later. But first I must secure my hostages." With a swift motion he stepped out into the street, wand drawn, as Snape emerged from the candy shop.

Severus had felt the mark on his arm burn. Even though he knew the summons was for others he was aware that the Dark Lord was nearby. He had told Phaedra to stay behind until he called. He drew his wand and stepped into the street.

"Severus, welcome to my party," Voldemort hissed, "nice of you to attend."

"*Expelliarmus!*" Snape shouted too late. Voldemort dodged and flicked his wand.

"*Stupefy!*" The Dark Lord grinned. The jet of red light passed to Snape's right, hitting Phaedra who had crept into the shadow of the doorway. Severus was momentarily distracted as he saw the child fall from the corner of his eye. It was all the Dark Lord needed. "*Impedimenta!*" Voldemort blasted Severus through the window of the shop. He knocked his head on the frame losing consciousness, falling with a sea of broken glass. Magical ropes shot from his wand as he quickly bound the child and her uncle. The Dark Lord then turned his attention to the group of people up the street. They were surrounded and putting up a major struggle.

Harry could see a jet of green light hit both Mr. and Mrs. Granger. Hermione screamed and dropped her wand running over to her dead parents. Draco was dueling with his father, while Tonks tripped trying to defend him against the *Avadra Kedavra*, taking the killing curse meant for him. Ron took a *Cruciatius* as he placed his body in front of Hermione. Ginny and

Charlie were battling together against a group of four Death Eaters. She could hear Charlie yelling at her and Draco to apparate for help. They did so but not before Ginny took a cutting curse to the stomach. Charlie instinctively blocked a blast of fire, meant for the twins, and fell to the ground. Circe meanwhile saw the Dark Lord levitating her unconscious brother and child and fired off a curse in his direction. It fell short and Lucius stunned her in the back. Voldemort was laughing with psychotic glee. It was then that he stopped and cocked his head. His smile grew even wider. He had detected Harry's presence in his mind.

"Enjoying the show Potter?" he taunted as she struggled to remove herself. "You have twenty four hours to come to me with your parents and Justinian. I shall send a portkey. If you fail to come alone they will all die... very... very... slowly. Especially the little one..." His poisonous laughter rang in her ears.

"NO!" Harry woke with a scream just as Dumbledore moved to her side and Tiberius stormed into the office. His eyes were wide with horror. Somehow, he too knew something had happened...

Chapter 27 - Till Death Do Us Part

Dumbledore looked from Tiberius to Harry as he rubbed the young witch's back in an attempt to calm her. She was shaking and crying, clinging to the old man in a desperate attempt to regain some semblance of control. He calmly projected a feeling of tranquility through his hands while she leaned into his embrace.

Meanwhile, Tiberius had steeled himself outwardly but Harry could sense that inside he was in a state of turmoil and fear. Her Occlumency training and Empathic senses made her realize that Tiberius was closing his mind to shut down his emotions. His face became a cool mask of detachment. When he spoke, it was with a voice of complete impassivity.

"Headmaster, we need to send help to Hogsmeade. Something has happened to my niece and nephew. I heard Circe call out to me with her telepathy for help."

"Voldemort...they were...attacked," Harry stuttered.

"Are you certain?" Dumbledore questioned as he activated his Phoenix amulet to summon the Order members.

"Yes!" The two exclaimed in unison.

"Voldemort...he...killed...Hermione's parents," Harry panted anxiously.

"All members of the Order are to apparate to the village of Hogsmeade immediately!" Dumbledore commanded through the medallion glowing around his neck. "This is an emergency!"

Even as he spoke the words, Harry had pulled herself together. Moving to open the window in his office, she transformed, flying out the window with Fawkes behind her. She saw Draco, carrying Ginny, running towards the castle. Fawkes dived down to help the injured girl while Harry flew towards the village. Remus, Sirius, Tiberius and Dumbledore were running to the castle gates to apparate. She landed in the village, transforming by the joke shop, just as they appeared in front of her in the street. A scene of devastation met Harry.

Fred was kneeling in front of his twin brother, rocking him in his arms, crying. Harry ran over to them. 'Please don't let George be dead too,' she thought, stepping past the still form of Charlie Weasley. Crouching down beside the distraught twin, she could see that George was injured but still breathing. She became aware of other members of the Order around her and a group of Aurors. Kingsley Shacklebolt gently eased George from his brother.

"We need to get him to St. Mungo's now!" he ordered.

Two Aurors that Harry didn't know immediately conjured a stretcher and apparated George to the hospital as Arthur and Molly appeared. Harry saw Molly look around and she began to scream, running to her dead son. She picked him up in her arms.

"My baby...oh Charlie...why?" she sobbed.

"He saved us Mum. He...he...took a...fire bolt meant...for me and...George," Fred cried. Arthur gently eased Molly to her feet, a look of pain and resignation marking his face.

Harry knew in that moment that this would have to end. She stood up slowly and faced her surrogate mother. She was aware of the others around her. Sirius was gently covering the still form of his cousin Tonks, placing her body on a stretcher. James and Lily were there with Remus, who placed a comforting hand on Sirius' shoulder. Dumbledore was tending to the bodies of Mr. and Mrs. Granger.

"This is my fault," Harry whispered, "I wasn't here to help them." Harry looked Molly directly in her eyes.

"No, Harry, you are not to blame," Molly replied. "Where are the others?"

"Ginny was hurt Mum, but she and Draco were able to apparate to the castle," Fred explained.

"Fawkes met them at the gates and was healing Ginny's wounds." Dumbledore's quiet voice explained comfortingly.

"He has taken all the others hostage. Voldemort has given me twenty-four hours to come to him or he plans to kill them all. He also knows about Tiberius and Justinian, but I don't know how. He wants me to bring my parents and the two of you with me," Harry said nodding towards Circe's husband and uncle. "He is sending a Portkey."

"How do you know this, Harry?" James asked soberly.

"When I was asleep in Dumbledore's office my mind wasn't occluded. I saw the whole battle through the Dark Lord's eyes. I couldn't get out before he became aware of my presence. He told me." Harry's eyes slid from one face to the other. Dumbledore's blue eyes were filled with anger at the Dark Lord. Molly, Arthur, and Fred's showed grief and worry. Tiberius's face was still masked but his blue eyes were cold with the same fury as the Headmaster's. Justinian looked as if he wanted to kill. Sirius and Remus eyes were wide with disbelief and she could sense they were going to try to argue with her. Harry shook her head at them negatively. Arsinoe was in the background just staring at Harry. Finally, she looked at James and Lily. Her mother's vibrant eyes were wet with unshed tears. Her father's soft hazel eyes had a mixture of pride and love. No words passed between them. None were necessary. It was almost time. Dumbledore quietly flicked his wand and the spell disguising their features was removed. For the first time since their arrival, Harry looked upon her parents in their true forms. No one spoke. Harry finally broke the silence. Straightening her shoulders, she lifted her chin proudly and addressed the group.

"One way or another this war will end by tomorrow but I will promise you all one thing. Whether I see another sunrise or not you can all bet that if I die I will take the son of a bitch out with me." Harry glanced at Arsinoe, sensing what was going through her mind. "I may not be able to do that transformation but I know the spell. It will have to be enough." Arsinoe nodded her understanding. Harry then addressed the Weasley's. "Molly, Arthur, get hold of Bill. I understand he is on assignment right now for the Order but he will want to be with you at St. Mungo's. I will check on Ginny when I get back to the castle. Fred, you go with them. I think George needs his other half right now," she smiled sadly. "I'll see that Ron comes home with Hermione."

"You make sure you get back too," she whispered giving Harry a hug. "I happen to know your parents would rather you stay here with us for now." Harry could see her parents nodding in affirmation.

"What will be, will be," Harry answered philosophically. "Tiberius, Headmaster, we need to plan. I will meet you back at Hogwarts." Harry didn't wait for an answer. She simply raised her wand and apparated.

As soon as she was gone, Dumbledore addressed the group standing around him.

"There will be a meeting in my office in one hour. Molly, I don't expect you to be there," he offered kindly, "but if you could spare Arthur and Bill I would appreciate their presence."

"Albus, I lost two brothers and two sons now to that monster. Another is lying in hospital near death. Anything we can do to be of service will be done," she stated grimly, some of the fire coming back into her eyes.

"Thank you, Molly."

Molly nodded in acceptance.

"Albus, I'm going to escort Molly and Fred to St. Mungo's. I will meet you shortly at Hogwarts."

"Of course, Arthur, and may I offer my sincere condolences? Charlie was a fine young man and an asset to our world. He will be sorely missed by us all." Dumbledore's blue eyes reflected his sadness.

"Thank you, Albus. Now, if you will excuse us we need to get to the hospital. I will return within the hour." Arthur Weasley gathered his wife and son, and disappeared...

As soon as Harry arrived back at Hogwarts, she headed directly to the infirmary to check on Ginny. Draco met her at the door and Harry could see Madam Pomfrey still working on her friend.

"How is she?"

"Madam Pomfrey says she'll pull through, Potter. She told us if it weren't for the Headmaster's phoenix Ginny would have bled to death before we reached the infirmary." The young wizard was clearly upset. "How about her brothers, she keeps asking if they have gotten back yet."

"Charlie was killed and George was seriously injured. His parents have taken him to St. Mungo's," Harry whispered.

"What about the Weasel? He is my partner, you know," Draco demanded but he was unable to disguise his concern.

"Draco," Harry began slowly, "Ron and Hermione were taken captive. So were Severus and his family."

"Shit!" Draco swore under his breath to keep Ginny from hearing. "Do you have any idea what the Dark Lord will do to them?" Dismayed, Draco ran his fingers through his long blond hair. Harry could see the horror reflected in his gray eyes. "He took Phaedra, too?"

"All three, but I don't believe he will harm them just yet. He is holding them for ransom."

"He wants you, doesn't he Potter?" Draco guessed shrewdly.

"Among others; he is sending a portkey in twenty-four hours. If I don't come with my parents, Tiberius, and Circe's husband, Justinian, they will all be killed."

"How do you know he hasn't killed them already, especially Granger?"

"He wants me to suffer, that's why. It would please him to make me watch while he tortures them to death," Harry spat, anger twisting her stomach, the taste of bile in her mouth.

"So what are you going to do? As members of the Order they knew the risks and were prepared to face them."

"Phaedra is not a member of the Order and you know what he will do with her!"

"He'll use her in one of his Revels and make my godfather and his sister watch," Draco stated glumly. He was clearly sickened at the thought.

"Exactly, I have to get them out of there! I just wish I knew where he's holding them."

"It could be any number of places." Draco frowned. "He usually only lets his inner circle know where to go when he calls and even then they are not always aware of his hiding places until after they have arrived at his summons."

"I know," Harry answered soberly.

Any further conversation was cut short as Madam Pomfrey stepped in their direction.

"Mr. Malfoy, Miss Potter, you may speak with Miss Weasley now. She keeps asking if there is any information about her brothers." The nurse could tell from their expressions that the news was not good and nodded her understanding.

Harry and Draco moved quietly over to the bed where Ginny was resting. She was pale and her abdomen was swathed in bandages, evidenced by a bulky mound beneath the blankets. She appeared tired and anxious.

"Harry, how are my brothers," she asked nervously. "Are they all right?"

"Ginny," Harry began slowly, taking the younger girl's hand. "Ron and Mione have been taken captive along with the Snapes."

"What about the twins and Charlie?" she gasped.

"Fred's fine but George has been taken to St. Mungo's," Harry told her softly a lump forming in her throat. Ginny swallowed hard looking from Harry to Draco.

"Charlie...he...he didn't...make it, did he?"

"I'm sorry, Gin, no. He was killed trying to protect the twins." A lone tear escaped from Harry's eye, sliding down her cheek.

Ginny sobbed softly reaching out for Draco. He wrapped his arms around her shoulders as she wept softly into his shoulder. He stroked her red hair allowing her time to adjust to her grief. Harry stood by feeling helpless and guilty. When her tears had finally been spent, Ginny looked up at Harry from the comfort of her boyfriend's arms.

"It's not your fault, Harry. Please don't feel guilty," Ginny squeezed Harry's hand in understanding. Harry hadn't realized she had still been holding it.

"I can't help it, Gin, if I had been there..."

"If you had been there, Potter, you probably would have been taken captive also," Draco interrupted before Harry could berate herself further. "Has Dumbledore got any idea of what he is going to do?"

"There will be an emergency meeting of the Order within the hour in his office. Ginny your dad and Bill will be here too and I'm sure they will want to speak with you when they get here. Fred and your mum are staying at St. Mungo's with George."

"I don't suppose there is any chance of me..."

"No, you can't come to the meeting. You know the rules. You're still in school and can't join the Order until you've finished," Harry admonished with the trace of a smile. "I promise to tell you whatever I can though. I think you have a right to know some of it at least."

"Thanks, Harry," Ginny replied laying back into the pillow and closing her eyes. Despite her bravado, Harry and Draco could tell she was in physical pain as well as attempting to deal with the loss of her brother.

"Miss Weasley needs to get some rest now," Madam Pomfrey stated approaching the bedside with a small vial of blue potion. Harry recognized it from her training as a potent painkiller. "You can both come back later on. She's had a terrible emotional shock in addition to the seriousness of her injury."

"I would prefer to stay for awhile," Draco remarked cockily. "I promise not to excite her," he added under the matron's glare.

"Very well, you may sit with her until her family arrives, Mr. Malfoy, but I expect you to let her rest. She's had more than enough for one day."

"Yes, Ma'am," Draco said giving the nurse his most charming smile.

"I will see you later, Gin," Harry told her. Leaning over she gave her friend a quick peck on the cheek. "For what it's worth you did good today."

"Thanks, Harry, but it wasn't good enough."

Harry knew that she was not referring to her injury. Ginny was thinking about her brothers. Harry left the infirmary with a heavy heart, brow creased into a thoughtful frown. She needed to plan. Like it or not she would be facing Voldemort again within a few hours and she needed to be prepared...

Voldemort was sitting on his high back chair smiling down at his followers. Potter had decimated their ranks but now he finally held the upper hand. The tide had turned in his favor.

"Today marks the beginning of our victory over Dumbledore and his Order. In a few hours, Potter will be destroyed and we shall begin cleansing our race of those who would pollute our blood and seek to destroy us. The Muggles will become our slaves to amuse us at our pleasure!" He waved his hands amid cheers from the gathering. "We must prepare now to fully insure our final victory." Voldemort's burning eyes slid over the group in front of him. "You have been given your orders. Those of you who are not of the inner circle are to go now and await my final order to attack both the Ministry of Magic and the Muggle Parliament. Once Potter is dead we shall enforce our will upon those who have for so long contaminated this earth with their vile existence." The two hundred or so Death eaters filed from the room without a word. The few who remained waited patiently for their leader to speak. "Lucius, have our guests been made comfortable for the evening?"

"Yes, My Lord. They have been secured in the cells you had me install in the basement. Their wands have been confiscated."

"Good. I shall enjoy watching Potter bargain fruitlessly for their lives."

"What of Dumbledore, My Lord?" Lucius asked brazenly.

"Dumbledore is an old fool! He grows weak with age and will not be able to withstand my assault for long. He can no longer protect Potter. It will be my pleasure to duel with him one final time to bring him to his knees."

"Is that wise, My Lord?" Nott asked from where he knelt within the circle.

"I was not aware I had spoken to you?"

"My Lord, forgive me, but I am merely your servant. I did not mean to question your judgment," Nott gulped nervously.

"See that you never do so. It is unwise to interrupt me, Nott. *Crucio!*" Voldemort pointed his wand so fast the Death eater didn't see it coming. He held the curse for a full two minutes while the man screamed in agony on the floor. "That should be a reminder to you all!" The Dark Lord glared at his minions. "Lucius, stay here. The rest of you go and secure the wards around the building." Voldemort waited until he was alone with Lucius. "Did you revive all the prisoners?"

"No, My Lord, I thought you would prefer to revive Severus yourself. The others are awake."

"Excellent," his thin lips twisted in a grimace of pleasure. "I shall enjoy playing with Severus and watching the Weasley boy while I torture his little Mudblood to secure the information I require."

"My Lord, may I make a request?"

"A request, Lucius? You intrigue me. I see a hint of desire in your mind."

"I would like to see to Draco's punishment."

"Hmm...Draco...yes. I did not include him in my little list to Potter. Perhaps that should be rectified. I see that you would dearly love a bit of sport with the youth," Voldemort remarked probing Lucius mind. "Are you certain there is no way he would be willing to join us?"

"No, My Lord, he fancy's the Weasley girl. He is nothing more than a weakling. He finds us revolting. I no longer consider Draco my son. He is as much a blood traitor as Severus."

"I shall send a message with the Portkey. He will be your reward for your faithful service to me and a warning to the others as well."

"Thank you, My Lord. The boy has been such a disappointment to me. At least I can enjoy killing him." Lucius laughed maliciously, gray eyes flashing with anticipation at the pain he planned to inflict on his son.

"Come, Lucius, let us go and see to our guests. I really ought to welcome them personally." Voldemort rose from his chair, red eyes gleaming. He swept from the room with Lucius following in his wake...

Harry went to her room to freshen up and think before the meeting of the Order. She needed to prepare for her confrontation with Voldemort. She was not afraid for herself. She was worried for her friends and Protectors. The next few days should have been happy ones; instead, they were turning into a nightmare of deaths and funerals. She prayed in her heart that there would be no more. Unfortunately, she knew this would not be the case. When she entered her sitting room, she was surprised to see a package with a note attached sitting unopened on her desk. Moody's words immediately came to mind, '*Constant Vigilance!*' Harry heeded his advice. Drawing her wand, she approached the package, muttering a few spells. Satisfied that there were no traps, she walked over and immediately recognized Hermione's handwriting on the envelope. Tearing it open, she read the brief missive.

Dear Harry,

I will be out for the morning with Ron but want you to know that I miss you and have a surprise for when I return this afternoon. In the meantime, here are the books on Wizarding Law that you requested. I had them delivered to me since no one would be suspicious as I am always reading something anyway. I took the liberty of having Dobby put them up in your room along with this note before I left. See you later.

Love,

Hermione

"Oh, Mione," she whispered sadly to herself, "if only you had spoken to me before you left about the wedding. You might be safe at Hogwarts right now and your parents would still be alive. It's all my fault for being such a prat these last few weeks."

Shaking her head, Harry refused to give in to the depression that was threatening to overtake her. She would do everything in her power to get the captives back safely. Now was not the time to break down. She picked up the package tearing the wrapping from the two books. Giving up on the idea of a shower, she sat down to read the laws regarding the Protectorship. It didn't take her long to find what she had been looking for.

"Why that conniving old stinker," Harry mused aloud, "now I know why he was always asking me those questions about how I felt. It's no wonder Sirius gave him a hard time about this. I can't wait to see Hermione's face," Harry snorted. "She will certainly have something to say about this! I wonder if Ron knows. Better yet, what in the hell am I going to do? I should have been told everything from the very beginning. It's just like Dumbledore to withhold a critical piece of information. No wonder this had to be approved by the Board of Governors."

Slamming the books shut, Harry glanced at her watch. It was almost time for the meeting of the Order. Quickly changing her robes, Harry headed up the hall towards the Headmaster's office. Her mood kept fluctuating between annoyance with Dumbledore, amusement over what Hermione would think, and dread for the safety of her loved ones...

Ginny Weasley had been resting quietly, eyes half shut, following the visit from her father and brother. Draco had excused himself when they had arrived in order to give her some quiet time with her family and get ready for the meeting of the Order. Her father and brother had been glad of the time to be alone with her. While their stay had not been long, both men had in turn reassured her that George was indeed alive, but in serious condition. She then told them what had happened in the village, recounting how they had been taken completely by surprise in the middle of the afternoon. No one seemed to know how Voldemort knew the group would be there. Tonks and Draco had just finished a second sweep of the village when the Death Eaters arrived. Her brother Bill explained that the Order was investigating and it was possible one of the shopkeepers had been an informant but no one was sure at the moment. Before they left, her father and brother promised to come back after the meeting. They would let her know if there was any further news about George.

Now that she was alone, Ginny was forming a plan in her mind. She would not just sit here while her friends and family were in danger. She knew what she had to do and it started with being present at the Meeting of the Order of the Phoenix. Madam Pomfrey had just given her a sleeping draught, but had been distracted when a second year came in complaining of stomach pains. She didn't see when Ginny quickly poured the vile out beneath her pillow and pretended to fall asleep. As soon as the nurse had finished with the student, she checked on Ginny, and left the infirmary to go to the Headmaster's office. Ginny smiled triumphantly. Ignoring the twinge of pain in her side, she slipped out of bed, took her wand from the night table securing it in her pajamas and padded to the door...

Voldemort entered the basement prison of his headquarters, Lucius Malfoy following on his heels. The Dark Lord kept to the shadows as he slid his snake like eyes over the group of people within the cells.

The Weasley boy was sitting on the floor with his arms encircling the Mudblood. Her head was resting on his shoulder, eyes staring vacantly, as tears slid down her cheeks. She was obviously in shock over the death of her Muggle parents. Voldemort smirked with pleasure.

Circe Snape was in the next cell with her young daughter. Both appeared to be aware of the Dark Lord's presence, glaring into the shadows, which concealed him. The child snuggled closer to her mother, yet she bore a look of defiance on her features, which would have made her uncles proud. Voldemort was amused by her attitude despite the unmistakable look of fear in her eyes.

Severus was in the next cell. Unlike the others, he had been chained to the wall. The silent black robed figures directed their attention towards this cell. The eyes of the other prisoners

followed their every movement. Voldemort studied the unconscious man before addressing his sister.

"Tell me, Circe, what form of punishment do you feel your brother deserves?" He cast a cold hard stare in her direction.

"You are the one who will be punished, Lord Voldemort," Circe answered coldly.

"I think not. In a few hours, the war will be over and you and all your family will be dead along with the Potters. First though I want to make sure Severus is punished slowly before I kill him."

"YOU LEAVE MY UNCLE SEV ALONE!" Phaedra screamed looking up from her mother's arms.

"Ha Ha Ha," Voldemort cackled. "The child has spirit." He turned to study Phaedra closely. His red eyes ran the length of her body, drinking in every feature. Phaedra squirmed under his intense stare. He made her feel unclean. Voldemort gave her another twisted smile. "The insolence of the Snapes is one of the things that has always annoyed me, rather like a mosquito buzzing incessantly in one's ear. You know it is there, yet you must allow it to exist until the right time."

"My Lord, would you like me to teach this obnoxious child a lesson in manners?" Lucius asked.

"Later, Lucius, I rather admire her foolish bravery and her loyalty is to be commended. If she weren't a half-blood I might even have considered keeping her with us and training her in the Dark Arts."

"You're sick, you filthy snake," Ron commented from his cell.

"Ah...the Gryffindor has finally found the courage to speak." Voldemort glared in his direction. "I would mind my manners, boy. I do not take lightly to being interrupted." Voldemort's eyes fell on Hermione. He set his thin lips into a line and pointed his wand. "*Crucio!*" Hermione screamed in agony.

"Let her go!" Ron bellowed, holding onto her tightly. "What has she ever done to you?"

"Oh...she failed to deliver Potter and attempted to resist my *Imperius* curse. It wasn't a wise move on her part. Of course I would have killed her anyway," Voldemort replied with another flick of his wand canceling the curse. "She is also an aberration of nature, Muggles producing magical children..."

"Too bad you weren't born a Squib," Ron snapped, ears red with anger, as he tried to comfort Hermione.

"You will pay dearly for that remark, young Weasley," Voldemort hissed, placing the Cruciatus curse on him. Ron screamed in torment as the Dark Lord increased the intensity of the pain. He was clearly enjoying the scene. He kept up the pain for two minutes, and Ron was barely conscious when he released him. "Come Lucius, I believe the young man has learned his lesson for the moment. Let us revive Severus..."

Ginny carefully made her way towards the staff wing using some of the secret tunnels her friends and brothers had shown her through the years. She had one narrow escape when she heard Mr. Filch talking with Mrs. Norris and had to duck into an unused classroom. Fortunately, he headed in the opposite direction. When Ginny reached the floor with the staff quarters, she quickly located Harry's room. Securing herself behind a stone gargoyle, she was just in time to see her friend charming her door with her new password. As soon as Harry disappeared up the hall, Ginny slipped from her hiding place.

"*Aenigma's Adversarius*," she muttered softly, lips twitching with amusement. 'Riddle's adversary, good one Harry,' she thought slipping into her friend's room. Ginny headed directly over to Harry's trunk. She knew from long experience that Harry kept her invisibility cloak there and hoped she hadn't lent it to Ron. Luck was with her. The cloak was folded neatly in the bottom. Quickly throwing it over her head, she slipped out of the room and headed towards Dumbledore's office. Now all she had to do was figure out the Headmaster's password. Nearing the stone gargoyles guarding his office she was elated to see Professor McGonagall just getting ready to mount the moving stairs. She slipped in behind her just as the gargoyle slid shut. Once upstairs, Ginny quickly found an empty corner near the rear of the room. Making sure the cloak was securely wrapped around her she sat down on the floor to wait...

Severus Snape immediately became aware of the pain in his wrists where the shackles secured him to the wall of his cell. He remembered being hit with a stunning curse by the Dark Lord. Instinctively he prepared himself to face the person he knew would be standing before him. As he slowly opened his dark eyes, they locked with the vehement red pair of his former master.

"Severuss," Voldemort hissed, "defiant to the end I see."

"You may kill me but at least I will have the satisfaction of knowing Potter will still bring you down," Severus replied coldly.

"Then you are a bigger fool than I thought. In a few hours the Potter girl will be mine to do with as I please and those who would seek to help her will die at my hands along with her."

"Then it seems you are a bigger fool than I am," Snape taunted, "since she will stop at nothing to bring you down even if it means her own death."

"Ah...but there you are wrong. She would never willingly sacrifice her friends and I not only have two of them in my possession but I also have this dear little child whom she adores. Do you really believe she would sit back and allow your niece to die?" Voldemort laughed coldly.

"Potter will rescue my niece and make sure she sends you back to whatever hell you managed to crawl out of," Snape replied without breaking eye contact. Without warning, he spit into Voldemort's face.

"You will pay for that, Severus. Let this be a lesson to you not to try that ever again." Voldemort flicked his wand in Phaedra's direction as Snape fought angrily at the chains that bound him. "*Crucio!*" Circe screamed in agony as her body blocked the curse meant for her daughter.

"Muuuummmmyyyy..." Phaedra screamed in terror as she watched her mother thrashing on the floor of the cell in agony. "You...leave...my mum...alone!" Phaedra gasped pulling off one of her shoes and throwing it towards the Dark Lord. He laughed as it hit the bars of their prison and he lowered his wand.

"Ah...such spirit, Severus!" Voldemort gloated in pleasure. "Tell me Little Miss Snape, would you like to play with my snake later on?" Phaedra looked at him in confusion as her uncle pulled unsuccessfully at his bonds, dark eyes livid with anger. "Don't worry, Severus, I was referring to Nagini," Voldemort pursed his lips in a twisted smile, "although now that I think of it..."

"Don't you dare lay your filthy hands on Phaedra or you won't have to worry about Harry Potter...Arrrggghhh..." Severus screamed in agony as the Dark Lord cut off his angry tirade with another Cruciatus curse.

"Enough games! Lucius, bring the Weasley boy. We have work to do!"

"Yes, My Lord." Lucius Malfoy pointed his wand at Ron, stunning him. He then kicked Hermione in the ribs and pushed her out of the way before deliberately dragging the young man from the cell scraping his back along the stone floor...

Harry glanced around Dumbledore's office as the last of the Order's members took their seats. All were present with the exception of Molly and Fred who were still at St. Mungo's with George. The mood was somber and quiet. Harry let her eyes wander among the sea of faces. Remus was worried and tired. Sirius was staring off into space, his eyes sad and lost. The remaining Weasley's were anxious. Mundungus Fletcher was unusually quiet. Old Mr. Chang's dark eyes were angry and his jaw was set. Professor McGonagall was quietly passing out tea and biscuits, her face set into its familiar stern appearance. Harry noted that her eyes were rimmed with red and suspected she had been crying. Kingsley was sitting rigidly at attention. Draco had on his perpetual scowl but his lips would occasionally twitch nervously. Mad Eye seemed to be staring over at the corner, his magical eye focused on something that no one could see. Harry's parents were sitting together, their arms around one another. Her mother's green eyes were studying her daughter sadly and her father looked at Harry with a half smile and a nod as if to say everything would be all right. Harry could not help the stab of pain in her heart. She knew it was almost time to say good-bye. Arsinoe Darkmoon was studying Harry intently, a look of concern etched into her exotic features. Justinian and Tiberius both wore mask like expressions. The rest of the group shifted nervously in their seats. Dumbledore looked at his young protégé and smiled sadly. His lines of age seemed more pronounced than ever but his blue eyes were still sharp. He rose eloquently to address the group.

"Good evening everyone and thank you all for coming on such short notice. We are faced with a grave crisis. As you all know some of our numbers were killed this afternoon and others have been taken captive by Voldemort. We are assuming that they are still alive. Harry witnessed the scene in one of her visions and we are expecting a message shortly from the Dark Lord himself. He will be sending a Portkey in order to secure the Potter family and the remainder of the Snapes."

"Surely you will not allow them to go, Albus!"

"That is what we are here to discuss, Minerva."

"Dumbledore, we're not even sure the others are still alive," Mundungus added, "it is purely conjecture on your part."

"I am considering all of the possibilities. At this point I have no concrete reason to assume that they have been killed." Dumbledore directed a fierce gaze at his fellow wizards. "We need to formulate a plan to get them back. I believe the battle is at hand..."

Harry was only half listening allowing the arguments to fade into the background of her mind. She knew what she needed to do. The pain in her scar was searing hot and growing worse as the meeting progressed. Closing her eyes, she allowed herself to slip silently into the Dark Lord's mind...

"Enervate," Harry smiled directing her wand at the still red headed man lying on the floor.

Ron moaned and opened his eyes. His head was throbbing painfully and his whole body felt as if it were on fire. His back and arms were stinging. Gazing around his eyes focused on black robes in front of him. He started in horror as he shook the confusion from his mind, trying to stand. He made it as far as his knees when he felt a set of strong hands on his shoulders holding him down.

"You do not stand in the presence of the Master," Lucius Malfoys sharp voice dictated from behind, his sharp nails digging into Ron's raw back, forcing him to remain in place.

"Voldemort," he whispered looking up. As frightened as Ron was he knew he shouldn't show any sign of weakness as he glared up into the Dark Lord's cold red eyes.

"You won't get away with this. I can't wait to see Harry kick your bloody ass!"

"Unfortunately for you that is not going to happen," the Dark Lord chuckled, "in more ways than one."

"You may kill me but that won't change the fact the Harry will stop you! When she does I hope you rot in Hell you bloody son of a bitch!" Ron yelled boldly.

Crack! The Dark Lord moved so swiftly he was like a swirling black blur, smacking Ron so hard he fell backwards into Lucius almost toppling him to the floor. Reaching down, his long white fingers picked Ron up by the throat in a vise like grip. Lifting him into the air with unnatural strength he flung the young wizard against the wall. Ron collapsed into a heap.

"Now my belligerent young Gryffindor you will know what it is like to feel the power of Lord Voldemort," the Dark Lord sneered. "You are going to aid me in the downfall of Harry Potter." Without moving, Voldemort called out sharply, "Axelrod, bring me the Mudblood!"

"Immediately, My Lord," a timid voice responded from behind the door.

"Lucius bring this foul mouthed traitor over to my desk," Voldemort commanded. "It is time we put him to our use."

"It will be my pleasure, Lord."

Lucius grabbed hold of Ron and pulled him to his feet forcing him over towards a large desk over near the hearth. Ron's eyes opened wide as he became aware of the giant snake warming itself in front of the fire. Even worse, he saw the goblet sitting atop the desk opposite the Dark Lord. Voldemort had conjured two hard chairs and Lucius forced Ron to sit, binding him securely with magical ropes. A moment later the door opened and a young Death eater, whom Ron assumed to be Axelrod, was forcing Hermione into the room. He tossed her roughly into the chair beside Ron where Lucius bound her. The other wizard then retreated from the room.

"You are aware that you will not get away with this?" Hermione questioned looking at the Dark Lord.

"*Silencio* Mudblood," Voldemort hissed with a flick of his wand. "I do not wish to hear your platitudes nor listen to your ridiculous arguments. You will not utter another sound unless I decree it." He then turned his hot red eyes on Ron. "Now my young Mr. Weasley you will do as I tell you or she will suffer for your refusal," he told Ron as he waved his hand over the goblet. It immediately flamed. "You will look into this fire and tell me what Potter is up to."

Hermione looked at Ron shaking her head negatively as she mouthed the word NO!

"I will not betray, Harry. Nor will Hermione."

"Then watch while she is made to suffer for your arrogance." Voldemort pointed his wand at Hermione casting the Cruciatus curse. She writhed in pain while Ron struggled at his bonds angrily. Voldemort merely smiled in amusement enjoying the scene. "Perhaps you will be more amenable to my suggestion if you can hear her screams?" he sneered removing the silencing charm.

Hermione's high-pitched screams wrenched at Ron's heart. 'Oh, Harry, please forgive me. I can't let her suffer like this,' he thought painfully. "Stop...stop it now!" He screamed aloud. "I'll do what you ask just leave her alone."

"Ah...I see you are now willing to cooperate. See what a little encouragement can do?"

"Ron...don't...do it," Hermione panted. "It's not...worth it. He'll..." Voldemort cut her off with a wave of his hand silencing her once more.

"Hermione...I can't let you suffer like that again," Ron replied looking into her tear filled brown eyes. She shook her head angrily, her face drenched with sweat, silently yelling at him not to do it. "She's right; you're only going to kill us anyway. If you want to know what Harry is doing so badly you will have to find out some other way. Why not just get into her head?" He questioned bravely. "Oh, I forgot, you can't do that anymore now can you? She's too strong for you now," Ron mocked him.

"Lucius, I will count to three. If he fails to cooperate you are to break the Mudblood's left leg."

"With pleasure, My Lord," Lucius smiled. He pointed his wand at Hermione's leg in anticipation.

"One...two...three."

"*Frango*," Lucius said waving his wand over Hermione's left knee. There was an audible cracking noise as she let out a silent scream. Lucius face lips twisted into a half smile of satisfaction.

"Have you been convinced yet, Weasley? I am sure my loyal servant would love to continue." Voldemort's red eyes bored into Ron while Hermione continued to shake her head no. Silent tears were streaming down her face.

Ron studied Hermione for a moment, unmistakable agony on his features. 'What would Harry do?' he considered anxiously. 'It would kill her to see Hermione in so much pain.' Ron had no idea that even now his best friend was watching the scenario play out behind the eyes of the Dark Lord all the while fighting to keep him from becoming aware of her presence. As much as it pained him, Ron mustered his courage and stared up at Lord Voldemort. His expression resolute as growled up at the powerful wizard in front of him. "I will not betray my friends you filthy piece of scum."

"Enough! You were warned Weasley. Your deaths will not come easily I assure you."

"Didn't ever think they would," Ron quipped maliciously. "If my dying will help to stop you then it will be worth it. Some things are worth dying for."

"Your arrogant display of bravado will do you no good. I promise you that you will beg me to kill you. You may not tell me willingly what I need to know but that is no matter." Voldemort smiled evilly. "I will just have to retrieve my information in another manner. *Imperio!*" Voldemort cast the Imperious curse so swiftly that Ron had been unprepared. He fought the curse as hard as he could but was unable to break free. The Dark Lord's will was too strong. "Now look into the flames and tell me what I need to know," Voldemort demanded. Ron looked into the flames...

"Harry! Harry!" A woman's voice shrieked from a long way off. "Wake up!" Strong arms were shaking her.

Harry slowly opened her eyes, to see her mother's frightened face and her father's hands gripping her shoulders. She could feel tears running down her cheeks and saw the blood dripping onto her robes. Dumbledore looked grave.

"What has happened, Harry? I assume you were in the Dark Lord's mind," the Headmaster inquired softly.

"Yes, Sir. I had to find them. I had to see what was happening."

"Are they still alive, Potter?" Mad Eye's gravelly voice questioned from across the room. His blue eye was still focused on the corner. Harry and Dumbledore followed his gaze and looked at one another. Dumbledore nodded in Harry's direction.

"Miss Weasley due come out from under the cloak," Dumbledore directed firmly.

"Ginny!" Arthur and Bill gasped at the same time

"What are you doing here young lady?" Arthur demanded angrily. "You should be resting in the infirmary and are too young to be at this meeting."

"I am not a baby, Dad. Charlie died today and George is hurt. I have every right to try and find out what is going on," Ginny shrieked back, sounding very much like Molly.

"Arthur, calm down. Ginny has been here since the meeting started. Alastor and Harry were both aware of her presence as was I."

"Albus, why on earth did you allow her to stay?" Bill asked dumbfounded.

"She has every right to be here. She may be your little sister, Bill, but she is of age and has been more than a friend to me. Ginny is a very powerful witch in her own right," Harry stated calmly. "In any case she would have joined the Order in four months anyway."

"Potter is right. If any of us had thought otherwise we would have thrown her out immediately," Alastor Moody commented.

"Molly will have all our hides for this," Arthur remarked helping Ginny up from the floor.

She sat down next to Bill who had the forethought to transform her pajamas into a set of robes. Mad as he was at his baby sister, he winked playfully.

"Thanks, Bill," she flushed, lowering her eyes momentarily before looking over at Harry. "Harry...your tears...they're bloody. Ron...did he..."

"Yes, Gin, but he didn't do so willingly. Voldemort had to use the Imperius on him."

"Ron's alive?" Arthur asked his face filling with hope.

"Yes, so is Hermione but he has been torturing them with the Cruciatus. I didn't see Severus or the others though but I got the impression that they are alive too," Harry explained.

"Harry, why were your tears filled with blood?" Lily asked waving her wand to clean the blood from her daughter's face and robes.

"Mr. Weasley used the Goblet," Ollivander's raspy voice stated from the back of the room. His silver eyes rested on Harry's face for confirmation.

"Not willingly. He was under the Imperious," Harry answered. "Ron is now blind." Everyone gasped. She then proceeded to tell everything she had seen through the Dark Lord's eyes. The room was silent for a few minutes as they all digested the information.

"So what do we do now? Are you sure you don't know where they are?" Kingsley questioned frowning.

"I think they were in a farmhouse but I don't know where. I only saw the one room."

"How many Deathaters did you see?"

"Only Lucius and one I didn't know. I think his name was Axelrod. He couldn't have been much older than I am."

"Well there's our answer to how the Dark Lord attacked. Stan Axelrod owns the dress shop in Hogsmeade. His son has always been a bit of a hothead and in trouble with the law."

"Yes, young Gregory was always getting into trouble in school. His father finally pulled him out and sent him to Durmstrang," Dumbledore remarked.

"I will have my team of Aurors look into this as soon as the meeting is over," Kingsley assured them.

"Headmaster, how come I don't know of him?"

"He was a number of years ahead of you, Harry. I believe he was in his seventh year when you started."

"I suppose he was in Slytherin," Ginny commented with a sneer.

"No Miss Weasley, he was not. He was a Hufflepuff."

"Just shows you should never take anything at face value," Neville snorted. "He is obviously loyal."

"We need to make some plans. I am open to suggestions." Dumbledore dismissed the subject and looked about the room.

"I have an idea but it is very dangerous," Harry stated flatly. "It will also involve Ginny."

"Absolutely Not!" Bill exclaimed.

"Shut up, Bill. You seem to forget that I am of age and capable of making up my mind."

"I agree with your brother, Ginny. You should not be involved. What the hell are you thinking, Potter?" Draco demanded furiously.

"I am thinking that I need a strong witch who can back me up. I think this should be Ginny's choice along with the Headmaster's approval."

"I think as her father I should be allowed to have some say in this situation."

"I agree, Arthur," Dumbledore stated over ruling Harry. "First though I wish to hear this plan."

As Dumbledore finished speaking, a large black raven was tapping at the window. He nodded to Bill to let the bird in. Arthur attempted to grab the bird but it flew up to the ceiling and dropped a letter on Dumbledore's desk before disappearing back the way he came. Waving his wand over the letter to satisfy everyone that there was no present danger Dumbledore opened the missive. He scanned it first, frowning, then read it aloud.

Dumbledore,

I have some people in my possession of whom you are well aware. I assure you that they are presently alive but should you fail to follow my instructions they will be killed. You are to

have the Potters, Justinian and Tiberius Snape, along with Draco Malfoy sent to me by noon tomorrow. Should you fail to do so my guests will be killed and other reprisals will occur. This letter will act as a Portkey at precisely noon and will bring them to my location. I warn you that should you try to defy me the consequences will not be pleasant.

Voldemort

"I knew my father wouldn't forget about me," Draco remarked grimly.

"It is a rather new development," Dumbledore agreed. "What is your feeling about this Draco?"

"He wants to kill me himself," the former Slytherin remarked arching his brow cockily, "Too bad for him that I plan on getting to him first."

"I must remind you Draco that in his present form he cannot be killed in the usual manner."

"I can disable him for Potter though, can't I?"

"Then you are willing to face what may come?"

"Without a doubt, Headmaster, Lucius murdered my mother and took out his sadistic delights on me since I could walk. He is almost as bad as his master," Draco snarled, clenching his fists. "I may believe in the separation of our worlds but not at the expense of the lives of others. They're no longer human and I am quite sure that Voldemort himself is long beyond sanity."

"Why, Draco, there's hope for you yet. Now all you have to do is get past the blood purity thing," Harry sneered back at him.

"Not gonna happen, Potter."

"I might remind you that if you marry Ginny your sister in law will be a Muggle born and I myself am a half-blood."

"And I have no need to remind you that the Dark Lord is a half-blood. It doesn't seem justified that either of you has more power than those of us who were born wizards for generations."

"Maybe that is the problem, Draco. Maybe you are actually losing your magic slowly because it is being cancelled out genetically. You may all be killing your own race without even knowing it. The gene pool is growing too small."

"That will be quite enough!" Dumbledore's angry voice interrupted their philosophical argument. "Such talk is entirely debatable. We have more urgent needs at the moment!"

"I apologize, Albus," Harry stated cowed while Draco nodded in confirmation.

"I for one wish to hear Harry's plan," Arsinoe spoke softly.

"Yeah, Harry, what do you have in mind?" Neville questioned. "You know I will be right with you whatever it is."

"Thanks, Neville but you will be with the rest of the Order on this one." Harry took a deep breath and looked around. "The plan is simple, although it will now include Draco, which will actually be a benefit with Ginny there."

"I still don't believe Miss Weasley should become involved in this," Professor McGonagall stated, lips drawn into a thin line.

"Neither do I." Molly Weasley had come in unobserved by Harry and had been listening quietly from the door.

"Mum! I want to help."

"Ginny dear, you're too young. Everyone should have known better than to let you in to this meeting!" Molly's eyes reflected her anger.

"Well I'm here and I am going to stay!" Ginny stood up, placing her hands on her hips, chin raised in defiance.

"Molly...please...let me tell everyone my idea. I won't deny that it is dangerous but it may be the only hope for Ron and the others," Harry pleaded.

"All right, Harry dear, but I can guarantee I will not be happy."

"Okay. First of all those of us that Voldemort has specifically targeted will need to go in as a team. He will probably disarm us immediately but we can also carry extra wands hidden in our robes. We will also need emergency Portkeys."

"What about the wards? You really don't believe that his headquarters is unprotected," Justinian asked.

"Humph...we should be so lucky," Draco snipped.

"That will be Tiberius' job. He may not know the exact location but can I safely assume you know most of the wards he has in place?" Harry looked inquiringly at the wizard.

"I do. It will not be easy to bring them down. We may also find ourselves in a situation where we will be unable to do so."

"I have taken that into consideration. Headmaster, do you have any kind of magical tracking device which may give the Order of at least a general idea of where we are?"

"Hmm...There is one but it will not function through the wards."

"Would it be able to track us once the Portkey has activated?"

"Yes to a certain extent but once you are inside the wards it will be useless."

"What kind of radius will you have before you lose contact?"

"Ten miles in all directions," Dumbledore replied. His expression was unreadable.

"Kingsley, do we have enough Aurors to form a grid and work in from all directions once contact is lost?" Harry questioned.

"We're pressed pretty thin right now but if it means we are able to get to Voldemort I can pull some off other assignments."

"Then do it," Moody interjected. "I think I know what the girl is leading up to."

"Thanks, Mad-Eye, but let me finish. Ginny you are the only other person in this room other than me who has been possessed by Voldemort. Do you think you would be able to stand up to him for a little while disguised as me?"

"So long as he doesn't use Legilimency we should be fine."

"Tiberius do we have any Polyjuice?"

"Yes. I believe you will need it for Miss Weasley?"

"No! No! No!" Molly yelled angrily. "You can't send my little girl in there Harry. It is too dangerous."

"Molly, I will be there too as will Draco and the rest. I know this is not a good situation but it is the best I can come up with. At least this way the others have a chance. If we fail to use that Portkey they will be killed without question."

"Harry, where will you be?" Ginny queried.

"Ginny, you know I'm an animagus."

"Yes, but a Phoenix will be noticed immediately."

"Gin, what you and most of the Order don't know is that I am a Multiplico. I have another form, courtesy of the Dark Lord. Arsinoe thinks that I may also have a third if I can combine the two. I will let her explain later but for now..." Harry transformed into her green serpent and slithered over to Tiberius amid gasps of amazement.

"Nice one, Potter," Draco drawled. "There may be hope for you yet too," he said as she turned back to herself.

"So how will you get in though?" James looked at his daughter with interest.

"I'll just wrap myself around one of your waists and hang on tight. I can remain hidden beneath someone's robes until the coast is clear. The snake will have the advantage of moving through narrow places and being able to hide near the floor as well as climb. If need be I can use the Phoenix form too once we're inside. I have the feeling if Fawkes is close enough he may be able to find me too." As if to confirm her suspicions, the beautiful red bird flew onto her shoulder and began to make pleasant trilling sounds.

"You're quite right, Harry. He may just be able to sense you in Phoenix form and lead us to all of you even faster."

"What happens once we're inside?" James questioned.

"That's the hardest part. I will have to try to free everyone. It might be best if I carry all the extra wands too. They will transform along with me so it shouldn't be a problem."

"Harry," Sirius spoke for the first time, "Moony and I don't like this. As your Protectors we I should be with you."

"No, Sirius. I understand that you feel you should come along but I will need you to help in the search. You can scent any people who may be nearby in your animagus form and Moony has his heightened werewolf senses and speed even if it isn't a full moon. Besides, he's really good with dark charms and will be needed to help Dumbledore and Bill bring down the rest of the wards. Severus is on the inside and I have no doubt that unless he is totally incapacitated he will follow his duties to the limit."

"I still don't like it," Sirius pouted, Remus nodding in agreement.

"Neither do I," Molly agreed. "It is entirely too dangerous."

"Mum, we have no other choice. Ron and Mione will be killed," Ginny pleaded.

"You might too. Arthur...Bill...try and talk some sense into her!"

"Gin, I don't want to lose either of them either and I know Mum and Dad don't too but this is a really dangerous idea. Unfortunately, it happens to be a good one." Bill looked between his sister and parents. He was torn between his family and his duty to the Order.

"I suggest we vote on the matter," Dumbledore stated calmly. "All those in favor?" The hands rose slowly and Dumbledore counted them silently. "All those opposed?" Several hands went up, including Molly and Arthur. Bill abstained. "It seems we have a tie. Bill you are the deciding vote." Bill Weasley shifted uncomfortably in his chair before looking at Dumbledore.

"Will my sister have an emergency Portkey to get out of there?"

"They all will Bill, but I cannot confirm that they will work inside of Voldemort's wards."

"I see." He frowned rubbing his face. "Ginny you aren't a member of the Order so you couldn't vote and you're as stubborn as Mum." He smiled at his little sister. "We always think of you as a little girl even though you aren't any more. Do you want to do this thing? You could be killed."

"I know that, Bill, but if it will save other lives than it would be worth it. I can't leave Ron and the others in the hands of that madman. I remember what it was like all those years ago. He's evil, Bill, and he has to be stopped."

"All right then," Bill Weasley looked at his parents, straightening his shoulders, "I vote in favor."

"The motion is passed," Dumbledore announced.

The room immediately erupted into a sea of voices. Molly Weasley started to cry unabashedly and Harry saw her mother go over and put her arms around the distraught woman. Harry just sat there, face set, knowing she had made one of those decisions which would affect all their lives. Dumbledore had told her that it would never be easy and it wasn't. She looked up to see him studying her along with Mr. Chang. The old Chinese gentleman nodded and Harry could see the pain in Dumbledore's eyes. She knew this was the only way. She also knew that it was unlikely they would all come out of this alive...

Chapter 28 - Into the Serpent's Lair

Harry had a fitful night following the meeting of the Order. She kept Voldemort out of her dreams but was aware of the increasing pain in her scar. She had made the only decision possible knowing it was going to cost lives. Dumbledore was gradually passing the torch of leadership onto her. Harry could only hope that she was worthy of such an honor. The outcome of the war would be the deciding factor.

The sun was just rising when Harry got out of bed and headed to the shower. The hot water helped her to relax the taught muscles in her body, giving her time to think about what lay ahead. It would be difficult to free the hostages but not impossible. She knew they were still alive. She just didn't know how badly they had been tortured during the night and she knew some of them had been tortured. The only one who had not been harmed had been Phaedra. Harry had been able to sense the little girl calling to her in her dreams. She was terrified but being very brave and Harry knew she had been crying over her mother. 'Don't worry, baby, I'm coming,' she thought as she climbed out of the shower. Dressing in a pair of black jeans and shirt, she pulled on a robe and her sneakers. Harry preferred to fight in Muggle clothing. For some reason she felt more vulnerable in her robes.

Harry wasn't hungry but knew she should eat something. She would need her strength. She decided to take her meal in her room wanting to think for a while longer. Sitting down on the settee in front of the fireplace, she watched the flames for a moment then rang for Dobby. He popped in with a loud crack.

"Harry Potter, Dobby is wanting to help. What can Dobby do for you this morning?" His big green eyes were worried and his ears were hanging flat to his head.

"First you can get us both something to eat for breakfast. I want to talk to you, Dobby."

"Harry Potter wants to have breakfast with Dobby?"

"Is that a problem, Dobby?"

"Dobby will be honored to have breakfast with such a famous witch. Dobby is just surprised that Harry Potter would want to be with him this morning of all mornings."

"That is exactly why I wish to be with you Dobby. You are my friend. Right now I could use your company." The elf blushed and lowered his head bashfully.

"Surely Harry Potter would rather be with her other friends or family? They are worried about her."

"I know. That is another reason I want to be with you right now."

"But Dobby is worried too!" he exclaimed wide-eyed, flapping his ears.

"Dobby, sometimes a person needs to speak with someone who is not a wizard for advice. You see things differently than they do. I would be very happy if you would stay and eat with me and we can talk."

"Dobby will get us our breakfast," he answered with a low bow. "Dobby will return shortly." He popped out returning two minutes later and snapped his fingers. A tray laden with all of Harry's favorite breakfast items appeared on the table.

"I see you are planning on stuffing my stomach this morning." Harry half smiled at the elf.

"Harry Potter must keep up her strength to face He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named."

"His name is Voldemort and he was born Tom Marvolo Riddle. He is nothing more than a powerful wizard and a coward," she said calmly spearing a sausage.

"Ooohhh...Harry Potter is indeed brave to say such things."

"I am only speaking the truth, Dobby, and you know it. Now here," she remarked spooning some eggs onto a small plate, "eat some breakfast or I will be very upset."

"Harry Potter is generous to a fault. To think about Dobby at a time like this," the elf replied flustered.

"Yes...well...I want my friends to be happy and you are my friend."

Dobby merely smiled and tried to hide behind his ears in embarrassment doing as Harry asked. They ate in silence for a little while. Harry was glad for his quiet presence. Once they had finished Harry solemnly poured them each a cup of hot chocolate studying the house elf shrewdly. He looked up at her in contemplation before he spoke.

"Harry Potter wishes to speak with Dobby about something she wishes to be kept a secret." It was not a question.

"Yes, Dobby, I don't know how you know this but you do."

"House elves is made to know when their masters want them to be discreet."

"I am not your mistress," she corrected gently, "nor would I ever wish to be. I am your friend and confidant and that is why I have asked you to be here."

"Harry Potter is very modest. Dobby did not wish to offend her."

"None was taken, Dobby. I need your help with a few things and I know you would do almost anything for me short of murder. Even then I'm not too sure you wouldn't go that far." Dobby merely glanced down without answering as Harry continued. "I want you to hold this for me." She pulled an envelope from her pocket. "It is my will."

"Harry Potter will not die!" Dobby exclaimed leaping up from his chair.

"Dobby calm down. I hope that I will be back and you can return that envelope to me in person. I need to make sure it's kept in safe hands in the event of my death. I will shortly be walking into a trap and need to know that if I don't come back my friends will have the means to escape to safety and regroup."

"Dobby understands," the elf sobbed.

"Good." She smiled wanly patting him on the head. "Last time I gave it to Dumbledore for safe keeping but he too will be fighting and is growing old. I am worried about his safety." The elf nodded in understanding. Dumbledore was an old man and as with all wizards and witches, their powers weakened with advancing age. The war was taking its toll on him and Dobby knew that Dumbledore might not survive. "Now listen to me Dobby. I want you to see that if I don't make it back that this envelope gets into the right hands. I trust your judgment to know who should receive it. I know you will know who can be trusted. House elves know more about what is going on in the wizarding world than most wizards and witches do."

"Dobby will do as Harry Potter wishes."

"I know you will Dobby. Now I have a few more things I need from you. First off, tell me about Draco. Will he be able to resist his father?"

"Young Mr. Malfoy was cruelly used by his father but Dobby thinks he will be able to stay true to the light."

"Now tell me anything you can about Lucius. I know he is a Death eater as well as having been brought back by the Dark Lord. Does he have any kind of weakness I can play on?"

"He is evil, Harry Potter. He cares nothing for the needs of others. He thinks only of himself and his power."

"He has no weaknesses then?" Dobby shifted uncomfortably at her question. "Please Dobby, this is important. You need not fear him. He is no longer your master."

"Dobby knows this...but...it is...difficult."

"I promise it can only help our cause, Dobby," Harry told him dropping down onto her knees to look him directly in the eyes.

"He...fears...becoming like...his...father."

"Like his father? I don't understand."

"He...had...a stroke. He was...unable to...move. All he could do was talk."

"I see. He fears being incapacitated. Hmm...That may be useful in trying to contain him but I'm not sure how just yet. Does Draco know this?"

"No. He was just a baby when his grandfather died."

"Dobby how did the senior Malfoy die?"

"Dobby cannot say for sure, Miss Harry, but the last person with him was Draco's father. He claimed he found him dead in his bed."

"Okay, I understand, Dobby." The elf nodded. It was clear to Harry that Lucius had most likely killed his father. "Now I have one other thing I need you to do for me."

"Anything, Harry Potter."

"If Lord Voldemort should win and I die I want you to convince the house elves to take the hats that Hermione gave them. Ask them to help the students and teachers get to safety."

"Harry Potter! That is impossible. The other elves does not wish to be freed!"

"You must convince them, Dobby. Tell them that Harry Potter asked them to do this. Tell them that they can bind themselves to good witches and wizards later on to help stop the tyranny, which will follow. The Dark Lord will not consider them worth his time and make them do awful things. He will kill many of them just for his own pleasure. Voldemort considers them beneath him."

"Dobby will try," he whined nervously.

"Don't try, Dobby, do it! Take a stand. Tell them to stand up for what is right. If they wish to be bound let them at least be with people who will treat them properly."

"Harry Potter is wise and noble. Dobby will convince them!"

"Thank you, Dobby." Harry wiped a tear from his cheek. "I don't know about wise and noble so much as just wanting to get the elves and students to safety. We both know that if we fail today he will be coming here. None of you should have to suffer for my failure."

"Now it is Dobby's turn to convince Harry Potter. You will not fail. You are the most powerful witch of the age. You are even more powerful than Dumbledore but you do not yet recognize that fact. Dobby knows you will be coming back in triumph!"

"I hope so, Dobby...I hope so..." Harry's voice faded worriedly. "Ahem," she cleared her voice to prevent a sob. "Can you tell me where my parents are at the moment?"

"They spent the night in with Professors Lupin and Black. They is all very worried about Harry Potter. Professor Black is feeling very sad knowing that if Harry Potter is able to do the spell to send the Dark Lord away his friends will go too."

"I expected that, Dobby. I'm sad too but they do not belong here."

"Dobby knows this and so does Professor Black but he is still unhappy."

"Then we will just have to do our best to see that he gets through all this. I want you to be sure that he and Professor Lupin are taken care of if I do not come back." Dobby opened his mouth to protest but Harry silenced him with a wave of her hand. "Now I would like it if you would send my parents in to see me before it is time to go."

"Dobby will send them, Miss."

"Thank you, Dobby. There is one more thing I want to give you."

"What is that, Harry Potter? You have given Dobby so much already."

"Just this," Harry grinned pulling the elf into a hug and kissing him on the forehead. "I love you, Dobby. Thank you for being my friend and for being there for me when I really needed it."

"Harry Potter is indeed the greatest witch who ever lived. Dobby loves you too," he sobbed. Snapping his fingers, he disappeared to carry out his instructions.

Harry glanced at her clock to check the time. Her scar was prickling and her stomach was tied in knots. She settled herself back on the couch drinking the rest of her cocoa contemplating what to say to her parents and what she might be facing in the hours ahead. She knew it would not be pleasant. Harry was running through the spell to defeat the Dark Lord in her mind. 'Maybe I'll get lucky for once and just be able to get in and say the spell to take the nasty gits out without any problems,' she mused. 'That would really be something but somehow I know there will be a welcoming committee when we arrive,' she grunted to herself with a frown as a knock came on her door.

"Enter," she called.

Her mother and father came in and she waved them over to the chairs by the fire. They sat down facing her. She studied them seriously. Her father's soft hazel eyes were thoughtful as he ran a hand through his messy black hair making it stand up. Harry knew the gesture well. She had used it often enough herself when she was in a difficult situation. He cast her a half smile. Her mother was looking at her nervously. Her emerald eyes reflecting the worry and anxiety only a mother could feel for her child. She casually slipped her hand into that of her husband.

"You wanted to see us?" James questioned.

"Uh huh," Harry responded suddenly feeling tongue-tied.

"Harry," Lily began slowly, "has something else happened?"

"What...Oh no...I just wanted a word with you both in private before we have to leave," Harry stated briskly. Her voice sounded shrill to her ears and her heart was pounding so hard she thought they must be able to hear it. Getting up she paced nervously for a minute. Harry unconsciously ran her hands through her hair just as her father had done a few moments before. James Potter chuckled in amusement as Harry realized she had repeated his nervous gesture.

"Seems to run in the family," he teased gently.

"Seems that way," she flushed sitting back down. "Look I know this hasn't been easy on any of us but I need to say a few things to both of you."

"What is troubling you, Harry?" Lily asked softly. Her identical green eyes locked with those of her daughter.

"I only wanted to say I'm sorry." James opened his mouth to speak but Harry put up her hand to silence him. "Please let me finish. I have been a prat and acting like a silly little girl. I think you both know that I did it deliberately because I knew this day would come. I really wasn't ready to face it. I always felt cheated that I grew up without the two of you. I don't know how many times I would wonder what our lives would have been like if you hadn't sacrificed yourselves for me or if Voldemort had never existed. I used to picture us all together and imagine having brothers and sisters to play with." Harry took a deep breath and plunged on. "You have no idea how many times I was jealous of my friends for having what I did not.

They had families who cared and I had a vault full of gold. It pissed me off that Ron would complain about being poor. He wasn't the one who was poor it was me. You have no idea how angry I was that night in Godric's Hollow after I was sent back in time. I couldn't understand why you wouldn't listen to me and get out. I knew you were aware of the prophecies." Harry's voice was shaking and her hands were clenched into fists.

"Harry we..."

"Dad, please don't interrupt. I have to get this out and I don't have much time left to do it." James Potter nodded solemnly allowing Harry to continue. "I kept thinking how could they do this to me? It wasn't just me either. I didn't understand how you could leave Padfoot and Moony to suffer the way they did. You had all the clues and I told you enough so that you understood without me giving away any secrets but you continued on the same path. It took me a long time to truly accept that it was the only thing you could do. Then, wham! You were brought back to me again! I wanted to stop it from happening. I actually tried to get there in time to stop it. You see I knew that if Voldemort succeeded I would have to face all my feelings again. I would have to admit to myself that what you did was right and that I was being selfish. I couldn't pretend any longer that I was the one who was poor and not my friends. I couldn't keep telling myself that all I had was a vault full of gold and that no one ever cared. The fact of the matter is you cared more for me than most parents. You were willing to die for me and not just to stop Voldemort. Your principles allowed you to make the ultimate sacrifice for me so that I could have a life and maybe not have to live in fear. You wanted me to go on..." Harry's voice trailed off. She sat staring into the fire. She looked up when she felt a weight come down on the sofa beside her as a gentle hand was placed around her shoulders.

"Harry, you weren't being a prat," her father's soft voice comforted. "You were reacting like a human being. One who has been hurt and lonely for a long time."

"All you wanted was to be with us and you knew that was impossible." Lily smiled sadly. "We were always there for you but there was no way you could know that. To you our presence was merely the platitudes that everyone states about someone who has died."

"But don't you see? I was being a prat. I knew I would have to send you back and I didn't want to face the reality of the situation! I pushed you both away deliberately instead of taking the time to be with you like I should have. I could have had everything that I ever wanted even if it was only for a short while and I just threw it away!" Tears were streaming down Harry's cheeks.

"Harry you didn't throw it away. You did exactly what you had to do and we wouldn't have had it any other way. You were smart to try not to get too close to either of us. You knew that you would have to send us back because it's the right thing to do but not the easy thing," James remarked.

"You didn't really push us away, Harry. Didn't you play Quidditch with your father and dance with him at the ball? You wore the dress for me and we both have seen you transform. Then at Christmas you sent us the best gift we could ever have received." Lily looked at Harry her eyes moist. "You gave us all happy memories to keep and managed to keep focused on what you need to do at the same time. So stop berating yourself," Lily admonished, smoothing the hair from Harry's forehead revealing the lightening bolt scar, which was an angry red hue.

"Voldemort is happy right now. The scar changes sometimes with his moods," Harry explained noting her mother's look of consternation.

"Is it very painful?" James asked.

"Sometimes," she shrugged, "but I've grown rather accustomed to the different sensations but I didn't ask to see you to talk about Voldemort," Harry dismissed the subject. "I wanted to spend a little while together just to get those things off my chest and to tell you that I love you."

"You'll get through this, Harry," James said hugging her, "after all you are a Potter." He grinned down at her mischievously.

"Humph, after living with my sister and her family standing up to Voldemort must seem like a piece of cake," Lily teased. Her emerald eyes were dancing with laughter displaying her sense of humor.

"You might say it's been a toss up," Harry laughed her mood brightening. "How are Moony and Padfoot doing?"

"They're prepared as much as they can be," her father stated hazel eyes sad. "You'll need to take care of them for us when this is over."

"We'll take care of one another. It helps to grieve together."

"You know we'll help to try and get Severus out alive too, don't you?" he asked.

"I never thought otherwise."

"Harry, I want you to understand that we were just stupid teenagers and what we did to Snape..."

"Dad, I understand. I think Severus does now too. Besides, he wasn't always the innocent victim. He'll grieve too in his own way."

"I think he'll be sorry that he and your father never really took the time to get to know one another. They let their childish antics get so out of hand that it turned them against one another. They lost sight of what each was really like underneath."

"I think he already understands that, Mum, but we can't change the past. He'll have to look forward. He and Sirius have already made a good deal of progress and I know he doesn't blame Remus for almost killing him. Underneath it all Severus is a good man. He just let his anger and frustrations get in the way at the wrong time."

"Are you in love with him?" James inquired curiously.

"Dad, I have three Protectors and I think you know what that means," Harry replied noncommittally.

"So you found out?" Lily demanded.

"Yes," Harry answered nodding towards the books on her desk, "but I haven't yet decided what to do about it." She grinned wickedly at the doubtful look on her mother's face.

"I see it doesn't bother you at all." James tried to hide his smile.

"I must admit it is different but I hope to have the time to figure it all out."

"Well I disagree with the whole notion." Lily shook her head vigorously, red hair flying. "However I am going to try and keep an open mind." Harry and her father laughed at Lily in amusement. "Whatever you decide though it has our blessing," she said hugging her daughter.

They spent the next hour together until it was almost twelve. Harry was happy and warm inside and knew that if she survived this confrontation she would not see them again for a long time. She was grateful for this time they had together. She could now see them as real people with feelings, hopes, and dreams that had been cut too short...

The small group had assembled in Dumbledore's office to await the countdown that would activate the Portkey. No one was talking much and all seemed to be prepared to face whatever ordeal lay ahead. Harry had taken both of her wands. Her father had been impressed with the one she had been awarded at her graduation. He told her it would be like carrying him with her into battle. She also knew he was rather pleased that his stag was her Patronus.

Draco and Ginny were standing together. Tiberius had brought the Polyjuice up with him. Ginny would drink it ten minutes prior to leaving and had already dressed in some of Harry's robes. Mr. Ollivander had also provided her with another wand made of holly to duplicate Harry's. The only difference was that the core was made of unicorn tail.

Justinian kept looking at the picture he carried of Circe and Phaedra. Harry could sense his deep pain and his feelings of loss. He had only just been reunited with them. Now he feared he would lose them once again. Tiberius Snape reminded Harry of Severus. He said little, standing stiff and tall, watching the others while gauging their abilities and weaknesses.

Sirius and Remus were there as well to help Dumbledore begin the tracking process once the Portkey activated. The others members of the Order and some of the Aurors were situated either on the grounds or in Hogsmeade. As soon as Dumbledore could establish a search grid, they would all apparate to the location in an effort to find Voldemort's headquarters.

"Attention everyone," Dumbledore addressed them all. "It is time for Miss Weasley to take the Polyjuice." He nodded to Tiberius who handed her the vial. "Are you most certain you wish to do this, Ginny?" The headmaster looked at the teen his blue eyes serious.

"Yes, Sir," she replied swallowing the vial in one gulp. She was unable to hide her grimace from the foul taste and the others couldn't help but snicker. The transformation only took a minute and she looked up at Harry with a grin.

"Here, Gin, I think you'll need these," Harry remarked handing her a pair of her glasses.

"Just promise me you won't get too used to looking like Potter," Draco drawled. "I much prefer redheads." Ginny punched him affectionately on the arm.

"Harry, please be careful. Are you sure we shouldn't try and come too?" Sirius questioned with his puppy eyes.

"No, you can't. So knock off giving me those eyes. I need you to help us get out." Harry kissed him gently on the cheek. "Just bark if you can when you get close. I can use it as a signal to try and create a diversion."

"I could let out a good howl," Moony grinned.

"You two are impossible." She winked at the werewolf.

"Seriously Princess, this is no game. Do whatever you must but make sure you get out of there in one piece."

"Remus, if I don't you have my permission to go after them all on the next full moon, although Voldemort might just give you food poisoning."

"Harry that is not funny," the werewolf admonished with a frown.

"No, but practical," Sirius agreed.

They both hugged her tightly before she let them go and stepped back. A moment later, her large green snake was slithering over the floor towards Tiberius. Being the tallest, it was felt that she could secure herself beneath his robes with the least amount of discomfort for them both. She deftly climbed up his long leg and wrapped the top of her body around his waist, coiling the rest along his leg. Once she was secured Tiberius spoke.

"We are ready, Albus."

"Very well, take hold of the letter, and good luck. James, Lily, it was good to see you and be able to say goodbye."

"You too," Lily responded with a smile as her husband shook his head in agreement shaking Dumbledore's hand.

Gathering around Dumbledore's desk their six fingers rested on the letter from the Dark Lord. Dumbledore counted down. "Six, five, four, three, two one..."

Severus had been tortured intermittently through out the night with the Cruciatus along with numerous floggings and cutting curses. His arms ached from hanging in the chains and his wrists were raw. It had been a relief when he had finally succumbed to the pain and passed out about sunrise. He had made sure to keep them occupied as long as possible. Phaedra would be too much of a temptation to them.

Circe had believed this too, making sure to keep herself between the Deathaters and her child. The Dark Lord however, had contented himself with putting her to the Cruciatus during her brother's floggings. Voldemort had taken delight in telling her his plans for Phaedra. He planned to use her in one of his revels and would thoroughly enjoy deflowering and torturing her himself while her family watched. Circe prayed that Harry would come. She could not bear the thought that her little girl would be subjected to such debauchery. In the mean time,

she would be left unharmed while she watched the torture he inflicted on the adults. Voldemort liked her spirit as she yelled at him to, *'Stop hurting them!'*

The Deathaters had also enjoyed making Ron run blind in his cell while they used him for target practice. It amused them when the Mudblood Granger had tried to block their curses from hitting him with her own body. Finally, they had stopped their sordid games around sunrise. The Dark Lord wanted them fresh for when Potter and the others arrived.

Severus was exhausted from the repeated curses and floggings he had been subjected to, wanting nothing more than to close his eyes and let the oblivion of unconsciousness overtake him again. However, he refused to give in to the temptation. His face was severely bruised, the left eye swollen shut. His wrists were bloodied and raw from where he had struggled and his arms were numb. His elegant black robes and his boots had been removed. His feet smelled of burnt flesh. The Dark Lord had taken delight at firing off burn hexes at them to make him dance while McNair had flogged him. Through it all he had barely made a sound and then only when he had been too exhausted to struggle any longer. He knew that the longer he held out the longer he and the others would stay alive. Painfully, he turned his stiff neck to peruse their prison, taking in the condition of the others.

Young Weasley was only half-conscious his head resting in Granger's lap. Severus had realized almost immediately what the Dark Lord had done when the couple was returned to their cell. The young man's eyes were blank and the iris's had turned a filmy white. He had been forced to use the goblet. Severus was able to discern from the conversations of the Deathaters that the young man had not done so willingly despite having to endure watching Granger be subjected to multiple episodes of the Cruciatius. 'The sorting hat knew what it was doing when he put them both in the house of the Lion,' Severus mused studying the couple. Both had curled up together almost as soon as the torture had stopped. Granger was leaning against the wall in a restless sleep. At least they hadn't raped her yet.

Circe and Phaedra were also huddled together. His sister had done her best to protect the little girl with all the defiance of the Snapes. He had been proud each time she had taunted the Deathaters using language so colorful that he might have blushed were the situation not so critical. She was unconscious now, having been struck by a powerful stunning hex, after screaming at the Dark Lord that he was a weakling. She'd told him that all Potter needed to be rid of him was a good Scourgify curse as he was no better than a Bundimun with a stench was just as foul.

Phaedra had been terrified when her mother had fallen and had thought she was dead until she realized Circe was indeed breathing. At first, the Dark Lord had enjoyed the spectacle immensely, laughing at the child's attempts to awaken her mother. The child had been so distraught and angry she had actually lunged at the bars of the cell in an attempt to attack the Dark Lord. Voldemort had merely laughed, reaching one slim white hand through the bars. Catching her by the hair he lifted her off her feet dropping her unceremoniously onto the cell floor. Severus had been proud when Phaedra, crying in pain and fear, had scooped up a handful of dirt from the floor and flung it at Voldemort. Her brown eyes had been defiant and proud in the face of danger. Unfortunately, this action had cost her dearly. Before Severus could distract him, the Dark Lord had flexed his wand, flinging her back against the wall, where she had sat crying in pain. 'At least he didn't use the Cruciatius on her,' Severus thought wryly. She was curled up now, lying with her head on her mother's chest. At first he had thought she was asleep until he heard her sniffing.

"Mummy, please wake up. I'm scared."

"Phaedra," he whispered hoarsely, "she is just unconscious. She'll awaken soon."

"Uncle Sev?" she questioned uncertainly crawling over to the bars, which separated their cells. "Are you all right?"

"I will be fine," he whispered in an attempt to calm her.

"I'm scared. I want to go home. It's cold in here too."

"I know," he sighed, "but you need to be strong until help comes."

"What if nobody comes? The bad wizard will kill us won't he?"

"Harry will come, Phaedra, "Ron's weak voice interrupted from the cell opposite them, "and when she does Voldemort will get his just desserts."

"Is Mr. Ron right, uncle? Will Miss Harry come?"

"Yes," Severus answered trying to keep the worry from his voice. 'I just hope she comes in time for Phaedra,' he considered, his heart heavy at the thought of what Voldemort planned for his niece.

"How do you know she's coming?" Phaedra looked from her uncle to where Ron was now sitting in his cell.

"She will come because we're people she loves. She would never abandon us to die," Ron told her firmly. He hoped his voice sounded more confident than he felt. 'She will know I used the goblet,' his mind berated him sadly. 'I have betrayed my trust. I should have fought harder.'

"But Miss Harry doesn't know where we are, does she?"

"She will find us, Phaedra," Severus replied, "and when she does you will need to be strong and brave."

"Will there be a fight?"

"It is very likely," Hermione's weak voice came from beside Ron. She had awoken when Ron had sat up but had been in too much pain to move.

"Will my mummy wake up soon too?" Phaedra asked seeing that everyone else was up except for Circe.

"It will be a little while yet, Phaedra, but she will waken," Severus reassured her. "Why don't you try and rest some more and by the time you wake up she will be awake too."

"All right, Uncle Sev," she sniffed. Moving back to her mother Phaedra curled up beside her once again.

No one spoke after that. Each was lost in thought their own thoughts. Severus was relieved when he saw that Phaedra did indeed drift off to sleep. His own exhaustion was catching up to him and he too drifted off into a fitful sleep. His dreams were filled with Harry trying in vain to find them while Phaedra screamed in agony. The sun was high up in the sky when he awoke to find the others were also awake. The door to the cellar was slowly being swung open.

"Ah...you are all up I see," Voldemort's oily voice greeted them. "Sssooo nicce to sssee you are all doing Sssooo well," he hissed scornfully.

"My Lord, all is in readiness," Lucius spoke coming to kneel behind him.

"Excellent, I will want to play with Potter for a bit before we begin. The others are to remain here while I play with her. It will be fun to see how she will barter for their lives. You will bring her to me in my study as soon as they arrive."

"What of Draco, My Lord? May I amuse myself with him while you are busy with Potter?"

"Patience, Lucius. You will have your chance later. Perhaps you would like to use Nagini?"

"That would be interesting, My Lord. He has always been afraid of her."

"Then I shall see to it that she is sent to you before the revel tonight."

"Thank you, My Lord," Lucius responded as Voldemort redirected his attention to the captives.

"As you shall all soon see Potter will be arriving shortly along with a few others. Unfortunately, all her efforts to secure your release will be in vain. She will watch you all die before I finally kill her too. That fool Dumbledore will not be able to help her this time," Voldemort gloated. "Oh, and Severus, don't think that your Uncle will be of any help either. I have been aware of his disloyalty for some time now. He will die right along side of you and your sister. I shall relish watching you all beg for death. I have special plans for all of you." Voldemort gave a sharp hissing laugh before spinning on his heel and leaving them in silence, Lucius standing guard with his wand drawn. Two other Death Eaters stood ready at his side...

Harry was wrapped around Tiberius tightly as Dumbledore counted down the Portkey. Her snake senses were on full alert and she flicked her tongue to get a sense of the atmosphere around her. She could feel the adrenaline pumping in the others and the smell of fear. Her snake like senses told her they were all in flight or fight modality. Today they would be doing both. As the portkey activated she felt the familiar tug in the underside of her belly where she supposed her navel would be and was gripping tightly as they spun into the unknown.

Harry felt a sudden jolt as Tiberius landed but did not lose her grip. She had no idea what was going on since she was safely hidden beneath his robes. However, the noise told her that it was not good. She was startled and almost lost her grip when Tiberius was suddenly thrown backwards and slumped to the floor amid a sea of voices and shouts...

"They're here! You know your objectives. Disable them now!" Lucius shouted to his associates.

A series of stunning spells rang out through the cellar hitting the small group of people who had just appeared in the empty cell. Looking around when they had landed, there had been no time to retaliate or attempt an escape before being hit with a burst of stunning spells from the group of Deathaters awaiting them. The Deathaters immediately entered the cell and grabbed the wands from their unconscious hands.

"Lucius, we have the wands and they are all out cold," an unfamiliar voice sneered. "This was almost too easy!"

"Yes...Potter was a fool to come along," Lucius laughed. "Bring her and leave the rest. The Dark Lord wishes to see her personally before we start our little party this evening."

"Yes, Sir," the man answered. He levitated the unconscious girl out of the cell and slammed the door with a loud bang. He had no idea that it was in fact Ginny Weasley, under the influence of the Polyjuice potion, as he floated her out of the room and upstairs.

"You will not get away with this," Hermione shouted in dismay.

"Oh but we will Miss Granger. Your foolish friend has mangled your rescue attempt from the beginning and will have the pleasure of watching you all die."

"Bastard!" Ron cursed. "You're all nothing but a bunch of cowards."

"*Crucio!*" Lucius spat coldly. "I shall play with you again later, Mr. Weasley." He smiled coldly as he withdrew the curse amid Ron's helpless screams. Retreating up the stairs, he secured the outer door leaving the prisoners alone.

Harry stayed where she was. Silently uncoiling herself from around Tiberius' still form, she counted to twenty. It was a bit difficult as she was caught beneath his leg but instinctively dug down into the dirt with her underbelly to free herself as she slithered forward. She could hear Hermione weeping softly.

"Oh, Ron, this is my entire fault. If I hadn't been so stubborn about our wedding..."

"Shh...Mione. Everything will be okay. Harry will find a way to help."

"No, Ron, it won't. We're all going to die here and I will never be able to tell her I'm sorry for acting like a prat."

Harry listened guiltily as she softly slithered out from behind Tiberius. Looking around she took in the situation. It was not good. She was glad she had secured their extra wands within her own clothes before transforming. She could see Phaedra in the cell next to her. She wanted to let them know she was there but to keep quiet so as not to alert the Deathaters. It was time to reveal Phaedra's little secret.

"Phaedra..." she hissed softly. The little girl looked around in confusion. "Phaedra, do not say anything. It's Harry. Look down at the floor in the next cell," she hissed. "You must be very quiet. I want you to come over by the bars."

"Miss Harry, is it really you?" she whispered softly sitting down away from her mother.

"Yesss...now listen to me..."

"Phaedra, what are you up to?" her mother questioned warily.

"Nothing, Mummy," she shrugged biting her lip. She knew instinctively that her mother would know she was lying.

"Quickly tell her to be quiet and come over here too..." Harry hissed.

"Mummy come here and be quiet, it's important."

"What ever are you...Oh my god, Phaedra come away from that snake!" she blurted, pulling at the child. Harry immediately reared up, showing herself.

"Snake, what snake!" Ron gasped thinking of Nagini.

"Quiet! It isn't a real snake," Phaedra admonished softly.

"I think you will find Phaedra is correct," Severus stated turning his head at the commotion. "I suggest you all stay quiet." All heads turned in his direction dumbfounded. His swollen lips were bent into a crooked sneer and his black eyes were burning with anticipation. "I also suspect that Phaedra may just be a Parselmouth."

"Severus is right," a soft familiar voice stated. All eyes turned simultaneously to stare at Harry in disbelief.

"Mione, what is going on? I thought they took Harry upstairs?" Ron demanded in confusion. He had heard his friend's voice even if he couldn't see her.

"Sh...Ron! Harry was hiding in her snake form. I think she was under someone's robes. She was able to get Phaedra's attention by speaking Parseltongue."

"You're right, Mione," she grinned at her friend, "but there is no time for explanations. We have to get out of here and hope the Order and the Aurors are able to find us. Dumbledore could only track the Portkey for a short way due to the wards."

"Harry, I..." Hermione started only to be silenced with a wave of Harry's hand.

"I saw what happened, Hermione. I got into Voldemort's mind when I was asleep in Albus' office. We can talk later but right now we have to get moving." Harry withdrew a wand from her pocket and directed it towards Tiberius. "Enervate!" she woke him swiftly.

"I should have expected we wouldn't have had time to fire," he said struggling to his feet as she withdrew his wand and handed it to him. "How many are there?"

"I don't know," Harry answered as they both began reviving the others.

"Merlin, I forgot how bad those stunners could be." James stretched getting to his feet. "Lils are you okay?"

"Just stiff," she replied as he helped her up.

"Justinian, what ever possessed you to come?" Circe questioned her husband as soon as he was awake.

"There was no way I was going to leave my two best girls here with that madman," he responded reaching through the bars to grasp Circe's hands.

"Come on, Draco, this is not the time to be taking a cat nap," Harry jested as soon as his eyes were opened.

"Very funny, Potter. We're lucky they didn't just use killing curses on us."

"You know that is not Voldemort's style. He has other plans for all of us."

"Where's Ginny?" Draco asked looking around.

"Ginny!" Ron gasped. "What do you mean?"

"Ron, Ginny took Polyjuice to look like me. She is the one they took upstairs."

"Harry, that's my little sister! How could you let..."

"It was her choice, Weasel, so shut up and let's see to getting her out of here too!" Draco snapped.

"Draco's right, Ron," Hermione agreed. "Ginny is a grown woman and you know that if she wanted to help no one would be able to stop her."

"I guess so," Ron agreed sullenly.

"What kind of charms are on the locks, Tiberius?" Harry questioned as he waved his wand across the door.

"*Alohomora!*" He smiled as the lock clicked opening the door. "Seems the Dark Lord didn't think anything stronger was needed."

"Either that or he had one of his stooges lock the doors." Harry nodded.

"I'll get Sev while you all see to the others," Harry directed moving off towards where he was confined. Unlocking the cell, she moved over towards where he hung suspended in the shackles and took stock of his injuries. "You are one big mess, but I'm glad."

"Why would you be glad that I am in such a state?" he mocked.

"You know damn well that I meant I was glad you're alive." She grinned up at him. "I wish I had brought you some clean clothes though." Harry blushed as she surveyed his naked limbs where he had been stripped bare.

"I'm sure we can secure a set of trousers from one of the Deathaters once they've been subdued." He arched his brow sardonically.

"Let's see about getting you down first." Harry waved her wand over the shackles. "Humph, I don't know what they did but it seems they will tighten if I try to unlock them."

"That would be a problem," Snape frowned. "I would suggest you blast them off but that might create a bit of noise. Not to mention further injury if you missed."

"I would not miss and a silencing charm might work but I don't want to risk it. I have a better idea and it may just drive them all crazy."

"Really, Potter, this is not the time to be showing off," he teased deadpanned.

"You let me be the judge of that." She snickered. Stepping back, Harry aimed her wand at his left arm, "*Reducio*." His arm immediately shrank and he slipped from the shackle, able to put one foot on the floor. Harry caught the slight grimace crossing his features. "Sorry, I should have healed those burns first," she apologized as Tiberius entered the cell.

"I have some burn ointment in my belt," he remarked setting to work on Severus feet. "Where are your robes?"

"I believe they threw them over in that corner," he told his uncle pointing to the end of the room.

"I'll get them," Harry hurried off and returned a moment later to find that Tiberius had reduced his nephew's other arm and lowered him to the floor. Harry quickly reversed the reduction spell returning his arms to their normal size. Tiberius healed his burns as best he could and handed Severus a pain-killing potion. She then handed Severus his boots and outer robes, which had also been thrown aside.

"At least they left something for him to wear until we can secure him some trousers," Tiberius chuckled.

"His shirt and pants were there too but they were too torn up to be repaired," Harry explained.

"I'll manage," Severus smirked. "How are the others?"

"Circe and Hermione are suffering the aftereffects of the Cruciatus," Lily commented from the other side of the cell. Your niece is bruised and frightened but seems otherwise unharmed."

"The Dark Lord used a hurling curse on her also."

"She doesn't seem to be affected by it. Children can be very resilient," James Potter added. "However, Harry was right. Ron is blind. He is also suffering the after effects of the curse. I healed his numerous cuts and bruises."

"I did the best I could, Harry," Lily commented sadly, "but there was nothing I could do for his sight."

"We'll have to worry about that later. We have other things to worry about now."

"Like my sister!" Ron gasped, turning his head in the direction of their quiet voices. He found that even though he couldn't see his hearing had begun to compensate for his loss of sight.

"She's my girlfriend. Don't you think I'm worried about her too?" Draco huffed.

"Stop it immediately," Justinian scolded. He was sitting with his family. "We will get to Miss Weasley. She knew what to expect and was prepared for it. Our biggest worry is that the Dark Lord will become aware of the deception too soon."

"Then let's go. We have to get her out!" Ron exclaimed.

"We will, Ron, we just have to move carefully. We don't have any idea how many Death eaters are here."

"Harry is right, Mr. Weasley. We also need to start working on the wards to allow the Aurors access to this site. We have no idea if they have located us yet," Tiberius stated coolly.

"Then tell us what we have to do." Hermione spoke matter of factly.

"First we need to get out of here. We need to move slowly. I recognize this place as one I have been in so I have an idea of the layout."

"How are the wards, Uncle?" Circe questioned.

"The building is heavily warded but I know a good number of them. I believe Severus will recognize some too. We need to get upstairs and start working on the ones that protect the building and the grounds."

"Right, now here is what we need to do. We go out in single file. Tiberius, you and Sev start working on the wards one inside and one out if you can manage it," Harry directed. Both men nodded in agreement. "Draco you need to help Hermione with Ron. You go first and let Hermione bring up the rear with Ron in between. We'll need to disarm a few of the Death eaters to get her a wand but it can't be helped. I could only bring so many."

"Hermione can use my wand, Harry," her mother interrupted. "I can use your Phoenix wand. You do have your other one?"

"Yes, that will work. Hermione is good with charms so yours will work for her better than mine." The women all switched wands while Harry continued, "Justinian you go last with Phaedra in between you and Circe."

"I suppose you will be leading the charge, Potter, with your usual Gryffindor bravado?" Draco sneered.

"You've got it. I need to be able to create a diversion so your godfather and his uncle can get to work. Besides, I am less likely to have a killing curse directed at me than the rest of you. Voldemort has me on his, *To Kill Personally List*, remember?"

"Better you than me," Draco drawled.

"Harry, what about your parents?" Ron asked slowly.

"They will be with me."

"Why...Oh..." Hermione frowned as the reason dawned on her.

"I just have one comment, Harry. I will lead the way. I can't be killed as such so you should go between me and your mother."

"James is right, Harry, it would do none of us any good if you are stopped before we can even try to accomplish our goals," Severus stated quietly. He was looking at his old rival with respect and something else. Harry sensed it was sadness but shook off the thought.

"I suppose you're right. Now let's get going." She started towards the door when Phaedra yelled.

"Miss Harry, look out!" She was pointing at the bottom of the door. Nagini was making her way in through a flap near the floor and was rising to strike.

"*Avadra Kedavra!*" Severus shot the killing curse before Harry could utter a sound, striking Nagini directly in the head. The huge snake dropped to the floor with a thud.

"Too bad we can't take her with us. I'm sure you could use her venom in a few of your Potions, godfather," Draco commented as Severus hauled the dead snake out of the way.

"Just be glad she came in rather than alerting anyone that we were free, Draco," Severus commented dryly.

They all positioned themselves to leave the cellar as James Potter slowly uncharmed the door pushing it open. The small group followed him in single file up the stone stairs. He motioned them to stop at the top of the stairs while he listened carefully before opening the outer door. Once satisfied that it was safe he tried the knob. It swung outward without a sound. Glancing around, he noted no one was about and indicated they should follow. Tiberius put a finger to his lips and motioned to James in the direction of the entrance. He had been in this house before. Unfortunately, he did not know its location having apparated here following a summons from the Dark Lord. They were about half way up the hall when they were stopped by a shrill scream from upstairs.

"It's Ginny!" Ron breathed in dismay as a group of ten Death eaters, led by Lucius Malfoy, stepped from around the corner blocking their path. The other end of the hall ended in a solid wall. The only other door was down to the cellar from which they had just escaped. They were trapped...

Chapter 29 - Never Wake A Sleeping Dragon

Once the Portkey had activated and the small rescue party vanished Dumbledore reached over to a small glowing cylindrical orb on his desk. It was glowing with bright bluish gray light shot with orange sparks. The whirling smoke inside was spinning furiously with indeterminate speed. He called it his *Locus Rescisco*, or Location Discoverer, for lack of a better term. It was a rare device that he'd invented in his youth aided by an old sorcerer experimenting in time displacement. A Portkey moved people through time and space appearing at a desired location without the need to apparate or floo and it was based on this principle. Unfortunately, it could not penetrate wards or pass through a destination that was unplotable. Therefore, the Ministry while run by Fudge had not widely used it in the first war. This device would help them to follow Harry and the others before they passed through the wards of Voldemort's headquarters. Dumbledore hoped that the wards did not extend too far out as it would take time to dismantle them and every moment was precious to their survival.

"Albus, how does that object work?" Remus asked unable to disguise his interest despite the critical situation.

"I am able to lock its magical properties with those of the Portkey. It will follow the magical signature until it passes through the wards. After that, we will be on our own since we have no idea how far Voldemort has extended his wards.

"Damn, that could be for miles!" Sirius swore.

"Perhaps, but I don't think so. Voldemort would not want anyone to stumble onto them accidentally," Dumbledore stated as he continued to observe the action within the cylinder. "I have it!" he crowed triumphantly. "The Portkey signature has vanished about forty miles due south of Hogwarts."

Dumbledore immediately notified the other members of the Order and the Aurors as Remus and Sirius ran from the office. They would apparate to the location then go by broom after deactivating the wards to avoid detection as long as possible. It was up to the others to get the wards down surrounding the Dark Lord's actual location so they would be allowed to enter. Dumbledore knew the area where they were going. It was rural farmland with little more than a few meager Muggle villages and sheep fields. The Dark Lord would not wish to be seen unless he decreed his presence necessary. Grabbing his broom with speed amazing for a man of his age Dumbledore headed for the castle gates and disappeared with the others...

The group of Death eaters spotted the hostages and drew their wands. All parties stood transfixed in the narrow hallway. Lucius Malfoy's lips curled into wicked smile, gray eyes the color of steel. Taking in the situation a brief look of confusion flashed across his face when he spotted Harry near the back of the group. He knew he had left her upstairs with the Dark Lord. 'Didn't I just hear her scream?' he considered. Resting his measured gaze on her features realization dawned.

"Harry Potter...it seems you have tried to deceive the Master into believing he has you captive. No matter though. He will be delighted when I deliver you to him personally. Tell me, who is the young lady upstairs with him now?"

"My twin sister maybe?" She grinned boldly. "As for delivering me to him...well...I don't think you have a prayer in hell of doing so."

"You really aren't arrogant enough to believe you will get out of this hallway let alone this house are you? Your backs are against the wall and the only door leads back the way you came."

"Then we'll just have to use the front door," James Potter smirked. "Sorry we won't be able to stay for tea but we have other plans."

"James Potter, you're as over confident as ever," Lucius remarked acidly. "It will be fun to watch you suffer when your brat of a daughter meets her death." The group of Deathaters chuckled around him. "I told her years ago that she would meet the same sticky fate as you and your wife. As for the rest of you..." he glanced around looking at the small group facing him, "I shall personally see to it that you do not escape your fates; especially my blood traitor of a son and his godfather." Lucius looked pointedly at Draco and Severus.

"It will be a pity to disappoint you, Lucius, since I know how good your hospitality is to your guests," Severus sneered, "but I believe we will be unable to attend your little soirée. According to young Miss Potter you have another appointment with death."

"It is not I who shall be meeting death, Severus," Lucius exploded, "but..." He was interrupted by another shrill scream from upstairs, glancing up with a callous smile.

"*Stupefy*," James yelled taking advantage of the situation. Lucius was knocked backwards into Dolohov, tumbling to the floor.

The others sprang into action, each group of wizards shouting hexes and curses at one another in all directions. Harry and Draco leaped forward.

"*Expelliarmus!*" they shouted in unison disarming two of the Deathaters as Lucius regained his footing.

"*Avadra Kedavra!*" Lucius directed the curse at his son. Draco ducked in time as Hermione knocked Ron to the floor. The killing curse flew over their heads dissipating on the wall.

"I will see you rot in Hell, father," Draco screamed.

"Draco, look out!" Lily yelled, pulling him to the side as a cutting curse grazed his arm. "*Confundo!*" Lily directed her wand in the direction of one of the Deathaters who had been trying to edge up the hall. He fell back in confusion looking about with dismay.

"*Relashio!*" Dolohov's wand sent a jet of boiling water streaming from his wand. Lily countered with a freezing charm. The boiling water turned to solid ice as the group moved slowly forward.

"Mione, what's happening?" Ron whispered as she dragged him slowly forward.

"I feel so useless."

"We're beating them down, Ron, but slowly," she replied as Ginny let out a long mournful scream from above. "I wonder why Voldemort hasn't come to see what is happening."

"*Avadra Kedavra, Avadra Kedavra*," an unknown Death eater yelled swinging his arm in a wide arc taking aim at the couple. The green light shot towards them at incredible speed.

"Ron, Hermione, get down!" Justinian called swinging round to pull them down. He had just pushed Ron to the floor beside Hermione when the curse hit him full in the back. Eyes growing wide in shock he slumped to the ground.

"Justinian...No!" Circe screamed moving to kneel beside her dead husband. Her features crumbled as tears streamed down her cheeks.

"Circe, there is nothing you can do," Severus yelled. "Take Phaedra and get the hell out of here."

"Mummy...Mummy...I'm scared. What's the matter with daddy?" the child cried in panic clinging to her mother.

"Circe, go now!" Tiberius yelled over his shoulder as he shot a group of arrows from his wand, killing one Death eater and hitting another in the leg. The man fell screaming to the floor.

"*Protego!*" James yelled setting up a shield around the distraught woman as Lily helped her up, steering her towards the door.

"Go... get out. I'll keep the last of them busy," Harry called over the din of curses as they reached the end of the hall. She placed herself between the few remaining Death eaters and the door. "Tiberius get the wards down...hurry."

"*Colloportus*," Lucius directed his wand at the door sealing it shut. "Did you all really think you would escape?" he laughed.

"*Reducto!*" Severus blasted a hole in the wall. Harry could see the house surrounded by a pulsing green light. The wards had them surrounded...

Dumbledore and the others materialized on a frozen moor the wind whipping their robes. Gray clouds scuttled across the sky. Bill Weasley and Mad Eye Moody hurried towards them as Kingsley organized the Aurors. Two other pops announced the arrival of Molly and Arthur Weasley who followed in their wake.

"Molly, Arthur, you need not be here. You should be at the hospital with George," Dumbledore admonished.

"George regained consciousness an hour ago, Albus. Fred is sitting with him," Molly explained hurriedly. "I have four other children to think of right now and they will need me. I refuse to sacrifice anymore to that monster. The Weasley family will stop at nothing to get them out safely!" She faced Dumbledore with an air of determination, hands on her hips, as she stood beside Arthur and Bill.

Dumbledore knew she was referring not just to her own offspring but to Hermione and Harry as well. The old man nodded, his eyes giving a brief twinkle. He knew better than to argue with Molly when her mind was set. She was a mother lion protecting her cubs and no one would get in her way.

"Your help will be appreciated," Dumbledore acknowledged. He then raised his wand and muttered a long incantation. A series of pulsating green walls sprang up in front of them interspersed with bisecting red and blue lines. "Difficult but not impossible," Dumbledore stated matter of factly studying the intricate weave before them.

"Let's see how deadly they are," Bill said. Picking up a rock, he hurled it into the wards hitting them with a splash. Emitting a fiery display of white sparks the rock was flung back towards them. It landed smoking and black at their feet. A partially melted mass was oozing from one side where it had hit the wards. "It seems to be a series of burning and cutting curses interspersed with a complex entrail expelling curse as well as the usual blocks."

"There is also a suffocation curse," Remus interjected quietly studying the wall. "I can sense the pulses as they squeeze together," he explained at their curious looks.

"Bill, you and Alastor work on the wards from the left. Remus and I will start on the right. We'll work towards one another. They should collapse when we reach the center," Dumbledore instructed.

"What about me, Albus? I can't just sit and do nothing." Sirius paced nervously.

"I want you to transform and use your animal senses to track our progress. Remus can use his as well." Sirius did as Dumbledore directed and ran the length of the wards while Dumbledore turned his attention in the direction of the Aurors. "Kingsley, instruct the Aurors to be ready to go as soon as the wards come down. This could take a while and we still don't know the exact location of Voldemort's headquarters."

"I'm on it, Albus," the big black man called. He turned and began barking out orders.

"Molly I want you and Arthur to go around and help keep the morale up. I suspect many of our team will be anxious about the battle."

"We'll do what we can, Albus," Arthur agreed. He and Molly went over to the group of Aurors and began the task assigned. It helped to hearten them that the Minister himself and his wife were there and willing to stand beside them during the crisis at hand.

"Gentlemen, let us begin." The old man pointed his wand at the barrier along with the others and began the laborious task of disassembling the wards...

Tiberius vigorously attacked the wards casting spells and waving his wand. As each incantation hit the pulsating mass, it gave off a low hum accompanied by a shower of sparks. James and Lily had taken up positions and were deflecting the curses from the remaining Death eaters. Circe and Hermione were doing their best to protect Phaedra and Ron. Phaedra was trying not to cry, while Ron was screaming at Hermione to give him Justinian's wand.

"Hermione, I may be blind but I can still hear. All I need to do is point the wand in the direction of their voices! I'll give those bastards what they deserve," he cried, red faced with anger as Ginny screamed again.

"No, Ron, you might hit one of us by accident!"

"Don't argue with me, Hermione, just do it!" he commanded forcefully. "If nothing else it will keep the wand away from them."

Hermione reluctantly did as he asked while firing off a jelly legs jinx at Lucius Malfoy. He blocked the curse easily and fired back with an impediment jinx, which Hermione blocked in the nick of time.

"Here," she said placing the wand in Ron's hand, "get up a shield and hold onto Phaedra." She grabbed the little girl and handed her off to Ron. Keeping his arms around her, he put up a protection shield around them both. He winced as he heard Ginny scream again.

Harry was working herself up beside Draco, easily blocking the curses flung at her by the Deathaters. She had thought of a way to stop Lucius but also had to get to Ginny. Draco could help to provide the distraction she needed. "Draco, listen," she whispered, "try to break Lucius neck. It will paralyze him. His soul still needs a functional nervous system in order to operate. He won't die but he won't be able to move either."

"*Incarcerous!*" Ropes flew from Draco's wand neatly catching another Deathater and binding him securely. "I'll try to get an opening to stop Lucius. Just get up those stairs!"

"Draco, watch yourself," Harry called as they both put up shields to block a flurry of new curses.

"Never mind about me, Potter. We have to get upstairs. Ginny can't hold up much longer from the sound of it." Even as he spoke another series of shrill screams erupted from above. This was followed by an ominous silence.

"Cover me! I will go for the stairs." Harry plunged forward amid a volley of curses, Draco deftly helping to clear her path as he circled around towards where the others were working to create an escape route. She was grateful for her quick reflexes due to seven years of Quidditch. Gaining the stairs Harry was half way up when she was flung backwards by a loud explosion. Twisting her body to avoid falling back down she hit the wall, sliding to her knees. Shaking her head to clear the ringing in her ears she was just in time to see the others escaping from the house. Tiberius and Sev had blasted through the wards and her parents were blocking the path of the few remaining Deathaters allowing them time to escape.

"Harry, come on, we have to get out of here!" Lily screamed.

"No! I am going after Ginny." Harry didn't wait for her mum to reply. Dashing back up the stairs, she stunned a Deathater at the top of the stairs who was coming to join the battle. Her instincts told her to be careful. It was too quiet. Harry knew there had to be more Deathaters either in the house or outside. She was sure Voldemort would summon more of his followers now that his hostages had escaped. Harry wasn't foolish enough to believe that he didn't know what was going on.

The hallway was dark and Harry took a minute to allow her eyes to adjust to the dim light. Three doors lined the hall. A dim light shone from underneath the one at the end. She stood for a moment listening but there was no sound. 'Why do I know that this is some kind of trap,' she mused with a wry smile. 'If nothing else Tom does have a flair for the dramatic.' Even as this thought flashed through her mind, the door was ominously swinging open on silent hinges...

"It won't be much longer now," Kingsley shouted to the group of waiting Aurors and Order members. "The wards are beginning to weaken!"

Even as he spoke and excited shout went up within the group as Remus and Bill succeeded in taking down a complex cutting curse. The wards vibrated with an odd glow as Padfoot suddenly let out a howl at the same time as Remus. When the cutting curse had been disabled, the wards automatically shifted. They were now emitting a high decibel-deafening curse inaudible to human ears. Professor Sprout recognized the pain that passed through her ears as one similar to a particular species of plant. She immediately started conjuring earmuffs, passing them out to the others. Fawkes appeared on Dumbledore's shoulder and began to sing. The magnificent bird was helping to counteract the curse as Dumbledore stepped forward and muttered a complex series of Latin spells directing his wand at the center of the wards. Remus dropped to the ground as Padfoot transformed with a scream when a loud explosion burst forth. Dumbledore has been able to counter the spell but not before both the animagus and the werewolf had suffered a good deal of pain. Professor McGonagall had been similarly affected. It took a few minutes for them to recover and Molly knew enough healing spells to repair their damaged eardrums. The work on the wards continued in earnest.

"We're almost through, Moony," Sirius remarked worriedly. "I hope Harry is doing as well."

"She has James and Lily with her, Padfoot. That combination alone should give Voldemort a good case of heartburn." The werewolf smiled trying to make his voice sound light but Sirius noted that his smile was forced and his eyes reflected the worry he actually felt.

"Right, let's get to it then. We can't let them have all the fun." He transformed back to Padfoot and began barking. Running over to Bill, he leaped up knocking the curse breaker to the ground as a bolt of purple light shot over their heads splintering a dead tree.

"Thanks, I should have seen that coming," Bill said petting Padfoot as he regained his feet.

"Nasty hex, that one," Moody grunted. "I haven't seen that combination used since the first war; combination of the Entrail Expelling Curse and the Cruciatius. Makes you feel the pain as each organ is pulled from your body."

"Alastor, Bill!" Dumbledore shouted. "Remus and I have reached the center. We need to direct all of our wands now!"

The two wizards did not have to be told twice. Joining Dumbledore and Remus, they all fired directly into the center of the wards with a prolonged burst of red light. The wall in front of them bulged and sucked like some kind of giant pulsing heart fighting for life. Time seemed to stand still as the others watched wide-eyed.

"It's not working, Albus, it's too strong," Arthur cried.

"Kingsley, Sirius, add your wands to ours," Dumbledore commanded, blue eyes glinting steel. The two men took up positions on either end directing the full force of their magic into the force before them. The wards gave one last shudder and then imploded in on itself with a loud boom, emitting a shower of harmless sparks.

"Aurors, mount your brooms! We have a Dark Lord to deal with," Kingsley shouted to his team. He grabbed his broom from the ground and rose into the air with Dumbledore and the Protectors.

"Everyone spread out and watch for any sign of a dwelling that appears abandoned," Dumbledore directed. Sirius and Remus were beside him helping to lead the assault. "Let us hope that they have gotten the wards down on their end too," Dumbledore told the two men. Fawkes had been flying beside them when the bird suddenly let out a shrill squawk vanishing in a puff of fire.

"Albus, what is going on?"

"I believe he senses that he is needed by Harry and the others. They are in trouble..."

Harry watched the door swing open. She was surprisingly calm. 'Well, Tom, it is kind of you to grant me an audience,' she considered. 'You must be awfully sure of yourself to have stayed upstairs all this time.' For some odd reason she couldn't fathom she was actually amused. If it weren't for her concern about Ginny, she would have simply made an obscene remark and left, making him come to her. Glancing around to make sure there were no other Death eaters lurking in the shadows she slowly made her way up the hall stopping at the other doors to check the rooms. They were devoid of life with no evidence of anyone having been there for a long time. She stopped at the threshold of the open door remaining in the shadows for a moment. 'Okay, Tom, this is it. I will either vanquish you back to the bowels of Hell or die trying. One way or another it will all end today,' Harry reflected with an odd detachment. A final thought flashed through her mind as she waited in the dark. It was a Muggle prayer she had read somewhere or other a while ago. *'God grant me the ability to accept the things I cannot change, to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.'* This was something she could change. Harry stepped across the threshold and into the light...

"Uncle we are outnumbered," Severus shouted at Tiberius. The group was running for their lives. "There is no sign of the Aurors." He glanced skyward, firing off a curse stunning another Death eater."

"They will be here. I felt the wards fall a few minutes ago. We need to buy them time to find us." Tiberius dodged another curse before firing off one of his own.

The Dark Lord had sent for reinforcements while they had battled in the hall. Once out of the house a host of his minions had greeted them. The small group was now pinned up inside of a small copse of trees behind a rocky wall.

"We need to get back to Harry," James said taking aim at another Death eater as a curse few over his head. "She's still in there with Voldemort!"

"There is nothing we can do right now, Potter. Harry has faced the Dark Lord many times as you well know. Only she can stop him. Trust in your daughter's ability to do so now!" Severus answered. "Your presence will only serve to distract her from what she has to do."

"Severus is right, James. If Harry sees us now she will not want to do the spell. We have to let her do this thing and you know it."

"I know, Lils, I only want to see that she gets out of this alive. Much as we've missed her I don't want her to join us in the afterlife just yet. We owe her more than the life she's had to endure."

"Mr. Potter, Harry will do the right thing. She always has." Hermione looked at James, love and pride for her friend evident on her face. "She won't leave without making sure Ginny is safe and Voldemort is stopped."

"Hermione is right, Sir. Hurt and angry as she was she still didn't abandon us when we were in trouble. I only wish I could do more. I feel so useless."

"You can, Son," James remarked with a wicked gleam. "Lie down on your stomach. There is a narrow space between these rocks. If you fire off a few curses it may just hit some of them. They won't expect to be attacked from below." James Potter helped Ron to get into a safe position, placing the wand in his hand. "Now let them have it!" Were it not for the seriousness of the situation they were in James expression could almost be described as gleeful.

"Mummy, I want to go home. Where is Miss Harry? Why doesn't she come?" Phaedra choked trying hard not to cry.

"Phaedra, listen to me. Miss Harry is with the evil wizard. No matter what happens she will make sure you are safe. She loves you very much and won't let him hurt you," Circe told her daughter. She hoped she sounded convincing. Phaedra nodded at her mother and curled up behind her. Circe noticed she had started to suck on her thumb, fear evident in her large brown eyes. 'Come on Harry, you have to save my baby. She will need you. Somehow I don't think I will make it out of here alive.' This passed through her mind in an instant before she was once again distracted by the battle.

"Arrrggghhh!" One of the Death eaters screamed in agony as Ron hit him with a cutting hex.

"What happened? Did I get one of them?"

"I'll say you did," James couldn't suppress a laugh, "and in a rather delicate area. Suffice it to say he will be singing soprano from now on."

"Cool." Ron blushed with a grin before firing off another volley. He found that lying near the ground he could hear thumping noises and assumed they were footfalls so he directed his shots towards them.

"Look!" Lily exclaimed pointing towards the sky while the air turned noticeably colder. She was unable to hide the look of consternation on her beautiful face.

"Great, that isn't what I think it is," Draco muttered. "Is it?"

"What is it? Is it the Order?" Ron asked hopefully.

"No, Mr. Weasley," Severus replied soberly. "The Dark Lord has summoned the Dementors..."

Voldemort was lazily leaning up against the hearth when Harry stepped into the room. Ginny was lying on the floor, eyes closed, curled into a tight knot, breath coming in short gasps. A

masked Death eater was standing over her unconscious form, wand drawn. Harry could tell it was a woman by the contours of her body beneath her black robes. She took all this in with a single glance.

"Welcome, Harry," the Dark Lord leered. "I have been expecting you."

"I'll bet. Who's your new whore?" She waved one hand in the woman's direction, green eyes locked with Voldemort's red ones. The woman sucked in an angry breath but didn't move. "I guess you got bored with Bellatrix?"

"Bella was simply too far into the madness from Azkaban. I simply put her out of her misery."

"I would hardly call murder and dismemberment putting one out of their misery."

"She failed to please me with her actions. I needed to make an example of her."

"Yeah, right, and how long before you do the same to the foolishly deluded woman over there?"

"My new foolishly deluded whore as you so crassly put it has my complete support. Her loyalty has been greatly appreciated. Perhaps you would like to make her acquaintance?"

"Since when do I get a choice?" Harry glared. She needed to stall for time. She could hear shouts and screams coming from outside and knew her comrades were in trouble but would have a better chance if Voldemort were in here with her. 'Where in hell is the bloody Order with the Aurors?' she wondered.

Voldemort laughed. "Dumbledore will not arrive in time to save any of you. I have no need to use *Legilimency* to know you are trying to stall. I will be joining my Death eaters shortly. First though I felt I should greet you personally."

"Oh, how gracious of you, My Lord," Harry sneered sarcastically, wand gripped tightly in her hand.

"DO NOT MOCK ME, POTTER!"

"Why, Tom, I would never think of begrudging the hospitality of such a powerful wizard as you." His red eyes glared through narrow slits and Harry knew she had struck a nerve. "Wake the imposter!" he directed the witch. "We shall see how much Harry Potter enjoys watching Miss Weasley suffer." Voldemort smiled evilly at Harry's brief look of consternation. "Yes, Harry, you see I knew all along it was Ginny Weasley. I too have my spies," Voldemort looked at the witch with pleasure.

"*Enervate!*" she pointed her wand at Ginny with one hand while lifting her mask with the other. Harry's jaw dropped in shock as Arsinoe Darkmoon smiled back at her...

"Albus...ahead of us...Dementors!" Sirius gasped, visibly paling. He gripped his broom tighter.

"Voldemort must have summoned them." The old man grit his teeth. "They are about five miles ahead of us."

"We'll need everyone who can do a Patronus up front," Remus shouted over to Kingsley. The Auror nodded and swung his broom towards his team while shouting orders to be prepared and organizing his troops.

"This may be a good sign," Moody's gravelly voice called in the wind. "It could be that things are not going well for the Dark Lord."

"I agree, Alastor," Dumbledore stated, blue eyes gleaming. "We need to go faster. It will be difficult for Harry and the others to fend them off; I count at least fifty from here." He leaned forward on his broom pressing it forward at maximum speed.

"Sirius, will you be okay?" Remus questioned his friend anxiously. He knew that the twelve years in Azkaban had taken their toll.

"Don't worry, Moony. It will take more than a few Dementors to keep me from getting to Harry. If I have to I'll transform when we hit the ground." Sirius jaw was set with determination as he watched the dark mass looming ahead of them...

"Good evening, Harry." Arsinoe's bell like voice was dripping ice. "I do not appreciate your insult by calling me the Master's whore."

"I knew I should have trusted my first instincts about you," Harry said recovering her composure.

"Aren't you even curious as to why I have joined the Dark Lord?"

"All right, I'll bite. Why did you?"

"It was your fault really. I couldn't have you usurp my position among the League of the Feathered Serpent. I am a high priestess among my people and have spent my life studying to attain the knowledge of the ancients. However, you come along and my grandfather stated you would be the chosen one. I deserve the power to deliver my people from the suppression they have endured since the Conquistadors not some stupid little white girl who can speak the language of the snake! The Master has promised that I shall be worshiped by his side. I will be the queen of my people."

"If you really believe that then you are seriously deluded. Voldemort has no love for anyone but himself. Once you have served your purpose, he will kill you without batting an eye. Just as he did to Bellatrix. I pity you, Arsinoe."

"Bitch," she screamed pointing her wand at Harry while Voldemort chuckled in amusement. "You will suffer for your pertinence. I will have you on your knees."

Harry had her shield up before the knee reversal curse was out of Arsinoe's mouth and she flicked her wand casually hitting the other witch square on with a powerful blasting curse. Arsinoe was pitched backwards into the window shattering the glass. Before Harry could react, the witch fell through the sash with a shrill scream. Harry was sickened by the sound of a loud crack as she hit the ground smashing her skull.

"Well done, Harry," Voldemort praised. "You have saved me the trouble of disposing of her myself."

"You're sick," Ginny spoke up weakly. Pulling herself up to a sitting position on the floor, she shivered from the after effects of the Cruciatus.

"Ah, Miss Weasley, I see the Polyjuice has begun to wear off. However, you too have outlived your usefulness. I am afraid I will have to kill you now!"

"No!" Harry screamed stepping between Ginny and Voldemort. "I'm the one you want. Let her go!"

"Unfortunately, that is not an option, Harry," he gloated. "You see, I have a rather unpleasant death planned for you. Just be grateful that I will allow Miss Weasley an easy death. *Expelliarmus!*" Voldemort flicked his wrist in an attempt to disarm Harry but she had put a sticking charm on her hand. "Very clever, Harry, but it will not save either one of you." Voldemort advanced on the two girls furiously. "*Avadra Kedavra!*"

Harry dodged the curse and knocked Ginny away. Ginny was rolled to the side as the curse hit the floor barely missing her as Fawkes appeared in a burst of flames. He dove down towards Ginny and she grabbed his tail as Voldemort directed another killing curse towards them. Harry held her breath but the bird had disappeared and the curse simply hit the wooden floor.

"You really aren't having a good day, are you Tom?" Harry taunted. "It's just you and me again just like the Prophecy said. Are you ready to die yet, Tom? Or should I say be vanquished since I already killed you once."

"Not today, Harry. It seems Dumbledore will be arriving shortly. It would be rude of me not to greet him personally. It seems I must bid you adieu," he smiled evilly.

"You really don't think I am going to let you out of here do you?"

"Ah...brave to the end. Don't worry though. The old fool and your parents will all have the pleasure of watching your death. Good bye, Harry Potter."

Harry had her wand pointed at Voldemort but was unprepared when he failed to fire. Instead, he left his wand pointed at the floor. His smile sent a chill up Harry's spine and tuned her stomach into a tight knot. The hair on the back of her neck stood on end. She could sense evil in its purist form as the house burst into flames around her and the floor collapsed beneath her feet. Voldemort's cold laughter was the last thing she heard as she plunged two floors down through the fire to the basement...

"Albus, we're gaining on the Dementors!"

"I am aware of that, Remus, but we still have a distance before we catch up to them and I fear some of them are starting to land."

"Remus, do you smell what I do?" Sirius questioned flying closer to his friend. Sirius eyes were wide with unbridled anxiety as he peered ahead in the fading light.

"If you mean the scent of fire, yes." The werewolf frowned. "I picked it up in the wind a minute ago."

"Look there, up ahead!" Moody growled. "I can just make out a dim light!"

"That is no light," Dumbledore squinted, blue eyes the color of ice, "it is a building on fire."

"Shit! We're going to be too late!" Sirius swore, unable to keep the agony from his voice.

Suddenly there was a burst of flames to their left, and Fawkes appeared carrying Ginny Weasley. Bill immediately pulled his broom up along side of the Phoenix and helped his sister to climb on behind him.

"Miss Weasley, are you unhurt?" Dumbledore asked as Fawkes disappeared again.

"He used the Cruciatus on me. Headmaster, Arsinoe...she...she was Voldemort's spy! He knew we were coming and everything."

Dumbledore nodded grimly. "I was worried that Voldemort knew too much but I assumed he had gotten into Harry's mind without her knowing. I will deal with Arsinoe accordingly."

"You can't. I think she's dead. There was a fight and Harry hit her with a blasting curse. She was hurled through the window." Ginny shuddered. "After that Harry...she...she was facing off with Riddle. He tried to kill us. Harry saved my life."

"She's alive then?" Sirius looked at Ginny, eyes burning with hope.

"Sirius...I don't know. Fawkes came and took me. Harry had no time to grab onto him too." Ginny was shaking visibly. The shock of her ordeal was starting to take its toll.

"Miss Weasley, I am going to have Fawkes take you back to Hogwarts. You need to be in the hospital wing."

"Headmaster, I want to help!" she protested.

"You already have, Child. Now do as I say. Have Madam Pomfrey get ready to receive the injured," Dumbledore told her kindly but in a manner that brooked no argument.

"Yes, Sir," she answered sullenly. Fawkes flew over and she grabbed onto his tail then vanished in a ball of flames.

"Albus, I believe we are close enough to send out some Patronus spells. It will affect at least some of the Dementors," Remus stated glaring into the dark sky.

"My thoughts exactly," Dumbledore agreed. "Kingsley have your team ready at my command!"

Kingsley motioned for the Aurors who were able to perform the strongest Patronus to move into firing range. "We're all set, Albus."

"Then fire on the count of three. One...two...three..*Expecto Patronus!*" Dumbledore's silver Patronus flowed from his wand followed by at least twenty others. The sky was full of glowing silver animals all racing after the tails of the Dementors as the glow from the fire grew closer. It could now be seen as a farmhouse and there were flashes emanating on the ground, which could only be wand fire...

"Here come the first wave of Dementors!" Tiberius shouted as he felt the intense cold. He conjured a picture of Phaedra laughing at Christmas in his mind and fired. A long silver serpent leaped forward. Beside him, Severus weaker Patronus darted forward, the teddy bear attacking with a ferocity, which would have been amusing, were it not for the dire situation.

"*Expecto Patronus!*" James Potter shouted as he crouched behind a large rock. His Patronus was his animagus form and identical to that of his daughter's.

Draco had moved over to help Circe cover Phaedra and Lily noted that his Patronus was weak but seemed to take the form of a ferret. She helped by sending out one of her own, a fox. This was followed by an angry lioness from Circe's wand along with Hermione's otter. Ron was still firing on the Death eaters who were drawing back when a woman's scream came from the farmhouse and a body came hurtling from the second story window.

"It's not Harry or Ginny is it?" Hermione questioned in an attempt to see what was happening.

"I do not believe so. The pitch of the voice was too high," Snape answered as he continued to concentrate on the battle.

"I think it may have been the Dark Lord's new consort. I do not know who she is but he took her after he rid himself of Bellatrix," Tiberius added. "I was never able to discover her identity." He glanced around turning his back abruptly. "*Stupefy!*" Watch behind you! The Death eaters are beginning to circle behind us through the trees," he warned.

"We're not going to get out of here alive, are we?" Hermione questioned fearfully. The horrors of the past few hours had begun to catch up with her.

"Harry will come, Mione. She won't leave us here!" Ron blindly reached his hand out to her.

"Oh my God!" Lily Potter screamed. "James, the house!"

"What is it? What's happening?" Ron demanded.

"The farm house has just burst into flames," James whispered hoarsely. "No...This...can't be...happening," he choked.

"Shit!" Draco swore shaking with terror. "The Dark Lord has...he...he's alive. He escaped the house. I don't...see...Ginny...or...Harry." The words died in his throat as the tall black robed figure glided forward.

"*NO, NOT MY HARRY! PLEASE...NOT HARRY...I'LL DO ANYTHING!*" Lily Potter's anguished voice screamed at the advancing figure.

Hermione just stared in shock. Somewhere in the back of her mind, she was glad Ron could not see the evil smile on Voldemort's face as she said a silent prayer for her lost family and friends.

Severus Snape glared in anger as Voldemort moved ever closer. He was not afraid to die. He had been prepared to do so ever since the first war. His anger came from the fact that he was unable to see Harry one last time. 'I promise you, Harry, that your death will not be in vain,' he thought. 'If it is the last thing I ever do I will take as many of them with me as I can. You

loved and trusted in me no matter how miserable I made you feel. You loved us all and we failed you...'

Harry could feel the flames licking at her clothes as the inferno raged around her. It felt like it took forever to fall. The world was moving in slow motion. The entire building was coming down with her. Splinters of wood were cutting into her, tearing her skin as the fire caused the exposed flesh on her arms and hands to blister with the searing heat as she tried to cover her face. Harry tried to breathe but the intense heat seared her lungs. Her eyes watered against the thick acrid smoke as tears of pain and anger stung her raw cheeks. She struck the earthen floor of the cellar prison hard. One leg was twisted wildly behind her, the bone jutting out from beneath her burned clothing. It hurt to breathe and knew she had cracked some ribs. Harry was dizzy from the pain and smoke. 'I'm dying...Voldemort has won...' she cried out in her mind as the darkness closed in around her and she began to grow cold despite the heat from the burning rafters over head.

"Harry...Harry Potter!" A man's voice called from everywhere and nowhere. "Wake up!"

She didn't want to move. The oblivion the darkness gave to her was safe. There was no pain here. There was simply nothing. She wanted to just stay there enveloped in its protective shroud until the end came.

"I said WAKE UP!" The voice bellowed bouncing off the walls.

Harry could feel the chill seeping into her bones. 'I must be getting delirious,' she mused. "Go away and let me die in peace. I'm nothing but a failure anyway," she mumbled trying to curl into a ball but a wave of pain shot through her chest.

"You will be a failure if you don't wake up, NOW!"

Harry's eyes jerked open. She found the voice familiar. The icy cold of the grave swept down her spine. A figure was looming over her just below where she had broken through the ceiling. She stared, gritting her teeth in anger. It was a ghost. There was a deep gash where his throat should have been. That was where Sirius had torn it out during the battle at Hogwarts.

"You! You murdered them! I should have let them kill you in the shack!"

"You probably should have, but you have your mother's kind heart, Harry. That is why I'm here now," Peter Pettigrew replied, his beady eyes studying her. "I died before I could pay back the life debt I owe. I am too afraid to go on so I am doomed to be a ghost to pay for my sins. I have come to pay you what I owe."

"It's a little late for that," she answered choking on the smoke and wincing in pain as she tried to sit.

"No, it isn't. Listen to the sounds from outside and feel the power within yourself. Only you can stop him now. Only you have the power. Listen to the sounds and feel from within your soul," Peter said sadly. "Don't give in to the weakness like I did. They need you...She needs you...Listen..." Peter vanished, his ethereal voice hanging in the air.

Harry sat gaping at the fire burning above her and tried to take a deep breath. The air in the cellar was cool. She must have been having a nightmare...and yet...she could still hear Peter's

words ringing in her ears. Off in the distance as if from underwater she could hear shouts and screams. That's when she heard the voice. Her voice. She was yelling frantically. Yelling almost the same identical words, the ones she had screamed the night she had died. "Not My Harry..." Suddenly it was as if a bell went off in Harry's mind as the memory of two almost identical omens came back to her. *'In fire you will find darkness...and in darkness you will find salvation.'* Peter...he was her salvation. He made sure she heard the one thing that would stir her back to reality and life. Her mother pleading once again for her child's life. She knew what she had to do. This was the reason she had been born. "It's time to save the world," she muttered.

Harry looked down and still had her wand clasped into her hand with the sticking spell. She knew the ceiling would come down on her at any moment. Her leg throbbed painfully as she pulled it out from beneath her and did a quick healing spell but had no time to worry about the burns on her exposed skin or broken ribs. She knew Madam Pomfrey would not be pleased but she needed to be able to move. Closing her eyes, she thought to herself, 'I am the soul of the Phoenix with the cunning of the serpent. I have been given a rare gift of power. I will use it wisely.' She then slowly began the sequence of spells she had learned when she first became an animagus. Only this time she pictured a dragon...a feathered dragon...

"I can see them!" Sirius shouted. "There, over by the trees!"

"Yes..."Dumbledore agreed squinting.

"Oh, Merlin, is that Lord Voldemort coming towards them?" Shacklebolt hissed.

"I don't see Harry..." Remus voice faded as he scanned the scene. His werewolf senses were on full alert.

"We can't worry about that now," Moody roared into the wind. "There are others down there that need our help. Potter can take care of herself. If she's alive, she'll be there somewhere. She's a resourceful lass."

"Kingsley, bring some of the Aurors around to circle the trees. The Deathaters are surrounding them. We can come in behind and catch them in between our people. I will hold off Tom," Dumbledore directed as he edged his broom down towards the foray on the ground.

"I'm on it, Albus, they won't get away," he replied ordering the Aurors to split off into three groups. One would come from behind; the next would keep the remaining Dementors at bay. Albus would lead the third group to the ground. All looked grim, jaws set into firm lines, as the battle was about to commence...

Voldemort held up his hand and the Deathaters dropped back awaiting his orders to kill the hostages. The Dark Lord was smiling at the Potters.

"Foolish idiots, you thought you could stop me? Your daughter is dead. Even now, what is left of her will be burning shortly. I have the pleasure of seeing your failure and knowing you will never join her again."

"Where's my sister?!" Ron screamed defiantly.

"Unfortunately the little brat escaped me, but she will be returned in due time. Perhaps I will keep her for a plaything once I am done with the child." Voldemort's red eyes slid over to Phaedra. She was staring at him with unbridled fear.

"Master," Lucius Malfoy stepped forward with a bow, "forgive my interruption but there is a large group of Aurors approaching."

"I am aware of that, Lucius. Our guests will also have the pleasure of watching me bring that old fool Dumbledore down before they die." His smile widened. "Bind them!"

The Deathaters sprang into action, but the little group was not going down without a fight. Shields went up around them as they fired back, much to the Dark Lord's amusement. He was intent on the skirmish but not unaware of the Aurors beginning to land. He turned to approach Dumbledore.

"Good evening, Tom," Dumbledore addressed him as if they were sitting down to afternoon tea.

"Where is Harry?" Sirius' angry voice came from behind Dumbledore as he landed and fired off a curse at one of the Deathaters simultaneously.

"Potter is dead," Voldemort answered calmly. His eyes locked on Dumbledore.

"She's in there." He flicked his wrist to indicate the farmhouse now fully engulfed in flames. The structure was near to collapse. "You will all be joining her shortly."

"You bloody..." Sirius charged forward but was struck to the ground by Dumbledore before Voldemort's killing curse could hit him.

"Sirius, over here," Remus called from where he had landed. "James and Lily need our help."

Sirius transformed, the big black dog bolting forward with all the strength he could muster. He leaped sideways to avoid a cutting curse from Lucius who had been slowly working his way towards Draco.

"James...tell me Harry is with you and that she isn't dead." Sirius pleaded.

His friend could not meet his eyes and Lily was crying even as she continued to fight. She had planted herself over by Circe and Phaedra doing her best to protect the mother and child.

"I...I haven't seen...Harry," James managed to choke. "She didn't come out from the house."

"I refuse to believe your daughter is dead," Severus' steely voice commented as he fired off a series of curses directed towards Dolohov.

"Never mind that now, we have to get moving," Tiberius commanded. "Voldemort is dueling with Dumbledore. Get Phaedra and Circe and make an emergency Portkey."

Severus moved swiftly towards his sister and Lily but was cut off by Lucius.

"Going somewhere, blood traitor?"

"Stand aside, Lucius, or be prepared to fight."

"You can't kill me again, Severus. Nevertheless, I am going to kill you."

"I don't think so, father," Draco's cold voice interrupted. His wand pointing at his father's back. Lucius swung around, kicking his leg out and toppling his son while Severus jumped over to his sister.

"Lily get over and help the others. We need to get out of here." Lily handed Phaedra over to Circe just as the battle grew more intense. She was halfway back to her husband when she was distracted by Voldemort's gleeful shout.

"Behold, I am the Lord of all Wizardry. The great Dumbledore has been brought to his knees." All eyes turned as Death Eaters and Aurors alike froze. Voldemort had his wand trained on Dumbledore who was sprawled out in front of him, coughing blood, having lost his wand. Dumbledore showed no sign of fear as he met the Dark Lord's intent gaze.

"You may have won the battle, Tom, but you have yet to win the war." Dumbledore's voice was barely above a whisper. Nevertheless, it carried across the expanse of the field so that all could hear.

"Stupid old fool. It is so like you not to beg for mercy. Therefore, you shall have none. Say your prayers old..." He never finished the sentence. Voldemort was suddenly thrown backwards off his feet by a huge explosion from the farmhouse.

"Look there! It's a dragon!" One of the younger Death Eaters screeched fearfully.

"That's no dragon," James Potter's excitement was evident in his voice, "it's Harry! She has transformed." A loud cheer rose from Order members and Aurors alike as the magnificent beast emerged from the flames rising majestically into the air.

"You'll never get away," Lucius spat firing towards Severus and Circe. "I will see you both suffer first though!" He flicked his wrist and yelled, "*Avadra Kedavra!*" A jet of green light went streaking towards Phaedra.

"NOT MY BABY!" Circe screamed throwing herself on top of her child while Severus made a frantic grab for her ankle to pull them both to safety...

Harry could feel the power coursing through her body. She felt like a thousand electrical charges were flowing through her veins. Her body elongated and feathers appeared on her neck and wings. Her head took the form of a snake but had the face and beak of a large bird. Finally, her legs shortened into those of a dragon enhanced by formidable talons. It was time to face her nemesis; time to restore balance to the world and force down the darkness. Time to say goodbye to her loved ones and restore peace.

She looked up at the ceiling, testing her wings, and lifted off. The fire raged, but she did not feel the heat. The house began to crumble and still she flew upwards. She could see the night sky as the power of her wings brought what was left of the ceiling down around her. With a shower of sparks, she emerged into the cold night air hovering in the glow above the wreckage of the old farmhouse.

Harry surveyed the scene below with the knowledge that this scene had been repeated many times throughout history. Cultures had been born and died since time began and still the carnage persisted. The darkness would always be there waiting to take hold but the light would provide a beacon of hope. A reluctant hero to show the way back, vanquishing the dark to keep the world safe, giving the people a choice. This was why she had been born. If she failed today all that she knew and held dear would disappear. The wizarding world would perish under the weight and oppression of the Dark Lord.

Harry could see them all staring up at her from the ground. Dumbledore was on his knees, injured and bleeding, smiling up at her as he summoned his wand back into his hands. Voldemort had been flung backwards to the ground by the sheer force of her emergence from the whirling inferno. He was rising slowly, red gaze intent on the hovering serpent above. Fury was written into those red eyes, face etched into grim lines. However, Harry directed her attention to another scene by the wail of a child.

"Muuuummmmyyyy...please wake up...Please don't be dead."

Harry had been too late to stop the death curse from hitting Circe. Severus was cradling his niece protectively even as he pulled his sister from on top of her. Circe had died protecting Phaedra just as Harry's own mother had done to save her. Harry could see Lily running over to help as her father and the others cheered for their savior. 'I'm sorry, Circe. I wasn't quick enough,' Harry thought even as she strove to control the anger welling up inside of her. 'I promise you that Phaedra will not grow up alone or unhappy like I did. My mum and dad will be with you and Justinian soon and when it's time we will all be together again.' Harry let out a loud hissing noise and plunged towards the Dark Lord. No more innocents would suffer at his hands.

Voldemort watched her dive towards him and fired his wand at Dumbledore. The old man still had some spunk though and rolled out of the path of the killing curse. Fawkes appeared out of the darkness and he grabbed the bird's tail to reappear next to Harry's mother. The mighty bird knew that this was no longer Albus' fight. It was up to Harry to stop the madness.

Lucius Malfoy moved to support his master, followed by Draco, a look of pure malevolence on the younger Malfoy's features. Harry could hear Draco shouting.

"No father, you will not be helping that piece of shit. This one is for Ginny!" He took aim and brought his arm around in a giant arc, slicing the back of his father's neck, severing Lucius spine. Lucius fell to the ground paralyzed. His gray eyes were furious but he was unable to move. Harry had been right. He could not die but he still needed his nervous system to manipulate his body. She winked at Draco as she landed.

Knocking Lucius limp body away from Voldemort with her tail before he could try to heal it she faced off with Voldemort. The Dark Lord smiled coldly, transforming. The giant cobra faced off with the Feathered Serpent, hissing and spitting. Each circled the other as Death eaters, Order members, and Aurors stood transfixed. There was no wind. The earth hung silent as the battle began.

Only Phaedra could understand what they were saying. The little girl, still in shock, mumbled the translations. Dumbledore, Remus, and Sirius looked on in surprise as Severus nodded. Only the rescue team had learned that she was a Parselmouth. Dumbledore took the frightened

child into his arms in an effort to comfort her while she repeated what the two combatants were saying.

"So...you still think you can challenge me and win?"

"You've lost already. You just don't see it."

"Heh, Heh, Heh," the Dark Lord laughed.

"Arrogant to the end, just like your parents," he sneered weaving his head. "See even now, the Dementors are returning." Voldemort hissed as a group of dark figures appeared hovering near the crumbling building.

"They will not come, Tom. They are here to make sure I do what I am supposed to. Even Dementors have rules. They understand the power I have and will not interfere unless I fail."

"Fool!" he spat attempting to strike. Harry dodged his fangs with a flip of her wings.

"I pity you, Tom. You really are a brilliant wizard. If you hadn't gone dark we could have been friends. You could have taught us so much but instead you choose to loose yourself in self pity and anger."

"You don't know what you're talking about. Prepare to die, Potter, for I have no more patience. There is no way you can stop me." The giant snake suddenly began to enlarge. Harry flew upwards diving and dodging his poisonous fangs. She looked down sadly at what could have been the greatest wizard of the age.

"You have forgotten about the spell, Tom. I know it by heart and Arsinoe carried the tablets back to her people."

"No they weren't you stupid girl. She gave them to me."

"Did she? I had an idea you would try to get hold of them so I made copies. It was quite easy actually. I used an old stone and a simple spell. I left out all the key words. Even Dumbledore didn't know. I happen to know that the originals are hidden at Hogwarts. The fakes are what she was carrying back to Mexico with her. I will return the originals to her grandfather when this is all over. I'm sure Severus would say that my subterfuge was worthy of any Slytherin. Don't you agree?"

"You lie!"

"No, Tom, it's the truth. I hope you finally find the peace which has eluded you, Tom...goodbye." Harry hovered just out of Voldemort's reach. A large tear fell to the ground as she gave on last look at her parents and nodded her farewell. She knew Phaedra would translate as she watched her father and mother sit down with their arms around each other. They smiled at her one last time in understanding. Sirius and Remus sat on either side of them, tears running down their faces. Her father motioned for Severus to stand with them. Harry began the spell to return their souls even as Voldemort attempted to Portkey away unsuccessfully. There were forces at work beyond his control now and they could not be stopped.

"Hail to this Tom Riddle

Hail to this Lucius Malfoy

Hail to this James and Lily Potter

May you all lie down and sleep.

May your astral souls be purified.

May your psyche be purified.

May your life force be purified.

May you come to your mothers.

May you come to the mother goddess of the sky

In the great Region of Unification

Where she will purify you.

This is Tom Riddle

This is Lucius Malfoy

This is James and Lily Potter.

Behold, you are spiritual.

Hail to this Tom Riddle

Hail to this Lucius Malfoy

Hail to this James and Lily Potter.

May your astral souls be purified and judged worthy

To dwell with the spirits or returned to the abyss.

May your psyche be purified and dwell with the gods

Lest they be banished to the darkness.

Hail to this Tom Riddle.

Hail to this Lucius Malfoy.

Hail to this James and Lily Potter.

May your limbs and your bones,

Your organs and your head

Come before the god of the Earth.

May he keep iniquity away from you.

Hail Tom Riddle

Hail Lucius Malfoy

Hail James and Lily Potter

May you reside for all time

With the gods of creation

Who have judged the worthiness of your souls.

Harry landed and transformed. The remaining Death eaters were trying to escape having seen their master defeated. The Aurors had sprung into action and were rounding them up. Harry looked down at the body of Tom Riddle. His features were contorted in agony. She determined there would be no more resurrections of his evil soul. She raised her wand.

"*Incendio*," she murmured softly. She looked over at Dumbledore who nodded his approval. She then walked over to where Lucius lay. His pale gray eyes were open and staring. He bore an expression of obstinate loathing. Even in death, he would not repent his sins.

"*Incendio*," Draco said from behind her igniting his father's remains. "It is my right. He was my father." The young man scowled. "Where's Ginny? The Dark Lord said she escaped." Harry could hear the worry in his voice.

"Fawkes saved her. If she's not here I would assume she was brought to Hogwarts." Draco smiled and turned his attention to where Ron and Hermione were sitting embraced. "I'll go and tell the Weasel."

Harry limped over to where the bodies of her parents were propped against the trees still in each other's arms. Sirius, Remus, and Severus waited patiently. Beginning to feel her injuries again Harry dismissed the pain. She was not yet done. She looked at the pained expressions on the faces of her Protectors and silently kissed each one of the three men on the cheek. Only then did she look at her parents faces. Her father had a quirky little smile on his lips. Had she not known better Harry would have believed him to be asleep. Her mother had an expression of rapture and reminded Harry of how much she had loved her husband and child. They were at peace. Gently laying them down she covered their bodies with her cloak. The cold air felt good on her burned and raw skin.

Harry was beginning to get dizzy as she tried to suppress her physical pain along with her emotions. It was not yet time for her to give in to her grief. She walked over to Dumbledore and embraced him. She then took Phaedra from his arms without a word and led her over to where Circe's body lay. Someone had covered her over. Harry assumed it was Severus. She gently exposed Circe's face grateful that her eyes were closed. She bore a look of satisfaction

and was beautiful even in death. She sensed someone along side of them and looked up to see Tiberius watching. She then hugged Phaedra.

"Look at her, Phaedra, and never forget how much she loved you. She died for you. She died so you could live just like my mum."

"Who will take care of me now?" the little girl questioned.

"We will. You still have your uncles, Sirius, Remus, and me. We all love you and you will never be sad again if we can help it."

"But I miss my mummy and my daddy is gone again too," she sobbed.

"I know. I miss Circe too as well as my mum and dad. Nevertheless, I do know she wouldn't want you to cry. She's watching you know. I'll bet that right now she is with your dad and my parents and telling them how brave you are. She's saying that you're a Snape and will hold your head up with dignity and pride."

"She told me you would come and you did."

"I'm only sorry I was not fast enough to spare you from losing her."

"It's not your fault, Harry," Tiberius remarked quietly. "You saved as many as you could. It was her time."

"Miss Harry, you're hurt." Phaedra could see the burns on her body and the odd twist to her leg as Harry swayed dizzily. "You won't leave me too, will you?"

"No, Phaedra, I won't leave you. I just need time to heal. I might pass out though so I don't want you to get scared, okay?"

"Okay," she answered nervously.

"Now go with your uncle. I still have one more thing to do." Harry handed Phaedra off to Tiberius and pointed her wand towards the smoldering ruins of the farmhouse. "*Accio goblet.*" It took a minute but the goblet found its way to her. It was blackened and tarnished but intact. Muttering a spell, she cooled it off and cleaned it before going over to Ron and Hermione.

"Harry! I'm so sorry," Hermione sobbed. "This whole thing was my entire fault."

"No, Hermione, it was nobody's fault. I'm sorry about your parents. I'm sorry I couldn't get there in time. Are you all right?"

"I haven't really had time to process everything," she admitted, "and now Ron is blind. He's saying he can't marry me. He says he wouldn't be any kind of a husband who could take care of his family properly now that he can't see."

"Is this true, Ronald Weasley?" Harry asked sharply. "I seem to recall you were fighting along with the rest of us despite not being able to see what you were doing."

"I didn't want anything to happen to Hermione," he protested.

"Do you love Hermione?"

"Of course I do but that isn't the point. How can I support a family if I can't see?"

"Lots of men do, Ron. You are just being your usual stubborn chauvinistic self! Now knock it off!" Harry blasted him.

"But I deserve to be blind. This is my punishment. I betrayed you and used the goblet for Voldemort!"

"Did you do so willingly? I happen to know you were under an Imperious curse at the time. You are not responsible."

"That doesn't matter. You're my best mate and I should have seen that he would do something like that!"

"Really, Weasley..." Draco drawled. "The Dark Lord has used all of us. You should be grateful that we are all alive and not feeling sorry for yourself."

"Draco is right, Ron," Hermione admonished tearfully. "I didn't fall in love with you because you could see. I fell in love with what is inside. I would love you even if you couldn't talk or walk."

"Hmm...might be an improvement," Draco sneered.

"That's enough, Draco," Harry remarked quietly. "So will you marry Hermione or not?"

"Yes, we'll work it out."

"In that case...Headmaster, could you come over here?" Harry called to Dumbledore who had been standing off to the side with the others watching.

"I assume you would like me to perform the ceremony before young Mr. Weasley has time to change his mind?"

"Yes, so long as they're both willing?"

"We are," Hermione answered for them both.

"Where are my Mum and Dad?" Ron asked.

"They're coming," Dumbledore answered, waving them over.

He quickly explained the situation and the Weasleys both smiled. Bill had come up to watch too. Once word spread, a whole crowd had gathered around. Harry grinned with amusement knowing how embarrassed Ron would be if he could see how many people were witnessing this. Harry swayed on her feet and felt someone at her arm. She looked up and saw Sirius giving her a wicked grin, which didn't quite reach his eyes.

"James and Lily would be proud to see this." He hugged her gently and frowned when she winced in pain.

"Shh...I think we all need a little happiness amidst all the pain," she answered leaning on him for support. Her side was throbbing and her leg was going numb. The burns were stinging painfully but inside she was beginning to feel a happy warmth. "Could you do me a favor and get my dad's glasses?"

"I've already brought them," Remus answered. He had moved up beside Sirius as Dumbledore started the ceremony. "I have a feeling I know why you want them," he winked with understanding eyeing the goblet.

The ceremony wasn't long. When it came time for a ring Molly gave Hermione hers. The couple kissed and everybody who had been watching cheered. Ron turned beet red.

"Who else is here?" he asked astonished.

"Only the entire Order and most of the Aurors who aren't taking in prisoners," Bill laughed. "Congratulations, you two, now all you have to do is give Mum those grandchildren she's been looking for forever." Everybody laughed and Hermione and Ron hugged one another as the crowd dispersed.

"Come on Son, I'll help you get back to Hogwarts," Mr. Weasley said fondly.

"Mr. Weasley, could you wait just one minute. I have a wedding present for them," Harry remarked with a snicker.

"A wedding present? What on earth could you give us here, Harry?" Hermione wondered.

"You'll see. Remus, I may need your help when this is done. I am very tired."

"I understand, Princess. You need to get to the infirmary soon."

"Harry, are you hurt?" Ron questioned. "Whatever it is can wait."

"No, Ron. It can't. I want you to have this now. Just stay still and be patient. You may feel a little discomfort and I will get balled out later by the Headmaster but some things are worth his getting pissed off," Harry remarked glancing at Dumbledore who was eyeing her shrewdly.

"What's going on?" Ron asked dismayed by her remark.

"Dumbledore will explain later," Harry stated, voice shaking as she lit the goblet with a wave of her wand.

She knew what she was going to do was borderline dark magic but didn't care. Remus and Dumbledore stood steady though. Both understood that her motives were good even if they weren't entirely happy with her actions. She removed her glasses. Placing one of Ron's hands on the goblet she covered it with one of her own. Harry softly uttered a long and involved incantation waving her wand over the goblet with her free hand. A beam of blue light shot out from the goblet into both of their eyes. Ron cried out in pain but Harry held him steady. The fire then went out. Harry blinked once and put her glasses back on. Ron looked up blinking the tears from his eyes.

"Harry? Is that you?" he asked squinting. "I think I can see but everything is all fuzzy and blurred," he cried excitedly.

"Welcome to the land of the nearsighted, Ron. I have just given you my eyesight."

"Harry are you blind now?" he questioned frantically.

"No, Ron, she's fine," Remus replied. "I think you would do well to try these on though." The werewolf gently placed James Potter's eyeglasses on Ron.

"I...I...can see! Harry, mate, how did you do that?"

"Never mind, Ron. It was the least I could do for my best friend. Take good care of those glasses though. They were my dad's. I think he would want you to have them. Use them well." Harry turned to face Dumbledore who shrugged and sighed. "I love you too, Albus," she chuckled.

"Do you have anything to say for yourself?" Albus blue eyes were twinkling but his face was stern.

"Ah...yeah...could someone catch me? I'm going to pass out..." Harry managed to say as the world spun into nothingness.

She never felt Remus and Sirius grab her at the same time. Nor did she hear Phaedra cry out in fear. Tiberius reassured her that Harry had merely passed out from her injuries before Severus apparated her back to Hogwarts accompanied by Sirius and Remus.

Chapter 30 - New Beginnings

Harry could vaguely hear a bell ringing and soft voices through the blanket of darkness. She woke slowly not wanting to give up the warmth and security that enveloped her. Yet as she came to consciousness, her instincts told her she was not alone. She sensed a nearby presence. The bell in the background was tolling the mournful note of a funeral dirge. Keeping her eyes closed Harry realized she could hear Madam Pomfrey talking to someone. She struggled to listen to the hushed voices.

"Are you certain she is not up to attending the funeral? It may help. She's barely said a word for the past three days," a soft male voice remarked worriedly. Harry struggled to identify the speaker but his tone was too low.

"No she's still in shock. It would be best if we give her more time. Harry will wake up soon and that should help. The child has been through a lot. I think she will respond more once she realizes that Harry will be fine."

"We have told her this several times but she doesn't seem to believe us. She merely clings to her rabbit and sucks her thumb. Severus and I are becoming more and more concerned."

Harry listened to this and realized that it was Tiberius Snape. They had to be discussing Phaedra. Harry began to struggle back to reality but she felt so weak and tired.

"It will take time Tiberius. Phaedra has seen a major battle and witnessed the deaths of both her parents. I'm doing as much as I can. However, I think her relationship with Harry is the key. It is more than a little ironic that both their sets of parents died in a similar fashion. You said that Harry had her look at her mother before she left the battlefield?"

"Yes, was that wise?"

"Actually it was. She knew that Phaedra would need to have closure and I suspect she could feel the child's distress being an empath. Harry herself must have been having feelings of a similar nature. I understand she covered Lily and James' bodies up herself."

"She did. It took a lot for her not to start crying. I suspect she was feeling a good deal of guilt. She was not in time to help Circe then had to do that spell regardless of her own personal feelings. It also must have grieved her to see Black and Lupin. They were crying. She knew it was right but I believe she did not want to do it."

"If you had the chance to restore something you always craved would you want to have to be the one to put it back even if it was the right thing to do?"

"I honestly do not know, Poppy," Tiberius sighed. "I need to go. I hope Harry is not too upset that she did not get to the funerals today. We tried to delay them but Albus felt it would be best to go ahead."

"He's right. I'm sure Harry will understand. You go on ahead. I'll be fine here with Phaedra and will send word if Harry wakes."

"Very well I shall inform the others."

Harry heard the soft click of the door. All the funerals were today. Phaedra was in a bad way. 'Open your eyes,' she berated herself. 'It will do you no good to hide. You need to be there and so does Phaedra.' She could feel Poppy beside her taking her pulse.

"Poppy," she croaked allowing her eyes to open. The room was out of focus and her throat was dry.

"Welcome back Harry. How are you feeling?" Madam Pomfrey questioned gently placing Harry's glasses on her face.

"Tired," she replied weakly.

"At least you didn't try and tell me you were fine," the nurse snorted good-naturedly.

"I heard you talking but couldn't get my eyes open. Where is Phaedra?"

"She is over there. Right now she's asleep."

"Oh. I was hoping she would be able to talk to me."

"She has been having a hard time. The little lamb has had a severe shock and it will take time for her to recover."

"She was very brave." Harry smiled sadly.

"So I have been told. She is having a difficult time accepting that her parents are gone though. Children don't fully understand the concept of death."

"Tell me about it." Harry frowned.

"Miss Harry?" Phaedra's voice came from across the room. Harry turned her head towards it. Phaedra was sitting up on one of the beds. She was fully dressed in mourning clothes clutching her stuffed rabbit.

"I'm awake Phaedra," Harry answered pulling herself up in bed.

"Mummy and Daddy are gone," she sobbed running over to Harry and flinging herself onto the bed next to her. "I thought you were going away too. I was so scared."

"Shh...I'm not going anywhere. Miss Harry just needed time to heal. I was hurt in the fire. You knew that."

"Uncle Sev told me that your magic was pleated and you needed to sleep but you were burned and broken. I heard Miss Poppy say so..."

"Calm down baby. I was burned and I have some badly broken bones. I took a bad fall. Then I had to fight the bad wizard. It took a lot of magic to stop him. I depleted my power but it will come back."

"You won't go away like mummy and daddy?"

"No, I will be right here. Didn't I tell you that before?"

"Yes," she sniffed curling up closer to Harry.

"How are you feeling? Did you get hurt at all?"

"Only when the bad wizard had us locked up and you knew about that." Harry nodded in affirmation allowing Phaedra to continue. "The bad wizard tried to curse me. That's why my mum is gone."

"I know," Harry answered. She was aware that Phaedra had not fully acknowledged her mother was dead. She seemed afraid to say the word.

"Uncle Sev is mad at me."

"Why would he be mad? I think he is probably worried."

"He wanted me to go with him today. They are going to put my Mummy and Daddy in the ground with yours..." Phaedra started to sob uncontrollably. Harry held her tightly tears stinging her own eyes.

"That's why the bell is ringing like that honey. It's called a funeral." Harry turned towards the nurse who had been standing off to the side pretending not to listen. "Poppy are all the funerals today?"

"Yes dear," she responded lowering her eyes. "Everyone had hoped you would be well enough to attend but I didn't feel it would be wise to wake you."

"Phaedra would you like to go to the funerals? It is how we say goodbye to those we loved."

"Mummy and Daddy will be cold and alone if they put them in the ground like that."

"No baby. It is only their bodies. Your mum and dad have moved on with mine."

"Why did they leave me here?"

"They wanted you to have a life. They want you to grow up and experience all the things that life has to offer. They'll still be watching though. When the time comes you will be together again."

"How do you know?"

"All you need to do is to ask some of the castle ghosts. They were alive once too."

"How come they are still here then?"

"I think they weren't ready to go on yet. Each has a different reason. Some have things they felt still needed to be done. Others were afraid but they will tell you that your parents are happy."

"How do you know?"

"Would you like to ask them?"

"Could we?"

"Poppy are any of the ghosts around? I know that they usually don't like to talk to us during these times but maybe they would be willing to talk to Phaedra a bit."

"I'm not sure, Harry, but I will try and find out."

Poppy left the ward and Harry sat holding onto the little girl. She found that holding Phaedra was a comfort for her too. Inside she agreed with Phaedra and didn't want to go to her parents funeral. She was warring with herself knowing that it was the right thing to do. They should go even though it would hurt. She knew her protectors would be there along with other staff and friends. While she mulled this over the Bloody Baron's transparent form swooped in through the door over to the bed. He looked down at the two girls with a forlorn expression.

"Hello Harry. I understand that you would like someone to talk with Phaedra?"

"Thank you for coming Baron. I know the ghosts don't like to answer questions but I think anything you can tell her would help. She is scared and confused."

"This is often the case, even with adults, but it is the little ones that feel it the most. Fortunately they also heal the fastest," he explained solemnly. "Do you know who I am Phaedra?"

"Uncle says you are his house ghost. I heard them call you the Bloody Baron. Is that your name?"

"My former name is not important but I was a Baron. The stains you see on my clothes are from my final battle where I died, hence the nickname, Bloody Baron."

"Oh...how come you are still here? Miss Harry says my parents have gone somewhere and won't come back."

"Wizards who stay behind have different reasons. In time I too will go on," the Baron explained patiently.

"Can my mum and dad come back to see me?"

"No Child. Once you go on you do not come back."

"Why didn't they stay here as ghosts? Did they want to leave me?"

"I cannot say for certain but I think they knew you would be loved and cared for. I can tell you that they will be aware of what you do and will await the time you can join them."

"Oh...I didn't want them to go away. Where did they go?"

"Phaedra the Baron can't tell us that. Even ghosts have rules. Trust him when he tells you that they're happy and looking after you from the afterlife," Harry interceded noting the Baron's apparent discomfort with this line of questioning.

"Thank you Harry. This is quite difficult for all of us."

"I know. Nick talked to me when I thought I had lost Sirius. This is even harder for Phaedra." The Baron nodded his acquiescence.

"How come you can't tell me? Why do ghosts have rules too?" Phaedra demanded growing frustrated.

"If we didn't have rules then you would spend all of your time anticipating the afterlife and never experiencing the joys of the present life. I will tell you that I am here because I felt the need to stay and finish what I started. Once I feel I have done so I too will go on."

"Do you miss your family? Are they waiting for you too?"

"Yes. However, I believe they understand my reasons for staying here. That is all I am permitted to tell you. I hope it will help."

"Wait! What about Miss Harry's parents are they with mine?"

"I should think so. They had much in common. I understand they both sacrificed themselves for their children."

"They did," Harry answered for them both. The Baron simply nodded and glided out the way he had come. A few minutes later Madam Pomfrey returned.

"I'm sorry I took so long. After I found the Baron I went downstairs to give my condolences before the funeral procession begins."

"Have they left yet?" Harry inquired.

"They will be leaving shortly. People are still giving their final eulogies."

"Phaedra would you like to go?"

"Are you going to go? Will I have to do anything?" she asked putting her thumb back into her mouth.

"I think we should. If you don't want to say anything you don't have to."

"Will you stay with me?"

"We'll stay with each other. I have to put something into my parent's caskets."

"What?"

"I want to give my dad the wand I got at graduation and I want to give my mum a picture of me in my pink robes. My friend Colin took it at the Yule ball."

"Could I give my mum and dad something too? I only have one thing."

"They could share. I think your dad's casket is probably closed because of the fire."

"What does that mean?"

"They leave them open till the end of the eulogies so you can look at them one more time unless the body is too badly damaged. I think maybe your dad's may have been burned with the house."

"It didn't hurt him did it?"

"No. He was already gone and waiting for your mum," Harry comforted.

"Then I'll go so long as you stay with me."

"Maybe I need you to stay with me too."

"Harry I think it would be wiser for you to rest," Poppy's stern voice interrupted.

"Madam Pomfrey I promise to rest after the funeral. I need to do this as much as Phaedra. I missed the original funeral being too young and having been placed with my Aunt. I need to go on too."

"I understand but I want you to use a cane. That leg was a frightful mess and your burns are not yet fully healed. Fortunately your face wasn't too badly affected and there will be no scars." Poppy looked at Harry oddly but Harry shrugged it off to her imagination. "I will help you dress."

"Thanks." Harry dressed as quickly as possible and Poppy brought her a cane. Harry still had the wand from the battle made from the antlers and Poppy summoned the picture for her. Harry was told she was not to attempt any magic as she was still too weak. The nurse was getting ready to walk Harry down to the Great Hall when Fawkes suddenly appeared. "Looks, like we are going to get a ride." Harry smiled. "Come on Phaedra. Hold onto me tightly and Fawkes will get us downstairs." The little girl grabbed onto Harry's waist while Harry took hold of the Phoenix's tail. They disappeared in a flash of flames appearing just outside of the doors to the Great Hall.

Harry quietly pushed the doors open a crack and peered inside. She could see Severus, Sirius, and Remus standing up front. Sirius had just finished his eulogy. She could tell he and Remus had both been crying. Severus was doing his best not to but his dark eyes were wet, features etched in pain. A wave of intense emotional sorrow hit Harry like a brick. She had to take a deep breath struggling to keep her empathic powers under control. She looked up to see Albus watching her from behind the podium. The room was packed with mourners and a number of the media. She took a deep breath and pushed open the doors. All heads looked up and the press was almost on top of her as they immediately began to take pictures. She held onto Phaedra's hand tightly as Dumbledore's voice echoed through the hall.

"I need not remind you all that this is a funeral. If the members of the press cannot control themselves they will be escorted from the premises."

"Thank you, Albus," Harry responded with a weak smile. "Are you okay, Phaedra?" she whispered.

"I'm scared."

"Me too. Come on." Harry limped forward with her cane, head held high, as she held onto Phaedra's hand. The little girl was doing her best to emulate her proud attitude. The four caskets were lined up side by side. Justinian's was closed as she had expected. The three men waited patiently for her to approach. As they walked Harry could hear people whispering their names. She frowned when she passed by Rita Skeeter. As she approached the front of the hall, Ron got up and offered her his arm. He had seen the pain on her face and the limp had grown markedly worse as she tried to walk. Tiberius also stepped forward to take Phaedra's hand staying behind Harry. Once they had reached the front Sirius, Remus, and Severus took over. They approached the caskets. Harry and Phaedra stepped up to Justinian's first. Harry spoke first.

"I only knew Justinian Snape for a short while but he was a good and decent man who cared about his family very much. I am proud to have known him and to call him my friend." She then looked down at Phaedra and nodded. The little girl looked thoughtful and then spoke quietly.

"Daddy please take good care of Mummy for me and when she feels sad tell her to hold onto Mr. Hoppity Hop. He will make her feel better." She then moved over to her mother's open casket and timidly placed her stuffed bunny beside her mother.

Harry followed, lips trembling, tears in her eyes. 'Oh, Merlin, don't let me lose control now,' she thought desperately. Severus placed a gentle hand on her shoulder as she collected herself. She could hear Molly Weasley sobbing softly somewhere in the crowded room.

"Circe Snape was a good mother and a woman who loved her child more than life itself. I can promise her this: Phaedra will never be unloved or unhappy. I will make sure of that. Farewell Circe. I am going to miss you very much." Harry could sense Severus pain and reached up to her shoulder squeezing his hand as the girls moved over to the Potters. This time Phaedra spoke.

"Miss Lily and Mr. James I will miss you both. I will always remember how Miss Lily would play with me and how Mr. James would turn into a deer and give me rides on his back. Please tell my Mummy and Daddy not to be sad. I have Miss Harry, she has me, and everything will be all right because Miss Harry loves us all. She'll take good care of me and Mr. Sirius, Mr. Remus, and Uncle Severus and we'll all take care of her too."

Harry was visibly shaking unable to stop the tears streaming down her cheeks. Remus moved to her side to support her while Severus and Sirius moved protectively.

"Are you okay Love? Do you need to sit down for a bit?" Sirius questioned worriedly. Harry was pale and looked about ready to collapse but shook her head negatively.

"Just get us out the back way when we're done. I don't want to deal with Skeeter right now," she whispered.

"I'll take care of it," Severus interjected turning back to whisper to Dumbledore. The old wizard nodded to Harry before she turned to face front again.

She looked down at her father pulling the wand from her robes. She gently placed it in his robe pocket.

"I've wanted to give this to you for awhile now. I think you deserve it more than I ever did. I also want you to have this," to everyone's surprise she pulled a golden snitch out of her pocket placing it into his hand. "I meant to give it to you before we left but never got around to it. Hang onto it for me till we can all play again." She then leaned down and kissed her father's forehead. Finally, she stood and looked down at her mother. "I know you must know what happened by now in the fire. Everyone thinks that I stopped him but it was really you. If I hadn't heard you screaming those same words you said on that Halloween night everything might be different now. You brought me back and gave me the strength I needed to do what had to be done. I'll miss you Mum," Harry cried, placing the photo beside her mother. "Sleep well." She bent down and gently kissed her goodbye. Taking one final look around Harry noted that even Rita Skeeter was weeping silently. 'She must have a heart somewhere after all,' she mused as the men led her out through the back room behind the podium and the undertakers began to seal the caskets. Once in the back room she collapsed into a chair. Phaedra climbed onto her lap and hugged her as the others took seats nearby. They sat in silence each alone with their own thoughts. Harry didn't hear Dumbledore enter and looked up in surprise at the sound of his gentle voice.

"Harry are you up to the trip to the cemetery?" His blue eyes were warm and soft.

"I'll come but I don't know how long this leg will hold up."

"I will send you with Fawkes. You and Phaedra need not follow the procession. I need to go on ahead since I will be performing the service at the graveside."

"Phaedra do you want to go to the cemetery?" Severus addressed his niece tenderly.

"I'm going with Miss Harry. If she goes I will too."

"All right. If you find you are too unhappy I want you to tell me and I will bring you back to the castle."

"Harry and the Baron said we should go but I will tell you if I want to come back."

"You spoke to the Baron?" He arched his brow in surprise.

"Phaedra had questions. I got Poppy to get one of the ghosts to answer what he could. It just happened to be the Baron. I guess he came since he's your house ghost."

"He probably felt it was his duty," Severus agreed.

"Harry," Sirius interrupted, "what did you mean when you said your mother was the one who saved us?"

"I'll explain it all later. I know you'll all want to hear what happened at the farm after I went after Voldemort. Let's just get through this first, okay Padfoot?"

"Of course, Miss Wings," he tweaked her cheek, "and I'll bet it is one hell of a tale."

"Yeah...and boy will you be surprised. I have an idea there will be another ghost somewhere in the castle lurking about." Harry gave them all a sly smirk thinking about Pettigrew.

"Ah...she just loves to keep us in suspense," Remus teased. "I have a feeling that this is going to be one of those stories that end up in *Hogwarts A History*."

"Somehow I am not surprised." Dumbledore's blue eyes were twinkling and Harry suspected he already knew about Peter. "Now I suggest we all get ready to leave. Harry I took the liberty of selecting the pallbearers for your parents. I hope you don't mind. Sirius will lead your father's casket and Remus your mother's. Severus and Tiberius will lead for Circe and Justinian."

"I understand. Just try to keep the reporters away from me. I know I will have to talk to them eventually but I would rather it not be today. If you have to promise Rita a private interview I'll do it so long as she doesn't write her usual crap."

"I will take care of it Child. You will also have to tell your story to the Ministry although we know most of it already."

"Good. Then I will only have to tell what happened after the others escaped the house. I would also like to know what happened with the rest of you before you arrived and I transformed."

"I am sure Remus and Sirius will fill you in," Dumbledore responded warmly. "Fawkes it is time," he said ending the discussion. The beautiful bird appeared and Harry stood with her cane. "Will they be laid to rest where they were before?"

"Yes. Circe and Justinian will be there too. Hold onto Fawkes and I will meet you shortly since I will apparate from the gates."

Harry nodded and took hold of Fawkes while Phaedra grabbed onto her as they had done earlier. They disappeared in a flash of flames and found themselves by the bench where Harry had first come to visit her parents. Phaedra shivered at the sight of the open graves and Harry did her best to comfort her. Glancing over towards the base of the tree she smiled when she saw Artemis waiting.

"Look, Phaedra, we have a friend here to meet us." She pointed out the elf.

"It's Miss Artemis!" Phaedra squealed in delight.

"The house elves sent word you would both be coming," she explained in her tinkling voice. "I am glad to see you are recovering and that Phaedra is doing better also."

"I'm glad you're here to meet us," Harry replied fondly. "My mum would be happy."

"Will you watch my mum and dad too like you do Miss Harry's?"

"Yes Little One. I shall see that their sleep remains undisturbed. You need have no fear of that."

"What if the bad wizard comes back again?"

"Don't worry; I made sure that it will never happen again Phaedra."

"Harry is right. He has been destroyed. Your parents will remain at rest for all time. It will be my pleasure to tend to their graves and watch over them for both of you." Artemis bowed gracefully. "Now I must go. The funeral procession is coming and will be here in a few minutes." She vanished as Dumbledore appeared.

"Have you seen Artemis? She told me she would be here."

"Yes, Headmaster Mr. Dumbledore, but she left just as you came."

"I am sure she is nearby. She just does not wish to be seen right now," Dumbledore replied knowingly. "Now as I said before, the ceremony will be brief, then we shall go back to the castle. I have arranged for you to have a private supper with only your Protectors, Tiberius, and the Weasley's present. The rest of the mourners will have refreshments in the Great Hall. Once your meal is done I will ask Arthur, Moody, and Kingsley to remain so you can tell us what happened."

"Thank you, Albus. This is proving to be more tiring than I thought. Do you think Poppy will let me go back to sleep in my own room tonight? I really would be more comfortable there."

"I will clear it with her Child."

"Great! That makes me feel better all ready." Harry smiled weakly. "By the way, how are you feeling? I should have asked earlier. I almost had a heart attack when I saw that Tom had disarmed you. Thank Merlin we didn't lose you too."

"I am fine. The plain fact of the matter is he got the better of me because I got my foot caught in a rabbit hole." Dumbledore blushed furiously. "I tripped and he caught me with a fast *Confundus* charm disarming me before I could counter. It was most embarrassing."

"You just aren't used to dueling on the frozen ground anymore." Harry hugged him. "I'm just relieved he didn't use anything worse on you." She deliberately did not mention the killing curse in front of Phaedra.

"Miss Harry," Phaedra interrupted pulling on her sleeve, "what is that in the sky?"

Harry looked up astonished. The Aurors were flying slowly in formation with the Gryffindor and Slytherin Quidditch teams as the Pallbearers floated the caskets up the hill towards the cemetery.

"Umm...Headmaster? That is an Honor Guard, isn't it?"

"Yes Harry. The Aurors are here since your father and Justinian were one of their own and your father was on his house team. The Slytherin team wanted to do the same for Severus' sister since he is their coach."

"It was kind of you to arrange..."

"I didn't," he cut her off. "They all came to me."

"What is an honor guard?" Phaedra questioned.

"Just that Little One. They are paying homage to one of their own by escorting them to their final rest."

"Oh..." Phaedra nodded but she wasn't really sure she fully understood. She sensed it was a good thing though and kept quiet since Harry looked like she was going to cry.

As the procession arrived Harry could see that Sirius, Kingsley, Moody, Bill, Ron, and George were escorting her father's coffin while Remus, Fred, Arthur, Molly and Hermione followed with her mother's. Severus was escorting Circe along with McGonagall, Sprout, Hagrid and Professor Vector, who had been an old friend of Circe's and Draco. Justinian was escorted by Tiberius, Dawlish, and several other Aurors. They were followed by friends, family members, a number of students, and the ever-present reporters. Harry idly wondered if there had already been a funeral for Charlie, Tonks, and the Granger's. Dumbledore was watching and she could feel him using his *Legilimency* to probe her thoughts and he nodded sadly.

"They were buried yesterday," he whispered gently. "We delayed this one in the hopes you and Phaedra could be here."

"I understand. I will have to offer my condolences to the families later."

The graveside ceremony did not take long. Harry was among the last of the mourners. She somehow managed not to cry as she dropped the lily into her mother's grave. Phaedra didn't do as well and started to become quite distraught as she watched her parents caskets lowered into their final resting place. She clung to Harry and Severus looking confused and lost. As soon as the ceremony was over Severus apparated her back to school. Harry stayed briefly to be with Sirius and Remus.

"They're not really gone you know," Sirius said as he held her tightly with Remus.

"I know but I feel miserable anyway."

"We do too Princess. I am glad that you got to spend some time with them though."

"Moony is right. You didn't remember them before. At least now you know what they were really like. The good and the bad," Sirius remarked wiping away a stray tear from her face.

"Yeah..." her voice trailed off. "Let's go home. I think its time we all started living in the present. We can't bring them back but somehow I think they know that we'll be able to go on and remember them now."

"We'll see them again you know, Princess."

"Why do you think I gave my dad that snitch," she laughed sadly. "It should keep him busy till I get there to get it back."

"I can just see him now. Throwing it up into the air and catching it with Lily frowning in the background." Sirius lips quirked into a small smile.

"Sirius I'm sorry about not being there for your cousin Tonks funeral. Is your grandmother doing okay and what about her parents?"

"My cousin and her husband are coping. They are proud that she died defending others against Voldemort. My grandmother is too. She has seen her fair share of deaths within the Black family over the years..." his voice trailed off bitterly.

"They're here today, Princess, if you would like a word with them."

"I will speak to them as soon as we get back," Harry remarked sorrowfully. Um...I...uh..."she stammered as they walked down the path together.

"Harry are you all right?" Sirius questioned as she slowed down.

"I can't walk that far and I'm not able to apparate back to the castle right now." Her cheeks flushed with embarrassment at having to ask for help. Her leg was throbbing painfully with every step she took.

"Why didn't you say something sooner?" Sirius admonished. "Moony I think a little ride would be in order to lighten up all our moods."

"Brilliant idea, Padfoot," he agreed drawing his wand. "It may take a bit longer than if we apparated her but I think it will be just what the doctor ordered."

"What are you two up to?" she demanded suspiciously.

Sirius gave her one of his wicked grins nodding to the werewolf.

"*Wingardium Leviosa*," they chimed in unison. Harry was immediately raised off the ground, floating in front of the two Marauders, while they chuckled in amusement at her startled expression. Despite her protests, they floated her back to the gates of the castle before gently lowering her back to her feet and escorting her inside.

As soon as she entered the castle, Harry sought out both the Weasleys and the Tonks families to offer her condolences. She sincerely regretted the losses from both families. She would especially miss Nymphadora and her ability to make them all laugh with her Metamorphagus changes. Charlie had been like a brother to her and Molly hugged her tightly. Molly and Arthur had never expected to come through the war unscathed and did their best to reassure Harry that it could have been a lot worse. Harry then took Hermione aside. She knew her friend was keeping up a brave front over the loss of her parents.

"Harry please don't feel guilty." Hermione hugged her friend. "Molly and Arthur have been wonderful through all of this. Even though they are struggling with the loss of Charlie. We suffered through the war and now it is time to go on. If it weren't for you none of us would be here today. We all know that. Ron never doubted that you would defeat Voldemort even in our darkest hours. If anything I should be apologizing to you. I know how much I hurt you but I was just so afraid. If I hadn't been so stubborn..."

"Now who's feeling guilty?" Harry questioned. "Albus says things happen for a reason. Maybe this was all meant to be but I still can't help but wonder. I love you and Ron, Mione, and if I could ease your pain right now I would."

"As usual, Harry, you are worried about everyone else. You have your own grief to deal with and yet here you are trying to console the others and me. That's one of the reasons you're so powerful, Harry. You care...you give us all hope."

"You're all my family. How could I not care how you feel?"

"That's just the point. You put everyone else before yourself. Over the years I've seen you face things that would have killed us all and still you go on. Don't ever change Harry. You help us all to make the world a better place," Hermione sobbed throwing herself into Harry's arms. "I love you like a sister. Besides, who else would ever put up with me and Ron like you do?" She smiled sadly wiping the tears from her face. "Now you should go and greet the rest of the mourners. I also think your Protectors could use a little boost too," she said matter-of-factly.

"That's the Hermione I'm used to, ever practical," Harry chuckled. "I really don't know what I ever would have done without your brains and Ron's loyalty all these years. We're a team you know." Harry winked.

"If I ever forget that again you have my heartfelt permission to hex me!" Hermione stated emphatically shoving Harry towards the rest of the gathering.

Harry formally thanked the pallbearers and other people who had attended the funerals. Rita Skeeter kept her distance allowing Harry a bit of privacy although she knew it was merely a formality. Albus had promised Rita an exclusive interview provided she print an accurate story without all the innuendo. It had been scheduled two days hence. The Headmaster and the Protectors would all be present. Rita had also requested that Ron, Hermione, Ginny, and Draco be there too. They felt it was their duty to see that Rita did not stray into her usual forms of yellow journalism. Finally, Harry quietly disappeared into the private supper that Albus had arranged.

Molly Weasley took it upon herself to mother both Harry and Phaedra. For once in her life Harry was glad. Not only did she need that extra bit of comfort but she knew that Phaedra did as well. She also suspected that Molly drew comfort from them too. The death of Charlie had been more than a little painful for all of the Weasleys. Harry knew that Molly, while taking the loss bravely, was hurting more than the rest.

Sirius and Remus were sitting nearby recalling old times with each other. Interestingly enough they had included Severus. It pleased Harry that they were all able to discuss their Hogwarts years as adults. The Marauders had often bullied Severus. However, Remus had been right. Severus had given as good as he got. It amused her when Remus reminded Sirius of an incident where Severus had cursed James' broom to fly backwards during a Quidditch match against Slytherin. Then there was the time he had somehow added extra rat-tails to Sirius hair-raising potion causing him to grow hair all over his body sticking out at odd angles.

"I guess the war finally made them realize what idiots they all were," Ron whispered nodding at the Protectors.

"That and having to deal with me having to come to terms with my past, present, and now the future," Harry remarked. "I'm just glad that they're finally becoming real friends."

"Harry what do you mean by dealing with your future?" Hermione queried. "Voldemort is destroyed and now you can have a life without the worry and fear of the damned prophecy hanging over your head."

"I still have to deal with the Protectorship, Hermione. You know it lasts for life unless I feel it should be dissolved."

"Yes I know but we still haven't had time to look at those books on Wizarding Law. I can't believe that Dumbledore withheld any kind of information from you."

"Actually, Hermione, I did look at the books. I needed to distract myself for a while when you were being held captive. I was so worried about all of you that I made myself do something to occupy the time till we could get our plans in motion."

"So..." Ron said slowly, "you've learned about the other rites?"

"You knew?" Harry asked studying the red head carefully.

"It was explained to me when I became Keeper of the Goblet. I was sworn to secrecy, Harry, or I would have told you. I really felt bad that you weren't told."

"What wasn't she told, Ron?" Hermione demanded.

"It would be better if Harry told you herself," Ron answered shame faced. "Harry you have to understand they were only trying to keep you safe."

"That part of it I understand. I'm not exactly happy with the rest. I should have been told about the specific legalities of this situation."

"Harry please tell me what is going on," Hermione begged brown eyes serious.

"Hermione the books are over on my desk. I have the pages marked so you can take them back to your room tonight and read them. Maybe you can find some kind of alternative solution for me."

"Child is something wrong?" Dumbledore's voice came from over her shoulder.

"Oh nothing much, Headmaster. I have been reviewing the laws regarding my Protectorship. It seems there was a bit of a loop hole that you omitted when we went over whether I should accept the rites."

"Ah...I see you were able to get copies of the books I took from the library."

"It is nice of you to admit your guilt," Harry sneered. "I will assume that the reason Sirius was not altogether happy with this is because of the possibility that I would have to follow through with the rest of the rites?"

"We had hoped that would not happen, but yes, he was rather dismayed. However, we should not be discussing this now."

"I agree. I need time to think. Apparently, my parents were aware of what it entailed. At least my dad was. My mum found it a bit distressing but tried to keep an open mind."

"I understand. It is a custom that has not been done for a long time and only used in extreme circumstances. She was Muggle born so it had to be upsetting for her. Your father being a Pureblood would understand and accept the necessity," Dumbledore stated calmly.

"My dad said that whatever I decided would be fine with him. They both gave me their blessing," Harry answered keenly aware that Severus, Remus, and Sirius were watching her reactions.

"Then you should not be too upset and do what you feel is right. I do want to tell you that I had to use the second rite in order to get the Ministry Governors to approve though. They were concerned that if you defeated Voldemort...well..." Dumbledore frowned trying to find words to make Harry understand.

"They were afraid that I might become a threat too," she finished for him. "I am extremely powerful."

"Yes, Harry, but those of us who know you understand that you would never follow the path to Darkness," he said patting her on the shoulder comfortingly. "However, we should continue this discussion later as I see Molly is getting ready to leave. I think it is time you told us your story and then got some rest."

"Okay. Let me just say my goodbyes to the Weasley's. Will you and Hermione be staying Ron?"

"It would take a herd of angry centaurs to get me to go. I want to hear what happened after you left us."

"So do I," Hermione agreed but Harry couldn't help but notice her glance longingly towards the books on the desk. She just shook her head and moved off to thank the Weasleys for coming. Once again expressing her grief over their loss she hugged them all promising to keep in touch.

After the rest of the Weasley family departed Arthur, being present as Minister of Magic seated himself with Dumbledore. Moody and Kingsley were there to represent the Aurors and take down Harry's statements.

Tiberius had also planned on remaining but Phaedra was exhausted. He felt it would be to the child's benefit to get her into bed. The past few days had taken their toll and Phaedra was particularly stressed to the limit. All the adults agreed. Severus would fill Tiberius in on the details later. Unfortunately, Phaedra did not want to leave Harry. She began to sob hysterically when her uncle tried to take her back to their suite of rooms. Harry came to her rescue and promised her that she could come back down and spend the night in her room once she had taken her bath and put on her pajamas.

"Do you all promise?" she sobbed through her tears. Her eyes were wide and fearful. Harry could sense her unease at being away from her.

"I will bring you back down as soon as you're ready for bed," Tiberius replied gently rubbing the distraught child's back.

"And I will see to it that you are both provided with some of my hot chocolate to help you sleep," Dumbledore beamed comfortingly.

"Okay but will Miss Harry tell me a story?"

"I'll tell you a story all about how I first saw Padfoot and blew up my mean old Aunt Marge." Harry winked with a sly grin. "Then I will expect you to go to sleep because I'm just as tired as you are."

"I will. I promise," she answered wiping the tears from her cheeks with her hand.

"We'll be back in about an hour then," Tiberius responded with a small smile at Harry. She gave Phaedra a quick kiss on the cheek and then settled herself in a comfy chair by the fire facing the others.

"I guess I'll begin when I went upstairs since everyone told you what happened from the time we escaped the cellar and fought it out with the Deathaters in the hallway."

"That will be fine Harry. If we have any questions about the battle in the hall we can ask you later," Kingsley confirmed taking out his notepad and quick quill.

"Well...after I made it up the stairs I encountered another Deathater. We exchanged a few curses but he seemed pretty new so it wasn't much of a struggle. I found Voldemort in a room at the end of the hall. He'd been putting Ginny through the ringer with the Cruciatius."

"Was he aware of your presence at all?" Moody queried.

"Let's just say I was expected. He even opened the door personally." She grinned wryly. "There was a witch there too. Of course, you all know that it turned out to be Arsinoe but when I got inside her back was facing me. She had her wand on Ginny."

"Humph, that witch had us all fooled," Moody growled.

"None of you would listen when I kept saying I didn't trust her. She was just too perfect. Next time I hope you'll all let me listen to my instincts. Albus always tells me to trust them as they're usually right."

"Indeed, Child, it is unfortunate that I too was led astray by her wiles."

Harry snorted playfully at Dumbledore before she proceeded to fill them in on the subsequent battle with Arsinoe and Voldemort's attack on Ginny.

"Thank Merlin that you were there for Ginny and that Fawkes got her out in time," Arthur commented with relief.

"Ginny was very brave. You should be proud of her Arthur," Dumbledore added.

"I am Albus."

"What happened next Harry?" Sirius questioned. "I think I must have died a thousand deaths when Fawkes showed up with Ginny and she told us how you were alone facing Voldemort."

"Do I detect a few gray hairs in that thick black mane of yours?" she teased.

"More like an ulcer," he countered with a grin.

"Moony you should give him some of that chocolate you like to keep hidden in your pockets before I go on. When he hears what happened he's going to need it."

"Then I think I'll have some myself," he laughed offering his candy around politely.

"Anyway, Voldemort caught me off guard," Harry continued ruefully. "I thought we would duel like we usually did but he just gave me that evil laugh and pointed his wand at the floor. I have no idea what kind of spell he used. The floor just shifted out from under me and the house burst into flames. I would have dropped my wand if I hadn't used a sticking charm to keep it in my hand. I crashed through both floors with the fire all around me. I fell right through to the basement. I kept getting hit with flying debris and broken wood not to mention bursts of fire. That's how I got burned. Somehow I managed to land upright when I hit the cellar floor but broke my leg in the process."

"It's a miracle you didn't break your neck. That fall should have killed you," Sirius gasped shaking his head in amazement.

"It almost did. I was in shock and only half conscious with the pain. I couldn't get up and was choking on the smoke. I knew I had broken some ribs since it hurt so much to breathe. Fortunately, I was on the floor so that helped keep me away from too much smoke. I really believed I was going to die."

"Yet you still managed that transformation," Severus stated dark eyes glittering.

"Not right away. I was dizzy and ready to give up. That's when I thought I was hallucinating."

"Hallucinating? What did you think was going on?" Kingsley questioned.

"I saw someone who shouldn't have been there."

"Was it Voldemort?" Ron asked. He had been sitting listening intently, eyes wide, his mouth half open.

"No. It was someone I knew to be dead."

"Who was it Princess?"

"A ghost and unless I am mistaken he has probably decided to take up residence here at the castle." Harry looked questioningly at Dumbledore. The old man nodded, blue eyes twinkling.

"Who is it then?" Ron demanded.

"What did he say to you?" Sirius asked.

"I'll tell you what he said and then we'll see if you all know who it is," Harry laughed. "The ghost told me to get up. He said to listen to the sounds of the battle outside. I could hear shouts and screams but through it all I heard my mum..." Harry's voice trailed off while she collected her thoughts. "She was screaming...it was the same thing as the night Voldemort killed her...the same words that I hear when the Dementors come near...*Not my Harry*...he came to pay the life debt he owed me." Harry looked from Sirius to Remus as understanding dawned in both their eyes.

"It was Peter," Sirius gasped as Remus let out the breath he had been holding.

"I had to do it," an ethereal voice murmured as the shade of Peter Pettigrew slid through the wall. "I helped to cause all this misery...I owed her...I betrayed my only friends...I couldn't let it go on anymore..."

"Well Peter," Remus calmly replied as he gripped Sirius tightly to keep him from leaping towards the spirit of their former comrade, "at least in death you have been able to help right a terrible wrong."

"That's why I'm here. I can't go on...I have to make sure people know that friendship and love...it's what keeps the darkness from happening. I was too weak to understand. I must remain to tell the tale...if people forget...it will happen again. I pray that in time you will all forgive me..." He moaned sadly before passing back out through the opposite wall.

"Not in a million years will I forgive that filthy rat," Sirius growled gritting his teeth.

"Padfoot...let it go. Peter paid with his life...and now his soul. He may yet be able to redeem himself by showing the error of his ways and what better place than here at Hogwarts."

"Remus is right," Dumbledore agreed. "This was where he made his truest and most loyal friends. What better way to redeem himself than to let the students know that friendship and love will stand up in the face of darkness if you only will let it."

"Sirius, listen to them," Harry pleaded. "If it weren't for Peter we would all be dead now and Voldemort would be in control of the wizarding world. He gave me the impetus to go on. He reminded me how much I cared. Peter knew I had the power to stop Voldemort if only I believed in myself. That's what gave me the will and desire to transform. I couldn't let Voldemort win even if it meant my own death. My parents...Cedric...Tonks...Charlie, and all the others who fought in both wars; they would have died for nothing."

"Harry," Sirius said slowly, "you're asking me to forgive the man who was responsible for your parents death. Because of him you grew up alone and neglected. Moony was left to fend for himself and I was sent to prison for a crime I didn't commit."

"I know, Sirius, but we've all come through the darkness. My parents are at rest and we'll go on. What does Peter have left? He not only needs your forgiveness but he needs to be able to forgive himself. My dad would want you to at least think about it and try."

"You're right; James would tell me what a stupid prat I am. He would want me to remember what Peter was like before he gave in to his fears. We always did protect him you know."

"And now he is protecting the students from giving in to the same weakness to which he himself did. In the end he saved all our lives," Harry sighed taking Sirius hand in hers.

"Anyway, you all know the rest. I did a quick healing spell on myself so I could stand and managed that transformation. I'm not even sure how I did it. All I can tell you about it is that I have never felt so powerful. It was as if every nerve in my body was pulsating with power. I rose from the fire as the house started to collapse around me and confronted Voldemort for the last time to undo a terrible wrong. Luna and Mr. Chang were right. *In fire, I found darkness but in darkness, I found light.* I hope to god that I never have to use that awesome power again. I can understand why the ancient wizards kept it so secret. If Voldemort had ever gotten hold of that spell..." she shuddered.

"*Absolute power corrupts absolutely,*" Remus quoted philosophically.

They were all quiet for a few minutes each contemplating their own thoughts. It had been a long day and they were all tired. Harry was looking forward to a nice hot shower and her warm bed. Finally, Dumbledore broke the silence.

"I believe Harry needs to get some rest as we all do. Arthur do you have anything you wish to say before we all retire for the rest of the evening?"

"I do have a question for Harry. How did you restore Ron's eyesight? I thought that if he used the goblet when you weren't in trouble he would be permanently blinded."

"Ron did not voluntarily misuse the goblet. If he had my spell would have been useless. What I did might even be considered illegal. There was a bit of a dark magic involved. I combined a healing spell with the Cruciatus and Conjunctivitis curses. That's why it was painful. I knew his retinas were burned out so I had to remove the useless nerves and repair the damage. I had to replace the damaged nerves and circulation to his eyes. It only worked because Ron and I have the same blood type. I was able to transfer some of my own nerves and retinal tissue into his eyes and rebuild them. The conjunctivitis curse helped to keep his eyes moist and the swelling enabled me to get a better handle on the nerves and circulation to his eyes. The only problem was that he would be as nearsighted as I am since I had to reshape his eyes inside to configure them with mine. I don't know if any of our healers know how to do this but I think it would be worth the research."

"Fascinating," Snape responded softly, "you used the dark magic to heal. While this is not unprecedented it will still open new doors in the field of magical healing procedures."

"Aye," Moody agreed. "If that had been available when I lost my eye then they may have been able to save it."

"Now, Alastor, we all know how much you like using that magical eye of yours. If I recall correctly when you were younger it was not always used appropriately where the ladies were concerned," Dumbledore teasingly admonished his old friend blue eyes twinkling merrily.

Moody rolled his magical eye towards the back of his head with a grin as the room erupted into laughter.

"Well mate I for one am glad you gave me back my sight," Ron stated giving her a thumbs up. "Even more I'm glad you made me realize that if I had stayed blind I would always have a

place in Mione's heart. Being blind shouldn't have affected our being together." He blushed furiously as he hugged his new wife giving her a quick peck on the lips.

"I guess that about sums it up Harry," Arthur Weasley smiled, "except for the awards ceremony and your interview with Skeeter which will be held in two days at the Ministry."

"Uh...Mr. Weasley, what awards ceremony?" Harry asked uncertainly.

"You really didn't think you could get away from all this without another Order of Merlin did you?" Arthur grinned. Harry just glared emitting a low growl from her throat. "If it makes you feel better, Harry, all of those involved will be receiving them too."

"Child I know you don't feel you deserve any of this. Especially in view of the circumstances. However, the world owes you a great debt. Accept it gracefully and then just move on," Dumbledore advised gently.

"Harry just think that in a few weeks all the excitement over Voldemort's destruction will blow over and you can have a nice quiet life," Hermione said with a toss of her head.

"I'm sure Harry would really love that, Hermione, but somehow I don't think it's going to happen," Ron laughed. "After all, we're talking about the famous Harry Potter. Trouble just seems to have a way of finding her. I for one can't wait for our next adventure." Harry just rolled her eyes with a grin as the room erupted into laughter.

"Let's just hope it isn't too soon," Dumbledore stated rising. "I could use a bit of a rest myself. Now I think we should all adjourn for the evening."

Everyone rose and said good night. Hermione made sure to grab the books from Harry's desk before she left. She could hear Ron moaning that she would never get to bed tonight. Harry snickered knowing that Ron was not thinking about sleeping. Sirius, Remus, and Severus had stayed behind which Harry had expected. A few minutes later, there was there a knock on the door. Tiberius had returned with Phaedra. She was clutching the teddy bear Harry had given her while at Severus town home.

"Harry are you sure you don't mind her staying the night with you?" Tiberius questioned.

"Not at all. Phaedra is always good company. Besides, somehow I have the feeling I will have other company as well." She shrugged nodding her head in the direction of the three men seated around the fire.

"Very well. I shall see you at breakfast. If you are up to it I would like to review some of the potions for the exam. February is almost over and May will be here before you know it. I understand that Dumbledore has excused you from teaching for the rest of the week."

"He gave me the week off for some additional grieving and to finish healing but I really would like to work on those potions for awhile."

"I will be free from ten until lunch if that is convenient for you?"

"Sure. It will help me to occupy my mind," Harry replied knowing he would understand that it would keep her from dwelling on the events of the past few days.

"I shall see you in the potions lab at ten. Goodnight." He nodded and swept away reminding her more than a little of his nephew.

"Miss Harry are you still going to tell me a story?" Phaedra questioned. She had climbed up onto her Uncle Severus lap.

"Just as soon as I take a nice hot shower. So go and let your uncle tuck you into my bed and drink your hot chocolate." Harry indicated the steaming mugs that had materialized on the coffee table. Dumbledore never forgot anything. "I'll be back in a few minutes."

"Okay. Come on Uncle Severus," she said climbing off his lap and tugging on his sleeve. Harry grinned as he followed her into the other room and turned on the light.

"Do we get a story too?" Sirius joked as she turned towards the bathroom.

"No. You get to participate. I am telling her all about Padfoot you know."

"Then he will just have to put in a dramatic appearance."

"Don't get him started, Princess, he will just ham it up."

"That's the idea. We could all use some fun tonight. It will help us to relax some more."

Harry disappeared into the bathroom and they could hear the shower running. Severus came to the door of the bedroom and the three men just looked at one another. A little while later the water stopped and there was a short gasp. Harry flung open the door. She was dressed in a long flannel nightgown and her hair was up in a towel. She looked at them all with a stunned expression.

"We were wondering when you would notice," Severus drawled with his proverbial sneer.

"I...Poppy helped me to dress today and did my hair. I never looked in the mirror. You all know I don't like to..."

"So what do you think?" Sirius asked softly.

"I...it's almost gone...all that's left is just the little bolt above my right eye and it's all faded and white. You can barely see it unless you really look."

"It will never disappear completely, Princess, since it's a curse scar. What is left is simply what an old scar from childhood should look like. It will merely be a simple reminder now of all you have been through."

"I...I'm free...It never really...sunk in...Till just now..." Harry's eyes filled with tears as she looked from one to the other. "It's really over...finally...finally...over." The tears spilled down onto her cheeks and she alternately sobbed and laughed for a few minutes muttering that she was free repeatedly while they all hugged her supportively.

Once she had calmed down sufficiently she retired to bed and they all had a good time telling Phaedra about Harry's first encounters with Padfoot while they enjoyed the hot chocolate Dumbledore had sent. Sirius, true to his word, hammed it up and transfigured going through

all the motions. He would roll and stalk wagging his tail at the appropriate times letting out his familiar bark. Phaedra was delighted and became more relaxed but would still suck her thumb from time to time. They all knew it would take a while for the child to get over the shock of what she had witnessed. Nevertheless, she was on the road to recovery. After the story Severus insisted Phaedra take a mild potion to help her sleep and she swallowed it with a grimace.

"Yech, Uncle Sev, that tasted yucky."

"That's why I have a nice piece of chocolate for you," Remus laughed reaching into his pocket. Severus merely arched an eyebrow at the werewolf giving him a half smile.

"Yummy. Will Miss Harry get some too?"

"Maybe in a little while if she takes her potion without complaining," Severus sneered at Harry. His dark eyes glittered in amusement. "Now lie down and go to sleep." He gently tucked the blankets about her as her eyes had already begun to droop. She fell asleep almost as soon as her head touched the pillow. As soon as Phaedra's breathing indicated she was in a deep sleep Harry turned towards her protectors.

"Now it's your turn," Severus stated handing her a small vial.

"I think we need to talk," Harry replied putting the potion on her nightstand.

"What is on your mind Love?" Sirius smirked.

"Oh...I don't know...how about the Rites of Union?" she answered sarcastically green eyes glittering.

"What about them Harry?" Severus inquired amused.

"I think we all know that the Ministry will not let me dissolve the Protectorship even if Arthur and Dumbledore try to intercede on my behalf. Not that I was going to but this sheds a new light on everything."

"Princess you have to understand that we didn't want you to find out this way."

"Originally you were only going to have a standard Protectorship but Albus was met with too much resistance. I only found out later in the day. We both felt that your safety did take precedence," Sirius explained nervously picking at the buttons on his shirt.

"I suppose I will have to take you at your word that this was what worried you when the subject of the Protectorship came up in the first place," Harry scowled at her godfather.

"Yes. Harry I never meant to put you into such an awkward situation."

"It really isn't that bad, Princess, and you do have until August to make up your mind."

"Yes, I read that the decision must be given within a specified amount of time after the danger has passed to give the protected person time to finalize any arrangements and make sure of his or her decision."

"Have you made a decision as of yet?" Severus queried. His dark eyes bored into her green ones but she was blocking his attempt to get into her mind with *Legilimency*.

"Of course not! I'm not even sure what I am feeling about this whole thing. It isn't every day you find out that you are married to three people with the option of either consummating the relationship or have a monogamous ceremony with one while the relationship with the others remains unchanged; unless you give them permission to wed outside the Protectorship!"

"Princess this is a very ancient magical union. We are all bound by blood now and that cannot be altered. Whatever you decide is fine with all of us. You will be in our lives no matter what. Try to look at it practically and then you will understand a little better."

"What would have happened if I had fallen in love with someone else?"

"You could then have asked one of us to step down or requested a fourth protector," Sirius replied soothingly. "Look at the bright side, at least you aren't married to Albus too," he chuckled.

"Humph, if I had been I may just have picked him for actual marriage," she retorted trying not to smile.

"How upset are you really Harry?" Severus questioned.

"I'm more upset that I wasn't told of this in the beginning and that you all kept it a secret. I suppose you have all been courting me because of it?"

"NO!" the three men chorused.

"We have been with you simply because we care and wish to be at your side. Each of our romantic involvements has been genuine," Severus related calmly.

"Severus is telling the truth Harry. We all care very much and know that no matter what you decide we will always be together one way or another," Sirius informed her.

"Knock off those puppy eyes. You know what they do to me." Harry blushed furiously as Sirius grinned back before transforming and sitting up to beg.

"In any event, Princess," Remus began ignoring Padfoot, "you have time to think about this and spend the next few months just letting us be with you and take your places without worrying."

"But if I choose one of you over the other two..."

"It won't matter!" Sirius stated changing back. "We will still love you. I do not want you to feel that you will be hurting any of us. We have already told you that this is your decision to make and agreed to abide by it."

"I hope so. This is very difficult for me. I can see why my Mum had problems with it. Having more than one spouse is only done in a very few cultures and none of those are in the Western World anymore."

"Only if you are a witch or wizard and only then in special circumstances," Severus agreed. "Perhaps you would feel better speaking of this with Albus. I believe he may know the families of the last witch and wizard that was involved in a Protectorship."

"Maybe I will. Do any of you know the outcomes of what happened?"

"Albus told me that the witch accepted the Rite of Union with two of her Protectors. The third protector was a witch also. They merely remained bonded and she gave her permission to wed later on to the wizard of her choice should she choose to do so. I think the Protectorship involving the wizard occurred when he was a small child so his was more of a guardianship at the time. He maintained the bond as an adult and married outside of the Protectorship," Sirius answered.

"Then maybe I will talk to the Headmaster and he can set up some kind of meeting with either them or their families."

"Try not to worry about this Harry. I know you will do what you feel is right for all of us," Remus comforted. "Now how about you take the sleeping potion. We'll sleep in the sitting room for tonight in case you or Phaedra need us."

"Yeah, maybe this will look different after I have time to consider all the possibilities. I do care about all of you very much and don't want to see any of you hurt."

"We understand Harry," Severus replied picking up the potion and handing it to her. "Now get some sleep. You still need to heal emotionally and physically. Worrying about this unique situation will not help any," he stated crossing his arms and giving her his best glare.

"Yes Professor Snape," she chuckled swallowing the potion with a grimace. "Now where is my chocolate?"

They all grinned and Remus dutifully passed her a piece of candy. Each kissed her goodnight and she curled up beside Phaedra. Closing her eyes she smiled to herself. Harry could almost hear Hermione's gasp when she read about the Rite of Union involving the Protectorship. Her reaction would certainly be interesting...

Chapter 31 - Heart of the Dog Loyalty of the Wolf and Cunning of the Serpent

The next few weeks passed quickly and Harry endured them gracefully. Hermione's reaction to the Rite of Union was just as Harry had expected. She was furious that her friend had been maneuvered into such a situation. Her logical mind understood the principle but her emotional reaction had been one of anger. She felt it was unfair not just to Harry but to her Protectors as well. Harry had been amused when she had lost her temper with the Headmaster two days after the funerals.

Harry had been in Dumbledore's office at the time discussing the possibility of talking with the families of the witch and wizard who had undergone the protection ritual. She had been amazed to learn that the witch had been Dumbledore's second wife who had died in childbirth. He had been her protector at the beginning of the twentieth century. Her father had been a high Ministry official and wished to keep his only child from harm when a group of renegade goblins had threatened his family. She had been much younger than her male protectors with whom she had accepted the Rites of Union. The other wizard was killed in a fight with the goblins. As Harry had been told, the third protector was a woman. What had shocked Harry even more was that the witch was Professor Grubbly Plank. Dumbledore had been about to set up a meeting with the elderly witch when Hermione came up to the Headmaster's office. He had known she was coming and looked up with an amused glint in his blue eyes as she burst through the door.

"Professor Dumbledore this is outrageous!" she sputtered, brown hair flying in all directions. "It is simply unnatural, not to mention immoral. Why is it even permitted?" Hermione demanded thumping the books Harry had given her onto the old man's desk.

"Mrs. Weasley please calm down and take a seat," Dumbledore remarked conjuring a chair beside Harry. "Harry and I have just been discussing this very same issue."

"I'm sorry, Harry, but I just can't justify your having to form a marital union with more than one man. It is almost as if you have been made their chattel."

"Chattel?" Harry questioned unfamiliar with the word.

"It is an old word for when women were considered the property of their husbands," Dumbledore explained patiently.

"Oh. I guess I can see Hermione's point but couldn't that work both ways in this situation?"

"What on earth do you mean, Harry?" Her friend looked at her frowning thoughtfully.

"Well..." Harry started thinking carefully, "I'm the one in control of the situation. It is entirely up to me to decide what will happen. Therefore, I suppose you could consider them my property. I'm the one who will determine whether to accept one or more of them with the union and only I can permit them to take a wife in the usual manner outside of this. I can also dissolve the Protectorship although the Governors and the Wizengamot have made it perfectly clear to Dumbledore that this would not be allowed. If I read the law correctly I need their permission to do so and they will not be forthcoming in my situation since I am so powerful."

"That is correct Harry," Dumbledore agreed.

"Then why was it done at all?" Hermione asked. Her cheeks were still red with anger but she had calmed down somewhat.

"To protect Harry until the Prophecy could be fulfilled. The reason the Rite of Union was even brought into this was that the Wizengamot and the Governors were aware of how powerful she was becoming. They were afraid that she would simply take over when Voldemort was destroyed."

"Harry would never go dark and we all know that! It is simply an effort on the part of the Wizarding government to control her."

"I agree with you Hermione," Dumbledore stated patiently. Nevertheless, at the time I had no other recourse. Had Voldemort been truly killed that day in Grimmauld Place I may have been able to get the situation reversed. However, once I suspected that he could possibly reappear I felt that I had no other recourse than to keep quiet. I knew that if the Death Eaters found a way to bring him back the Ministry would not authorize Harry's release from the formal Rites of Union. She would need to use such a vast amount of power that they would simply be too frightened of what she might do to them."

"In other words the Protectors are there to keep her from using her powers for dark magic and opposing the government"

"Unfortunately, that is the case," the old man sighed. "Harry will have to make a decision within six months as to what she will do and dissolving the Protectorship is no longer an option."

"Why six months Professor?" Harry wondered curiously.

"It is the period which was decided upon to be sure that there would be no other rising of the Dark Lord. Normally, this would not be allowed. I argued that you should have time to adjust and allowed some latitude. I had originally asked for a year but was outvoted. We were able to reach a compromise with the six-month time frame."

"Then let me pose a hypothetical argument," Harry could see Hermione's logical mind at work, "what is to keep Harry from going dark and using the Protectors as her allies?"

"You should go into law Hermione." Dumbledore smiled blue eyes twinkling. "The members of the board and the Wizengamot made that same argument."

"What did you tell them Headmaster?" Harry queried green eyes glittering as she met his blue ones.

"I quite simply told them that it would not happen and staked my reputation on it."

"Humph, I'm surprised that they took that answer," Hermione snorted.

"They didn't," Dumbledore answered seriously. He studied the two young women over his spectacles thoughtfully before he continued.

"Then how did you convince them?" Harry watched him anxiously. She had let down her guard and he was allowing her to use her empathy to sense his feelings.

"I told them that I had enough confidence in you that if I so much as suspected you were misusing your powers in such a fashion I would kill you and that if I failed to do so they could give my soul to the Dementors."

"Albus," Harry gasped, "that's outrageous!"

"Did they accept your terms?" Hermione looked at him visibly shaken by his statement.

"Naturally." He winked. "How could they not?"

"Now I know why you were watching me so carefully when I did that spell to restore Ron's eye sight," Harry remarked. "I almost put you into a horrible predicament."

"Your intentions were laudable and many of the healers are most interested to study what you did. However, I must caution you Harry not to attempt such things in the future. They could be misconstrued by those who would seek to gain power by less than creditable methods."

"I understand Sir." Harry and Dumbledore locked eyes and he gently reached across his desk to take her hand. Her distress was obvious and he wished to soothe her anxiety.

"Headmaster... you wouldn't really kill Harry... would you?"

"He would," Harry answered for him, "and I would want him to do it. The thought of what I would become..." her voice trailed off with a shudder.

"I sincerely doubt it would ever come down to that Harry," Dumbledore answered patting her hand. "And I promise you that I have no more secrets."

"So I guess Harry will have to follow through with the Rites of Union in one form or another then?"

"I am afraid so Hermione. However, I have every confidence that she will make the right decision."

"Too bad you're the Keeper of the Trust. I would just marry you," Harry laughed good-naturedly. She loved teasing the old wizard about their affection for one another.

"Harry James Potter, Dumbledore is old enough to be your great great grandfather!" Hermione rolled her eyes at Harry's shameless grin while Dumbledore looked between the two of them. His blue eyes were twinkling merrily.

"Oh... I don't know Hermione. Age shouldn't matter. I could always just do this..." Harry raised her wand waving it in Dumbledore's direction. His beard immediately began to shorten and turn red as his ancient face took on the appearance of a man one third of his age. She then conjured a mirror and handed it to her mentor.

"Hmm...Excellent piece of transfiguration Harry. I wonder what would happen if I went around the school like this for a few hours?"

"You would probably have all the witches groveling at your feet flirting shamelessly. I could just see the look on Minerva's face and Madam Hooch would be following you around like a hawk," she joked wiggling her brows.

"I can see why Harry," Hermione agreed. "Then again I am partial to red heads." She blushed furiously as Harry waved her wand changing the headmaster's appearance back.

Dumbledore and Harry exchanged a few more words about the Protectorship before the girls left his office. Harry had told him that she would do what had to be done but was still very confused and uncertain what path to follow. 'I love all three of them but am I actually in love with any of them? I know they all care for me too but are they in love with me. I wish I could say for certain but none has ever told me exactly how they actually feel. I'll just have to do what Remus suggested and spend the next few weeks with them. I only hope I don't hurt anyone's feelings...' she mused worriedly.

That same afternoon Harry had also had to deal with receiving another Order of Merlin. She was glad that her friends had also received them again along with her three Protectors, Dumbledore, and many of the Aurors. There was also a special award for Phaedra. Harry was happy that Voldemort was no longer a threat and more than a little pleased that her scar was no longer so obvious. Nevertheless, it bothered her that she was being rewarded for having to kill. It just seemed so incongruous. Her very nature was one of peace and the thought of killing still abhorred her. She was glad that there was no death penalty anymore even if many people felt the captured Death eaters deserved to die.

Of course, the Dementors were still around and the Ministry had once again worked out a deal with them. Arthur had been reluctant to do so but it was either that or reinstate the Death Penalty. The Dementors were now back on duty at Azkaban. The conditions within the prison itself were also being made more humane. Safeguards were being discussed to prevent the Dementors from leaving again should another dark wizard ever seek them out. It seemed that the Department of Mysteries had found a way to kill them, which involved using unhappy or dark memories. One of the workers had hit upon the simple idea when it was mentioned that they fed on happiness. The theory had been tested on one of the rogue Dementors and it had worked. Those that had actually participated in the battle had been put to death. No one seemed to care about this since they were not considered human. The rest were now guarding the prison along with a contingent of Aurors who would be rotated every month.

Following the ceremony to receive her Order of Merlin Harry had to contend with the exclusive interview with Rita Skeeter. Rita had been given strict rules about what she could ask Harry but had still tried to circumvent them. She seemed very interested in what Harry would do with her Protectorship. Harry had politely declined to answer with a simple, 'no comment.' Rita was unfazed by this but did not press the issue when Snape gave her an extremely malevolent glare. Instead, she had pressed forward on another topic.

"Harry how did you get around the magic in the goblet to restore Mr. Weasley's eye sight?"

"There is always a way, Miss Skeeter, as you well know. The healers have been given the information and spells. They are now working on learning and refining them for similar cases."

"Yet you will not tell the public what you did?"

"The information will be made available through the healers at St. Mungo's as soon as they deem it a certifiable healing process. Other than that I can't tell you anything more."

"Mr. Weasley how do you feel about what she did?"

"I am happy of course. Who wouldn't be? Being blind even for that limited amount of time was devastating but somehow I was able to cope with it and did my best to help during the battle."

"Weren't you afraid that you would hit one of your comrades?"

"Not really. They had me aim low and I was lying on the ground. Mostly I hit people with things like Jelly legs and stuff like that," Ron replied casually.

"What about you Mrs. Weasley. You lost your parents during the attack in Hogsmeade just prior to the battle. Don't you think you should have waited for a suitable mourning period before you and Ron tied the knot?"

"No. My parents would have wanted to see me and Ron happy," Hermione bristled. "I learned that I didn't need the show of a fancy wedding. What was important was that I was with the man I loved who loved me too."

"Professor Snape how did you feel when Voldemort was holding you captive? Surely, you believed you could not get out of there alive. After all you had been spying on him. He considered you a traitor to his cause."

"Miss Skeeter I had been fully prepared to die from the day I joined Dumbledore in the fight against him."

"Weren't you in the least concerned for you sister and her daughter?"

"Madam... you are treading dangerously with that question and only a moron would ask such a thing," Snape scowled glaring darkly. Rita averted her eyes quickly moving on to her next question.

"I see that your niece is not here. How did she feel about being the youngest recipient to ever be awarded the Meritorious Medal of Bravery?"

"My niece understands the significance of the award. She accepted it with all the dignity one would expect of a child her age."

"How do you feel about her receiving the award Harry?" Rita asked redirecting her attention.

"She deserved that and more. Had she been old enough she would have received an Order of Merlin along with the posthumous ones given her parents. She held up better than many adults would under such circumstances."

"This next question is for Mr. Black and Mr. Lupin. What was going through your minds when you were trying to locate the Dark Lord's Headquarters?"

"We were doing what needed to be done, Miss Skeeter," Sirius bristled, "attempting to rescue the captives and perform our obligation as Harry's protectors."

"Do you agree with this statement Mr. Lupin?"

"It is the truth," Remus responded nonchalantly.

"Weren't either of you concerned that you would not get there in time?"

"We had every confidence in Harry's ability to fight Voldemort." Remus continued, "She has been doing so for a number of years quite successfully."

"Mr. Black how do you feel about the rumors that you were a dark wizard even though you were vindicated of any charges before this last rising of the Dark Lord?"

"Sirius has never practiced the Dark Arts," Harry interceded quickly noting the angry look in her godfather's eyes. "He is not responsible for what other members of his family have done. If people are foolish enough to think so they had better take a long look at some of their own relatives. My godfather has undergone more hardships than you could ever imagine. He is to be commended for his bravery and ability to stand up in the face of adversity." Sirius shot Harry a warm look.

"Mr. Lupin do you think your involvement will cause people to look at werewolves and other dark creatures in a different light?"

"Excuse me, Rita," Arthur interjected, "but this may be a good time to let the public know that Remus has agreed to work with the Ministry's Department of Control of Magical Creatures as an unofficial liaison. We will be examining the laws on the control of werewolves and some of the others to see about changing them in a way that will keep the public safe and ensure that those afflicted will be able to have a more normal way of life."

"Does this mean that there will be fewer restrictions?" Rita asked eagerly knowing she was getting a scoop.

"It means that they will be changed to benefit all of those involved or at least we hope so," Remus replied seriously. "I will be the first one to tell you that there should be some kind of safeguards. Most werewolves are good law-abiding citizens but we have been shunned and unable to work because people are afraid. We are thought of as monsters and inhuman. This is a fallacy that needs to be rectified but it will take time and careful planning. The only time we are a threat is during the full moon."

"What kinds of changes would you like to see enacted?" Rita's eyes were wide and her quill was moving furiously.

"We need to make the Wolfsbane potion more readily available for one thing. Employers also need to agree to give time off during the three days surrounding the full moon," Remus told her soberly.

"That's right," Hermione agreed. "Harry has always said that Remus affliction should be thought of as more of an incurable illness."

"Why do you say that Harry?" Rita questioned.

"Because it is. Remus didn't ask to be bitten by a werewolf and most werewolves would be horrified at passing on the trait to someone. I know Remus worries about it. Even though he has access to the potion, he still will lock himself up unless he is with Sirius or me when we are in our animagus forms. Even then, he prefers to be in a place where there are no people he could harm."

"What about children? Do you believe they should be allowed to have parental rights?"

"With certain safeguards there is no reason why they shouldn't. There are some werewolves who have families you know," Harry remarked annoyed.

"Yes but the children are usually cared for by other relatives," Rita countered.

"The help of relatives or others would of course be required," Remus interrupted. "However, that would only be needed during the same full moon period as we discussed earlier. It would not be as much of a problem once the children were old enough to go away to school."

"Hmm...Do you believe you and Miss Potter will be having children?"

"Rita you have been warned about asking specific questions about the Protectorship," Dumbledore said coolly.

"It's all right Albus. I'd like to answer that. I have made no decisions yet as to the Rites of Union. Should I decide to take the formal ones or just to marry one of the three I will most likely have children. Should Remus and I have a child together I hope that we would be responsible parents. Naturally, they would learn from a young age that their father could inadvertently cause them harm. I would like to hope that they would also be able to tell their friends that he was no different from their own fathers. Only that his illness precludes any interaction during the full moon."

"Interesting...how do you feel about werewolves being allowed to be guardians?"

"It should be permitted so long as there are safeguards," Harry tossed her head annoyed.

"These are the kinds of things that will be studied and reviewed by the Ministry. I was raised by my Muggle relatives because Sirius was falsely imprisoned and Remus was not allowed to take me simply because he was a werewolf. I find that unacceptable and hope that in time these regulations will be changed," she told Rita with ferocity.

"Harry," Rita began using her sweetest voice, "are you aware that the Ministry had reservations about allowing Mr. Lupin to become one of your protectors because he is a werewolf?"

"Then it's a good thing that they used their common sense or Voldemort might still be here and I wouldn't," Harry countered looking Rita squarely in the eye. "Now unless you have no further questions..."

"Well yes, I do. I would like to ask Ginny Weasley how she felt when she was posing as you in front of Voldemort."

"If you really must know, I was scared to death but I was determined to get my brother and the others out of there alive. I was willing to do whatever it took to stop Lord Voldemort."

"I understand you were subjected a number of times to the *Cruciatus* curse. How did you feel about that?"

"I knew what I was getting into. I'm only sorry I never got to do my *Bat-Boogey* Hex on him. Would you like me to demonstrate it?" Ginny pointed her wand at Rita with a wicked chuckle.

"She's really good at it," Draco sneered, "and I should know having experienced it first hand." He gave Ginny a quick hug.

"No. That won't be necessary," Rita answered hurriedly. "I think we're done here."

"You are aware that your story must be approved by the Ministry," Arthur commented as she gathered up her quill and parchment.

Harry didn't hear the rest of the conversation as the group left the room and headed back towards the floo system to return to Hogwarts...

That had been almost three months ago and Harry had thrown herself into her teaching and studying. She was working hard with Severus and Tiberius since the Potions Master exam was in another week. She also had to prepare exams for the end of term for each of her classes. In between, she was spending time with all three men. None of them was pushing her for a decision and she was relieved by this. Each had something to offer her and she knew that under the circumstances she could have all three but did not feel such a thing would be appropriate. However, none of them seemed to mind and this troubled her even more. She found she was spending a good deal of time watching each one when they weren't aware of her presence and had taken to following them about with her invisibility cloak. She would also use her empathic ability to feel their emotions. Unfortunately, the use of *Legilimency* was impossible since Remus and Severus were both skilled Occlumens and would know. She refused to try it on Sirius too since she did not wish to invade his private thoughts. It would not be fair to either one of them.

Harry had decided to do some revision down by the lake since it was a warm day for the beginning of May. She had just conjured herself a blanket to sit on when she saw Remus and Sirius coming towards her from the castle. Sirius was smiling at Remus while the werewolf was rolling his eyes. Harry couldn't hear what they were saying but each seemed pleased. Looking a bit more closely she could see that Sirius was whispering something into Remus ear and he was blushing. This was not the first time she had seen them like this and her mind immediately flashed back to a night a few weeks ago when she had found them sitting in the atrium. They had jumped apart when she entered but not fast enough for her not to notice they had been embracing one another. While this was not unusual since they were such close friends, she suspected that there was more there than they were letting on to her.

This brought back a memory of Severus and a conversation she had overheard him having with his uncle.

"Do you believe Harry will accept the full rites or settle on just one of you as a husband?" Tiberius had asked.

"I am uncertain at this time, Uncle," Severus replied quietly.

"How do you feel about her?"

"I do not believe that my feelings are relevant to the situation."

"She will be an asset to our family, Severus, should she accept the full rites."

"What if she does not? How will you feel then?"

"You will still be bound by the Protectorship Severus. While this will not be as illustrious of a union as the full rites or an actual marriage it will still help to restore our family from the darkness, which was caused by your parents. Besides, Phaedra adores Harry. She has helped her to accept the loss of Circe and Justinian in ways that neither of us ever could have."

"I know, Uncle, and it is good to see Phaedra smiling again," Severus sighed.

"Severus answer me truthfully. Do you believe that Harry will choose her godfather or Lupin?"

"They are all close in ways that I am not a party to."

"Why are you so unsure she will not accept you? I can tell you have feelings for her even if you refuse to admit it."

"And if she does not feel the same way towards me I will only be making a fool of myself," Severus had retorted.

Harry never heard the rest of the conversation as the bell had rung and she had to duck behind a gargyle in the dungeon as a group of students headed towards the potions classroom. Her heart had been beating rapidly and she had found herself more than a little disappointed that she had not heard the rest Severus' reply.

"Hey, Princess, getting ready for the exam I see," Remus fond voice interrupted her reverie.

"Trying to but this stuff is brutal," Harry grinned up at the two men, "and I thought Potions class was hard."

"You know, Love, there is no shame in withdrawing from the exam. I'm sure Severus would understand."

"Yeah right. He'd just give me one of his sardonic smiles and say, 'I told you that you weren't good at Potions.' I made a commitment to take this test and I'm going to do my best."

"Then you have nothing to feel ashamed of," Remus commented. "Even if you don't pass you will have done your best."

"Nobody expects you to be perfect Harry," Sirius said sitting down beside her.

"I only wish that were true Padfoot. People hear my name and think I can do anything."

"That's only because you did something that no one else could. You defied and stood up to the greatest dark wizard of the age from the time you were a year old. I for one am proud of you." Sirius hugged her.

"Hey, Padfoot, don't hog up all the hugs," Remus teased dropping down on her other side for a hug of his own.

"You two are incorrigible," Harry laughed. "What am I ever going to do with you?"

"Now she sounds like Lily." Remus winked at Sirius.

"So are you going to watch the Slytherin vs. Gryffindor Quidditch final tomorrow?" Sirius questioned changing the subject.

"Naturally but I wish I were playing in it again."

"Who do you think will have the advantage Harry?" Remus inquired with interest.

"It's hard to say. Both teams are pretty evenly matched but I think Ginny will catch the snitch before Tybolt."

"Hmm...I've seen her play and she's really quick but I think Tybolt has a good eye too," Sirius remarked thoughtfully.

"I hope Gryffindor wins though. It would be nice to keep the cup. Especially since Slytherin is in the lead for the House Cup."

"I haven't checked the standings lately. What are the scores?" Remus asked pleasantly.

"Slytherin has 480, Gryffindor and Ravenclaw are tied at the moment with 420, and Hufflepuff has 375."

"Well then I will just have to give a few points more to Gryffindor during my next class. What do you say, Remus, should we help them along and knock the socks off of those Slytherins?" Sirius looked at his friend mischievously

"In that case I will just have to make sure that I deduct a few house points during my class this afternoon," Severus silky voice remarked from behind startling them. They had not seen him come up from the rear of the castle.

"I think I'll just give points to the Hufflepuffs for effort," Harry sighed, "that would solve the whole situation and keep you guys from acting like a couple of first years. What do you think Moony?"

"Now that would be something. Hufflepuff winning the cup. That hasn't happened in years. I could just see Pomona Sprout's face. I think the dear lady would have a heart attack." Remus grinned.

Severus arched his brow amused while Sirius chuckled merrily. Harry rolled her eyes. Hufflepuff hadn't won the cup since the three men had been students at Hogwarts.

"Harry I came to let you know that we will be leaving on Friday morning for Paris. We shall need to apparate to the Leaky Cauldron and then we will take a Portkey over to France. Your written exam is scheduled to begin at one o'clock. Your practical will be on Saturday. We'll return to England on Sunday morning," Severus informed her.

"What time are we leaving on Friday?"

"We shall leave here right after breakfast. I want to leave us plenty of time to get settled at our hotel."

"I still think you both should have stayed at the Black estate in Brittany," Sirius remarked.

"It will be easier to stay at the hotel. Harry will have more time to relax between her testing," Severus replied. "I need to go back up to the castle now since I have a class to dock points from. It will be nice to win the cup," he sneered playfully. "I will see you all later."

They watched him disappear back up the hill. Harry found herself grinning after him. She rather liked Severus' dry sense of humor. Sirius and Remus watched her expression and exchanged knowing looks.

"Harry we need to talk," Remus said trying to sound casual.

"God I hate that phrase. It never bodes anything good," Harry sighed. She looked intently at the two of them letting herself feel their emotions. They were anxious but she could sense happiness about them too. Harry's heart started to beat rapidly. She knew what they were feeling. She also knew what she wanted and felt for each of them.

"Don't look so solemn," Sirius frowned. "We just want to have a little chat."

"What about?" Harry asked cautiously.

"You haven't said anything lately about the Rites. We were wondering if you had given it any thought," Remus answered avoiding her gaze.

"Every day," she responded curtly. "However I have a problem. I love three men but I suspect I am actually in love with one of them. Unfortunately, I don't know if he feels the same way. I also don't want to hurt the other two. I should prefer not to accept the full rites with all three unless I have to."

"In other words you are afraid of any of us being hurt." Sirius studied her carefully.

"I suppose so," Harry sighed.

"That won't happen Princess. We all care about you."

"Remus it could happen very easily," Harry remarked choosing her words carefully. "You see if I choose to commit myself to either you or Sirius alone neither of you could tell me that you wouldn't be hurt."

"What do you mean Honey?" Sirius queried feigning innocence.

"I mean that I have two protectors who love me very much. So much so that they would sacrifice their own happiness with one another to make me happy." Harry smiled sadly at the two of them. "You lied to me Moony. I should have realized that as a werewolf you could do it. Sometimes you're able to block me when I let my guard down and allow myself to feel your emotions. What you forgot is that Sirius can't. He loves me very much but he loves you more."

"Harry...I..." Remus started to object.

"It's okay Moony. I know you love me just as much as Sirius does. I love you both but I can tell you that I am not in love with either of you the way a wife and a husband should be. I would never come between either of you. You're Soulmates and that's how it should be."

"Then you're not upset?" Sirius asked eyes alight with hope.

"That you're lovers? No. I am upset that Moony lied to me a few months back when he denied it. I am also more than a little peeved that the two of you would sacrifice your love for each other for my happiness."

"Harry you have to understand that we all agreed that the decision of who you were with was to come from you and you alone." Sirius hugged her affectionately. "We also didn't know how you would react to our being together." He nodded in Remus direction.

"Who am I to interfere with true love? Besides, you are both very discreet. I can only assume that is because there are a good number of people who would object to such a relationship. Fortunately, I am not one of them." She grinned at the two of them.

"Princess will you forgive me for not telling you the truth?"

"Only if you promise never to lie to me again Remus Lupin," Harry scowled pretending to be angry but unable to hide her smile.

"Werewolf's honor!" Remus held up his hands in salute.

"Shit! I just realized that you said you were in love with one of us..." Sirius gasped looking over at Remus.

"Snivellus," the two men stated in unison.

"You promised never to call him that!" Harry admonished.

"Er...sorry Love." Sirius flushed, eyes dancing. "Who would have thought...this is just amazing," he stuttered trying to find the right words.

"Will you marry him then Princess?"

Harry sighed unable to look at them. Remus tilted her chin up seeing her wistful expression.

"What's wrong Harry?"

"He...he's never said how he actually feels about me," Harry's voice cracked and she could feel tears filling up in her eyes, "and he is very hard to read emotionally."

"Then you should let him know how you feel," Remus remarked gently.

"NO! What if he laughs at me or tells me he doesn't love me like that."

"Do you want us to talk with him, Honey?"

"Sirius, are you crazy? Don't you dare say a word to him! I could never live down the humiliation."

"Then what are you going to do?"

"At this point all I can hope for is that he will let me know how he feels. He is not one to make a public display of his feelings. I have until August. If nothing happens by then..." her voice trailed off.

"Humph...that foolish git should let you know if he loves you. If he had any sense he would shout it to the world." Sirius clenched his fists jumping to his feet.

"Yeah right. If only he would but I don't ever see that happening."

"Give him time Princess. Severus is a very private man. He does not like to show his feelings. You know he's your Soulmate."

"A person doesn't necessarily have to be in love with their Soulmate."

"I think he cares very deeply for you Love. Don't forget we've seen him at times when you have been injured or missing. I think if he had been capable he would have torn Voldemort to pieces if you had been killed."

"Thanks, Sirius, but that still doesn't change the way things are now. I will just have to wait. If it turns out that he doesn't love me the way I want him to...well then...we'll cross that bridge when we come to it." Harry gathered her books no longer in the mood to study for her exam and they walked her back to the castle.

None of them had been aware of the tall dark haired man who had been gathering plants just out of their view in the Forbidden Forest. He had listened silently, his jaw set. His ice blue eyes were thoughtful as his brow furrowed into a sly frown. He would seek out Dumbledore's opinion and then proceed from there. True to his nature as a Slytherin, a cunning idea was forming in the back of his mind. If it worked, none of them would ever be the wiser...

Harry and Severus had arrived in France by ten o'clock Friday morning. They settled into their hotel, a quaint building much nicer than the Leaky Cauldron and each went to unpack their bags. They had rooms across the hall from one another and Harry was delighted with her view of the Seine. It was a lovely spring morning and she almost wished she were in Paris on holiday rather than having to spend the afternoon taking the written half of the Potion Master exam. With a sigh, she turned back from the view just as there was a knock on her door. She knew it was Severus and hurriedly opened the door for him.

"Are you finished unpacking?" he inquired glancing around the room.

"Yes. I didn't bring too much with me. I was wondering why you said I should bring a set of dress robes though."

"I shall explain later. It is almost eleven now so I thought we should eat before we head over to the wizarding area of the Paris Institute for your exam. Are you prepared?"

"For what the test or lunch?"

The test naturally," he replied with a smirk.

"If I try to cram any more into my head I think I'll just get everything all mixed up."

"I take it you're nervous?"

"Wouldn't you be?" she asked as he picked her cloak up and helped her to put it on.

"You forget I took the exam myself a number of years ago."

"Yeah and you probably scored one hundred."

"Ninety eight point five actually," he sneered. "I lost points for failing to list an alternate for the Pepper up Potion to weaken it so that it could be administered safely to children under ten."

"You wouldn't be willing to tell me exactly what that alternate is would you?" she asked following him from the room.

"No...You would know it if you did your revision properly."

"Humph, just for your information it happens to be done by reducing the amount of porcupine quills by half." Harry glanced up at him slyly.

"Very good, Miss Potter, that will be ten points for Gryffindor," he smirked arching his brow in amusement.

"Still the teacher," Harry laughed, "right up until the end."

Snape looked down at her sardonically but didn't say anything as he led Harry from the hotel. They had lunch in a small outdoor café frequented by the wizarding community with a view of the Eiffel Tower. Snape ordered for them both since Harry did not speak French. She was delighted with the Spinach Quiche but was more than a bit put off by his Escargot.

"How can you eat snails?" She grimaced.

"They're quite good. Why don't you try one?" he offered politely.

"Ah...no thanks. We use enough of them in some of the potions."

"As you wish." He pursed his lips, dark eyes glittering with mirth as he continued with his meal.

Harry ate as much as she could but her stomach was in knots and she kept glancing at her watch. 'What ever possessed me to want to take this test,' she fretted inwardly. 'I must be mad! I'll never pass. Maybe I should just plead sick and have Severus take me back,' she worried desperately. She was startled out of her thoughts when Severus gently touched her arm indicating that it was time to leave. Harry followed him without speaking trying to fight the bile rising up in her throat.

"Sev, I meant to ask you... what is the passing score for the exams?" she questioned nervously as they entered the building.

"You must attain a ninety on the multiple choice and an eighty five on the essay portion of the exam for a median score of eighty seven point five. Tomorrow you will be asked to brew at least three potions of varying difficulty from memory. You will be allowed only one mistake and may start over. Any more than that is an automatic failure," he told her matter of factly. "Still want to go in?" he challenged with a sneer.

"What's the worse that can happen?" Harry answered trying to cover her nerves.

They were met at the door of the exam room by a stout witch with white hair. She took Harry's admittance forms and looked up at her, eyes growing wide when she read the name.

"Harry Potter...It's a pleasure to meet you. I am Madam Quintas and will be proctoring the written portion of your exam. I see your sponsors are..." she glanced up quickly. "Severus it is good to see you! How is your uncle?"

"He is well Luella," Snape answered. "I shall tell him you inquired after him."

"Yes, my boy, please do. Neither of you have been here for awhile but I suppose you were busy with all that nasty business with You-Know-Who."

"Yes. I am sure that now that the Dark Lord has been destroyed we shall be able to attend more of the Institutes lectures on the latest discoveries in Potions."

"More likely you will both be giving them. If Miss Potter is as good at Potions as she was with stopping You-Know-Who then we will have three of the best Masters in all of Europe."

Snape merely inclined his head politely. Harry just pretended to study the painting of a unicorn on the wall. She felt like she was ready to throw up. 'I think fighting Voldemort was easier than trying to do this,' she considered miserably while Madam Quintas directed her into the exam room.

"Good luck, Harry, I will pick you up as soon as the exam is over. If you finish early just wait for me by that bench," he told her indicating a bench further up the hall.

Harry nodded and went to take her seat. She looked around at the other witches and wizards who were taking their places. None were as young as she was. A few seemed to know each other and apparently had taken the exam before and failed. Harry learned that their sponsors would receive the exam results in about a month. Once the explanations and directions had

been given out, the exam started. Turning her test form over Harry read the first two multiple-choice questions and nearly laughed aloud. 'Where would you find a bezoar and what is the difference between Monkshood and Wolfbane?' She couldn't stop the grin on her face as she recalled the first day she had laid eyes on Severus Snape as a first year as she started her test. Like most exams, it started out easy and grew more difficult as she went along. When she was uncertain of an answer, she merely put down what came to her mind first knowing that it was usually the correct answer. She then began the essay questions. For the first time in her life Harry was grateful that Severus had only given them essay questions on his exams. Now she understood why. She completed the final question ten minutes before the end of the test and turned in her paper. Severus arrived just as she left the exam room. Harry's green eyes beamed up at him as she met him in the hall.

"You're never going to believe what the first two questions on that test were," she chuckled.

"Indeed. Since I can see you are absolutely bursting at the seams to tell me it must be something that you think I would find quite interesting."

"Oh, I'm sure you will find it hilarious."

"Very well, Harry, what were they?"

"Where would you find a bezoar and what is the difference between Wolfbane and Monkshood." She looked at him trying hard not to laugh as he blinked in astonishment.

"They are obviously excellent questions to start with," Snape replied with aplomb regaining his usual composure. "I certainly hope you knew the answers."

"Maybe we should ask Hermione. I'm sure she would know," Harry joked unable to conceal her glee as her thoughts drifted back in time once more.

"I'm sure she does. Are you hungry?"

"Not just yet. Are you? We could get something to eat before going back to the hotel."

"Actually I thought perhaps you would like to change. I had you bring those dress robes for a reason."

"Really?" she asked trying not to sound too eager as her face lit with curiosity.

"I hoped you would like to join me tonight to relax at the Paris Opera. I bought the tickets in anticipation of this trip. They will be performing *Candide*. We can have a late supper afterwards."

"Terrific! I've never been to the opera. I may not understand the words but I think I should be able to follow the story."

"Then we should go and get ready," he stated giving her one of his rare smiles. "I think you could use the diversion. You've had a rough day."

They went back to the hotel and Harry took a quick shower. She put her hair into a French knot and put in her contact lenses before applying some light make up and donning pale green dress robes. Severus knocked on her door just as she was finishing up.

"Come in," she called coming out of the bathroom.

"You look lovely," he said taking in her appearance.

"Thank you. You look pretty good yourself." His usual black was trimmed with silver tonight and he carried a silver-topped cane. "Let me guess. Your wand is in the cane."

"It is," he agreed nodding.

"Didn't Lucius Malfoy have one like that?"

"Actually this one used to be his. Draco gave it to me after Lucius demise."

"In that case I hope you checked it over for any unusual spells."

"Naturally. There were only a few simple ones which were easily removed," he smirked as she looked at him askance. "Shall we go?" Harry took his arm and they headed to the opera house.

Harry enjoyed the opera and found she needn't have worried about not understanding the words. Each seat was magically geared for the translations to appear on the back of the one in front of it. She followed along with only a minimum of difficulty and found herself humming some of the lyrics afterwards while they walked towards the restaurant.

"I can see you enjoyed yourself," Severus remarked amused.

"I thought it was wonderful. I haven't been this relaxed in a long time. I might actually get some real sleep tonight."

"Are you still having nightmares?"

"Not as often as I was. At least now I know that's all they really are. How about Phaedra, is she sleeping any better?"

"Yes but she still has some bad dreams. It is to be expected."

"We should bring her a present."

"What do you propose we bring her?"

"I would say a snake since she could talk to it but that might bring back too many bad memories."

"I agree. Besides she already has two pets."

"Then how about we bring her a new dress? I think she would like that."

"Planning on starting her on the new Paris fashions so young?" Severus teased.

"Why not? She's a very pretty little girl. In a few years you will have all the boys chasing after her."

"Not unless they want to be turned into potion ingredients."

Harry laughed and the rest of their evening continued with light banter. She was happier than she had been in a long time and was glad to see Severus so calm. He was enjoying her company as well. All too soon, it was time to go back to the hotel since Harry's practical exam would begin by nine in the morning.

Severus walked her to her door and waved his wand to unlock it before turning her to face him. He stared down at her dark eyes unfathomable as they locked with hers. Harry wasn't certain how long they stared at each other before he slowly lowered his head. His lips met hers and she found herself returning his kiss. Gradually his tongue sought hers. She opened her mouth to meet his with her own, gently twisting her fingers into his silky black hair as he pressed her close. When they finally separated her heart was beating wildly. She thought her knees would buckle. Severus' normally pale cheeks were tinged with a faint blush. Neither spoke as Harry opened the door to her room.

"Get some sleep Harry. You have a busy day tomorrow," Severus quietly commented breaking the silence.

"I'll see you in the morning then," she whispered unable to find her voice. He nodded and pulled the door closed between them. Harry was deep in thought as she prepared for bed. 'That's it, I'm hooked for sure. I wish he would just tell me what he's feeling. He's too good at blocking me. Please, Merlin, don't let him be toying with me,' she mused climbing into bed and turning off the light. 'I couldn't bear it if he doesn't love me.' Rolling over onto her side, she fell asleep hugging her pillow.

The next day neither mentioned what had happened. After breakfast, Severus escorted Harry back to the Paris Institute for her practical. Each participant drew a slip of paper from a bowl; magical writing appeared which stated the potions they were to brew. Harry had the Skele-Gro, Pepper Up, and Draught of Living Death. The exam took all day with a short break for lunch, which was provided as a courtesy. It took all her effort to concentrate. She had all she could do not to think about Severus.

Once the exam ended he picked her up right on time. They made a brief stop to pick out a new dress for Phaedra before returning to the hotel. Severus seemed preoccupied the entire time and Harry dared not try to interrupt his thoughts. Reaching their rooms Severus told her he brought some papers to grade and went directly inside. Harry ate a cold supper alone in her room and then went to bed. She was exhausted and fell asleep as soon as her head hit the pillow. They returned to Hogwarts in the morning, neither mentioning what had happened...

May quickly turned into June. Severus remained less reserved but made no further attempts to kiss her openly. Several times Harry thought he was watching her covertly. This seemed especially true when she was with Sirius. Harry idly wondered if he were jealous. She remembered that he had told her he would want to see her happy even if it was with his old rival. Sirius and Remus did their best to make her feel better but knew she was hurting inside.

They even went as far as to ask if they had quarreled while in Paris and Harry confessed what had happened.

"Harry, Severus is just being a stubborn git. He's too proud to admit that he is in love with James Potter's daughter. What he needs is a swift kick in the ass," Sirius grumbled in annoyance. "I should go down to the dungeon right now and..."

"No! Sirius you promised to stay out of this," Harry reminded him unable to hide the agitation in her voice.

"Harry is right, Padfoot, it will only make matters worse," Remus advised.

"But Harry deserves to be happy!"

"She will be, Padfoot, even if she has to accept the full Rites. We'll be there with her either way and so will Severus."

"Yes but it's not the same. She shouldn't have to feel she was made to do this just to be close to him."

"Sirius please...just don't say or do anything. If Sev isn't in love with me, I can't force him to want me like that. If I have to fulfill the full Rites of Union then at least I know you and Moony do care about me in such a way that you won't have any problems with the physical side of things," she remarked unable to meet their eyes, her cheeks growing hot.

"See, Moony, I told you she wouldn't have any problems with our relationship should it come down to the full rites," Sirius chuckled. "It must be our animal magnetism."

"Oh knock it off," Harry said cuffing him on the head affectionately. "Besides, Moony is the one with animal magnetism or haven't you noticed?"

Remus blushed hotly and then threw back his head and howled. Harry couldn't help but laugh.

"Feeling better now Princess?"

"You two always make me feel good. That's why I love you both so much."

"Now if only we could get that cold serpent to coil himself up around you I bet even Fawkes couldn't rival your Phoenix song," Sirius commented hugging her fondly.

"Speak of the devil..." Remus gasped as Fawkes suddenly appeared with a note in his beak and landed on Harry's shoulder.

"This must be important for Dumbledore to send Fawkes," Harry commented taking the note. The Phoenix then gave a pleasant trill and disappeared into a burst of flames as Harry opened the missive.

"What does it say Princess?"

"Just that he wants to see us all in ten minutes for a cup of tea. I wonder what is going on. You don't suppose something bad has happened. Is my scar any different?" she questioned with a note of panic in her voice.

"Nope, it's barely visible," Sirius reassured pushing away her hair. "The Headmaster must want us for something else."

"Did either of you ever consider that he merely wants to spend a quiet afternoon tea with all of us?" Remus stated calmly.

"He always was the practical one," Sirius remarked as they all headed upstairs to Dumbledore's office.

The door was opened when they arrived and Severus was sitting with Dumbledore over by the empty hearth. A small table was spread before them laden with tea and biscuits as well as assorted scones and pastries.

"Thank you all for coming. I hope I didn't worry you by sending Fawkes but this is most important and I felt you should all be here. Please sit down and help yourselves." He waved them over to the sofa indicating the refreshments.

"Headmaster is something wrong?" Harry asked nervously.

"No Child. I just felt that since things have calmed down a bit we could all use some time together," he replied looking at her over his spectacles. His blue eyes were dancing merrily.

"Since when is tea and biscuits important?" Harry looked at him confused.

"When it is the middle of a pleasant Saturday afternoon and the term is just about over. After all, there is only one more week of classes and the OWL's and NEWT's are completed. It has been a most stressful year. I thought we should just enjoy one another's company. It is the Trust Keeper and Headmaster's prerogative."

"In other words, Princess, he'll tell us what is going on when he's ready. In the meantime just sit and relax."

"Indeed. The Headmaster is in a very good humor today," Severus commented. "I believe Harry is the reason." He arched his brow resting his dark eyes on her face.

"Well I can believe that. She did take out Voldemort and saved a number of lives in the process," Sirius teased rumpling her hair.

"Don't forget the fact that she restored her best mate's eye sight and helped Phaedra get through the loss of her parents."

"Speaking of Phaedra, where is she? I haven't seen her today and it's gorgeous outside."

"My uncle took her to Diagon Alley. She wanted to see the Weasley twins. I believe she still has a crush on them. She also wanted to buy some of their wares." Severus frowned.

"I see you and Ron are breaking her into becoming a Marauder young," Sirius gloated grinning at Severus.

"Just think she may actually marry one of the twins later on. They have been rather slow to mature." Harry gave Severus an evil smile.

"My niece will have better sense than to marry either one of them," Severus sneered, "and they will mind their manners unless they want to find themselves in the bottom of one of my cauldrons."

"Sev they've already been there. I think they hold the record for cleaning them in detention," Harry laughed trying not to choke as she munched on a biscuit. Severus actually gave her a sardonic smile in return.

"if I may interrupt your pleasant banter for a moment I have some things I would like to discuss. The first is one of utmost importance concerning next year." Dumbledore smiled up at them all pleasantly.

"Of course Albus," Remus stated as they looked at him expectantly.

"It seems that one of our teachers will be leaving us and I will have a full time position available. Hagrid will also be returning to his position as Care of Magical Creatures instructor and Tiberius will be going back to his business on a full time basis."

"So we will need to look for other employment?" Remus couldn't hide his disappointment.

"On the contrary, Remus, I would like you all to stay on full time. I know that Harry and Sirius will do occasional special assignments with the Aurors but we can worry about that when it happens."

"What do you have in mind Albus?" the werewolf asked eagerly. He enjoyed teaching immensely.

"First off I would like you to go back to teaching Defense Against the Dark Arts, Remus. Unless you would prefer to stay with Charms?"

"No. Defense was always my specialty."

"Excellent. Sirius would you be willing to take over as the full time Charms Professor?"

"It would be my pleasure Albus. I always liked Charms."

"Severus will be going back to teaching Potions full time. He has rather missed being able to do his research and now that Voldemort is no longer a threat he will have my full support for his studies." Severus nodded unable to disguise the delighted look in his eyes.

"And here I always thought you wanted to teach Defense," Harry sneered.

"Actually I prefer my research. I am planning on making some improvements to Lupin's Wolfsbane."

"Are you really?" Lupin looked at him with interest.

"If you will occasionally part with a vial of blood or urine along with a few bits of hair, yes. I think it may prove useful. Especially if I can get samples at various times of the month."

"I shall be more than happy to provide them. Just let me know when."

"Thank you, Remus. I hope to be able to eliminate the pain with the transformation although my ultimate goal would be a cure for your affliction."

"All right Severus! I always said he knew his way around the Potions lab," Sirius praised him excitedly.

"I think I'm going to faint. Did Sirius actually compliment Severus Snape?" Harry questioned smugly.

"I believe I shall put this memory into my Pensieve. This is a red letter day." Dumbledore beamed. "Now I have another position which I am going to offer to Harry but first what I have to tell you is not to be mentioned outside of this office. It will be one of two announcements I will be making tonight at dinner."

"Of course Headmaster. What is it?" Harry inquired seriously.

"I would like you to teach Transfiguration next year."

"What about Minerva?"

"She will be retiring."

"What! Why? She's not that old."

"It seems that the war did have some good side effects other than those you are aware of. Minerva is getting married. She and Dr. McBride have been quietly seeing one another and he has proposed. Minerva accepted."

"That's wonderful but why has she decided to leave?" Remus asked. "McBride lives in Hogsmeade."

"She will be teaching the younger children of the village and helping him with his practice. I am sure you will miss her as much as I will but she will be close by."

"Who will take her place as your Deputy Headmaster?"

"I offered the post to both Pomona and Severus but both have declined. Pomona prefers to work with her plants and Severus wishes to conduct his research. I would very much like it if you would consider the position Remus."

"Me? But the Board of Governors..."

"My boy they have already agreed. They were more than a little impressed with you in the war and you can still help as a liaison with the Department of Control of Magical Creatures."

In fact, your ability to handle the position may also be of help. It will show people may that many of our laws in that area are unfounded."

"I don't know what to say..." Remus shook his head in disbelief.

"Just say yes Moony." Sirius grinned broadly. The werewolf nodded his acceptance unable to verbalize his gratitude, tears in his eyes.

"Now Harry about that Transfiguration position?"

"I'd love it," she replied excitedly.

"I would also like to ask Sirius to become the Head of House for Gryffindor. It is time he learned a bit about discipline," Dumbledore joked fondly.

"Me? I'm no stranger to discipline," Sirius quipped jovially. "I am honored Sir."

"Then I would also like to ask you to help Remus with any administrative duties pertaining to the students should the full moon interfere. It doesn't happen often but sometimes the term starts at that time. You may also have to visit some of the Muggle families if needed prior to their admission to the school. Harry could help you with that." Sirius and Harry nodded in agreement and the Headmaster continued. "Excellent. Now there is just one more thing. Severus if you will..." He motioned the Potions Master to continue.

"Harry I received this today. I think you should see it," he told her stoically. Reaching into his robes, he withdrew an envelope. She took it from him and gasped when she saw the official seal.

"What is it Harry?" Sirius demanded.

"Probably the reason I'm teaching Transfiguration and not Potions," she sighed nervously removing the contents of the envelope.

"It is the results of her exam," Severus informed them without moving.

Harry quickly scanned the letter and looked up at Severus. He pursed his lips in amusement meeting her eyes.

"Well what does it say Princess?"

"Umm...are you sure this is not some joke?" Harry shook her head in disbelief.

"The results have already been recorded. You scored the minimum passing grade on the written and only made a minor mistake in the practical. Ironically, it was the easiest potion to brew and the same one that cost me a perfect score when I took the exam. You are now the youngest ever Master of Potions."

"Way to go Harry!" Sirius cheered hugging her.

"Congratulations Princess. I knew you could do it."

"Nah... I was just lucky. I'll never have the talent for Potions that Severus and his Uncle have. They just knew what to teach me. If I were really any good I would never have screwed up the Pepper Up Potion."

"Nonetheless, I am pleased and so is my Uncle. Only ten people passed the exam. You worked hard and I would enjoy having your company from time to time down in the lab." Harry beamed at Severus as he gave her a brief smile of approval and acceptance as they looked eyes.

"Now that everything is settled I shall announce Harry's passing the exam and Minerva's engagement tonight at dinner. In the meantime let's just enjoy the rest of this wonderful day shall we?" Dumbledore sipped his tea with a smile...

The rest of the week passed quickly and before she knew it Harry was sitting in the Great Hall for the Leaving Feast. The points for the House Cup had changed somewhat during the week but Slytherin had managed to hang onto the lead. However, Gryffindor would be keeping the Quidditch Cup, which would be transferred from Minerva's old office into the one that would now be occupied by Sirius as Gryffindor's Head of House. The students had been sorry to learn that the stern Transfiguration professor would be leaving. Nevertheless, they were enthused with the changes made for the next year. They seemed especially happy for Professor Lupin but the most gossip for the past week had to do with the changes they had noted in Professor Snape's behavior.

He was no longer the tyrant he had been. This was attributed to his role-playing during the war. Of course, the Headmaster knew otherwise. Severus Snape had come back to life and it all had to do with his relationship with Harry Potter. She had brought him back from the brink of despair. He had found friends among former rivals. The bitterness and anger, which had so afflicted him from his past mistakes, had begun to fade into a bad memory. He was emerging as the sensitive and intelligent man that a cruel twist of fate had almost destroyed. While his position still dictated that he be a strict taskmaster he was no longer yelling and belittling the students. Dumbledore was pleased with him but he sighed inwardly. There was still one thing missing from his life if only the young man could see it.

The Headmaster scanned the Great Hall looking out at the assemblage. The teachers had taken their places at the Head Table and everyone was present except for Severus. He had sent Dumbledore a brief message to begin the feast without him as he had a matter of urgent personal business. Dumbledore had questioned Tiberius but Severus' uncle merely said that the young man had gone into Diagon Alley and would be delayed returning. He studied the elder Snape seriously from the dais. Tiberius was sitting with Phaedra, who had been allowed to attend, and she was talking animatedly with him about going home for the summer. It had been decided that they would reopen Snape Manor rather than the family town home in London. Sirius had decided the small house in Ottery St. Catchpole over to Ron and Hermione for a wedding present. Phaedra was still adjusting to the changes in her life. Her nightmares persisted but they were slowly resolving. She was not yet ready to be reminded of places she had spent time with her mother. Harry was also looking forward to going to Snape Manor. A change of scene would do them all good.

Dumbledore had just announced the winners of the House and Quidditch Cups when the doors to the Great Hall burst open. Severus Snape stood there silhouetted in the doorway. The room fell into silence as all heads turned in his direction.

"Forgive me Headmaster," he said sweeping up the aisle between the Ravenclaw and Gryffindor tables, black robes billowing out behind him, "but I need to address a member of your staff and I wish everyone to hear what I have to say."

"Of course Professor," Dumbledore agreed studying the younger wizard shrewdly, as all eyes were upon them.

The hall remained totally silent as the Potions Master reached the front of the room. Students and staff alike were wondering what was going on. Reaching the front of the room Severus walked over to where Harry was sitting between Remus and Sirius. He stared at her for a full minute before gracefully dropping down onto one knee, painfully aware that the last time he had done so had been in front of Lord Voldemort.

"Harry James Potter, I kneel before you in front of your friends, peers, and students so that they may bear witness to what I am about to say." He looked her directly in the eyes and Harry felt her stomach jolt. He had let his guard down. "I am in love with you and would ask you in front of these witness if you would become my wife?"

Harry looked around the room. All eyes were on her. 'Breathe, Harry. Slow deep breaths,' she thought nervously. She continued to stare at Severus and was aware of Sirius trying to suppress a grin as he looked at Remus who gently nudged her in the back. Her mouth was suddenly dry and she took a sip of pumpkin juice before leaning over to whisper softly to Severus all the while maintaining eye contact.

"You know that Sirius and Remus will still have to be my Protectors."

"Of course," he replied softly.

"Will you promise me one thing then?"

"What is it?"

"Promise me you will never kneel in front of anyone else ever again? I think you have done it more than enough for one lifetime." She knew he understood that she was referring to all the times he had done so for the Dark Lord.

"That is one promise I shall be delighted to keep," he smiled warmly.

"Yes, Severus, I'll marry you," Harry answered so that everyone could hear. "I love you too."

The Great Hall erupted into shouts and cheers of amazement as Severus stood and placed an engagement ring on her finger and leaned in to give her a brief kiss. Sirius and Remus were hugging her and shaking hands with Severus as the rest of the staff all came over to congratulate them. Hermione ran off to send an owl to Ron and Draco who were back at Auror headquarters. Harry was simply in shock. Severus had announced to the world that he loved her and had meant it. Remus moved over so Severus could sit beside her. Harry looked up as she felt a tug on her sleeve meeting Phaedra's brown eyes.

"I told you that you would marry Uncle Sev," she giggled, "but nobody ever listens to me."

Harry just hugged her and whispered, "I think we will from now on."

Dumbledore gave the students and staff a few minutes to calm down and then congratulated the couple from the podium. He was beaming with pride. Harry was happy and well. Severus had found what he thought he could never have. Sirius and Remus had found what they had thought lost forever. It had been a hard battle but the war was finally over. Old wounds were finally healed and life would begin anew.