

# **A Chance Meeting**

By

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## **Chapter One: Harry**

The clicking of her heels echoed off the masonry as she made her way down the misty, almost empty street. Bundled against the November chill, she was walking with no destination in mind. She just couldn't stay in the house any longer. She could no longer listen to her mother and her 'advice'. She just couldn't listen to her father's schemes and plans any longer. Her sisters annoyed her to the point of screaming with their ribald wedding night 'humor'. She had had enough of them and their 'help'. The strawberry blond knew that she had to get away from all of them... Get away from them the night before she left them forever.

A sign hanging over the pavement caught her eye. A white dove with a sprig of some plant or other in its beak with picturesque farm land in the back ground. **THE DOVE** in white letters on the black border. A small neighborhood pub. Perhaps a drink among the Muggles, perhaps a man would dull the questions in her head. Probably not, but it was worth a try. If nothing else, it would infuriate her father if he found out.

She pulled the door open and entered the pub. A long oak bar ran the length of the room to her right; several booths lined the walls and a scattering of tables filled the room. The saloon bar had a low ceiling with dark oak beams. An open fire took the chill off the November night. A small flight of steps lead to the dining area at the rear and double doors lead out into a small conservatory. She made her way to the bar and ordered a glass of white wine.

Sipping her drink she looked around the room... and almost dropped the glass when she spotted him out of the corner of her eye. He was sitting at one of the tables facing the fire, so all she could make out was his silhouette. She knew that hair anywhere. There couldn't be another man in the country whose hair looked like such a rats nest. After more than a decade, what were the chances of meeting him here tonight? She walked up to his table ignoring the looks she was getting from the other men in the room.

As she sat the man looked up from his pint, then he went back to staring at his glass. "Please, just leave me alone."

"You're as arrogant as ever Potter." She said with a smile. "No everyone wants to partake of your body. Sometimes a girl just wants a chance to have a few words with a former classmate."

Potter looked up again, and focused on her face. It was amazing how little he had changed in the last ten years. "Tracey? Tracey Davis? How are you?" That crooked grin of his suddenly appeared on his face.

"Getting married tomorrow. How about you?"

"Married? Congratulations." Potter took a pull on his pint. "Not much going on for me, getting ready for a trip to Bolivia... Something about a new 'Dark Lord'."

"I'd heard you were still trying to kill yourself."

The man shrugged. "Turned out to be the only thing I'm any good at, besides pissing people off. How about you? Would I know your intended?"

She shook her head. "Not unless you know much about the landed pure blood gentry." Tracey directed her attention to the fire in the hearth. "Gerald is in his seventies... it's unlikely you know him."

"Contract marriage?"

"No. Well yes, but not like that." She couldn't meet the man's startlingly green eyes. "It's more of a business merger. The Davis line brings the gold; the Llewellyn line brings the status."

“That’s what the lines bring and what the lines get... What does Tracey bring to the marriage and what does she get out of it?”

“I bring fertility. Gerald has no children, and wants a son badly enough to pay for it.”

“Ah.” The man drained his glass. “Would you like another?” he asked signaling the waitress.

“Please.”

Harry ordered for the both of them and paid when the drinks arrived.

“You were missed at the tenth anniversary of Riddle’s death. McGonagall had a get together at the school. Everyone kept asking where you were.”

“I was very very drunk in a pub in Lisbon that evening.” He shrugged. “No one wanted to see me anyway. They wanted the Gryffindor Golden boy, not the drunken idiot he turned out to be.”

“Feeling sorry for yourself are you?”

Potter smiled. “You bet. It’s one of my two useful skills. Feeling sorry for myself and fighting dark morons.”

The pair sat in silence for a few moments, staring into the flames of the fire. Harry broke first. “So, who was there?”

“Amazingly, pretty much everyone who survived, even Daphne.”

“How was she? I saw her at the Los Angeles International Airport last year. Couldn’t get close enough to talk of course, but she looked amazing.”

“She’s... Well happy would be the best term I guess. She’s all but left the magical world behind and is focusing on her career. You know she only uses her given name?”

“Yeah. The first time I found a magazine with her picture on it, I almost lost it right then and there. Who would have thought the Ice Princess would end up a Super Model?”

“I certainly didn’t. I didn’t even know that there were such things. Daphne’s younger sister married Draco Malfoy three years ago.”

“Really? I don’t know why, but I have problems picturing Malfoy married.”

The woman smiled. “You won’t believe what he did at the Hogwarts party.”

“What? Say something snarky about me? He always said something snarky about me.”

“No Potter, Draco Malfoy stood there in the Great Hall and offered a toast to you. He called you ‘The Man who saved me from myself’ and spoke of the debt we all owed you.”

“So he was drunk?”

“No. Stone cold sober.” The Slytherin Alumnus smirked. “He went on to call you a sanctimonious ass and a judgmental prig who never had an original thought in your life.”

Harry choked on his drink. “Oh stop.” He said wiping his chin with a paper napkin. “You’re getting me all misty.”

“You asked.”

“Yeah I did.” He sighed. “Who else was there?”

“All three of them were Potter. You don’t need to beat around the bush.” Teasing him she took a long sip from her wineglass. “The Weaselette was looking good. She came with some Italian Quidditch

player in tow. I think she was looking to rub him in your face. What happened between you two anyway?"

"We wanted different things." He shrugged. "I wanted to live quietly and hope the world forgot about me. She wanted the parties, the adulation, and the fame. Every time I heard someone cast anything, I was rolling on the ground looking for cover so I could hex back. She left for her parties, and I left to fight anyone but her. What about Ron and Hermione. I know they married..."

"There was a meeting of the old Study Group..."

"Study Group?"

"You didn't know?" Tracey smiled. "Imagine that. We formed second year. Padma and Lisa from Ravenclaw, Hannah from the 'Puffs, Hermione from the Gryffs, and Daphne and me from Slytherin. Anyway we got together for a bit at the party. Hermione seems to be happy. She was pregnant with number 5. Her career is on hold until she's done with having children. She was very disappointed that you weren't there. She wanted you to meet your namesake. He takes after his mother and starts Hogwarts in three more years."

"They don't need me in their lives."

"This side of you isn't very attractive Potter. The Weasel is the assistant Keeper Coach for the Canons; he seems to be happy as well. Hermione says he is a loving attentive husband and father. Though after he had a few drinks he started telling everyone how he actually won that final fight with Voldemort. I think he forgot just how many of us were actually there. A Hannah had to keep her husband from attacking him. She's been good for Neville."

"Thank you for telling me. I wish I'd had the courage to go."

The woman shook her head. "I don't know... It might have been braver to stay away. All night long I had the feeling that it was all boiling down to 'look what we used to be, weren't we something?' By the end of the night I was horribly depressed. I mean 43 of us were sorted on September first 1991. Twenty three of us survived the war. Twenty two of us came to that party, everyone save you. Other than Daphne everyone was obsessed with talking about then, almost no one wanted to talk about now."

"You're right" Harry said, running his hand through his hair. "That is depressing. Let's change the subject." He signaled the waitress for another round. "Let's talk about the most fascinating person at this table. You're getting married tomorrow, yet you're spending the night before talking to me. Why? Shouldn't you be at a Hen Party, or having a last fling?"

"My sisters tried to throw me a Hen Party, and I told them no. I couldn't imagine anything more depressing than going to such a thing with them." She sipped her drink, looking at him over the rim of her wineglass. "And who says I'm not having a last fling?"

A look of realization appeared on Potter's face. "Ah, I understand now. You're meeting hem here then." He checked his watch. "He'd better hurry up, this place closes at eleven."

Tracey shook her head. "Where are you staying?"

"I own a flat. Why?"

She stood up, pulling on her jacket. "Let's go."

"What? Why?"

"You're my last fling idiot."

-----oooOOooo-----

The pair hadn't said a word in the taxi from the pub to his first floor flat. Tracey wasn't the best judge of Muggle things, but the building appeared to be very nice, though she didn't detect a single ward, which surprised her, but she wasn't sure why.

He opened the door for her and followed her into his flat. Tracey was surprised. She had seen a few bachelor flats; almost universally they tended to be decorated in early slob. Harry's was clean, incredibly so.

"I'm impressed Potter, I expected a sty."

Harry took her jacket and hung it in on a coat rack by the door along with his own while gesturing toward the sofa. "Sorry to disappoint you. Cleanliness was beaten into me at a young age. So... why me?" He asked as he entered the flat's kitchenette.

"Why not you? Tomorrow I'm entering into a business merger thinly disguised as a marriage. One of the clauses in the contract forbids me from ever taking a lover. That means that tonight will be the last time with a strong young man for at least sixty years. Besides, I wanted to see what was under those Quidditch robes of yours since third year."

Harry returned to the sitting area with two glasses of wine. He handed her one and sat on the other end of the sofa. "You should have said something." He grinned. "You probably would have scared me to death."

"Draco tried to pay Daphne and me to seduce you and shag your brains out the night before your last match against each other."

"Ah, of all his harebrained plots, THAT'S the one that was never actually attempted."

"The only reason it wasn't attempted was because he offered us money Potter. If he had just appealed to our house loyalty, we'd have drained you dry and wrung you out. You wouldn't have been able to walk the next day much less fly. By offering us money he told us he considered us whores. I broke his nose. Daphne kicked him between the legs."

Harry started laughing. "That's why he was limping when he walked out onto the pitch?"

"Daphne and I liked to think that we contributed to your victory."

The pair laughed for a few moments at their own personal memories of that day more than a decade before. The silence between them grew.

Tracey moved to his end of the sofa and kissed him. After they broke the kiss she said "Take me to bed Potter." Her large blue eyes sparkling.

"Potter?" He asked.

"Take me to bed Harry."

-----oooOOooo-----

Tracey fought against waking up, she was so warm and comfortable. Though there was an odd 'lub lub' sound that was distracting her from going back to sleep. Then there was the erection underneath her thigh.

Erection under her thigh? That meant she was waking up with a man. That was nice. There was something tickling at the back of her mind about a wedding. Ah. Yes. She was getting married today.

Damn. That mean she shouldn't get used to waking up to a nice erection like that. She opened her

eyes and looked up to see the man she had slept with. Potter. Potter? Then the prior evening came flooding back, how she had decided to bed him as soon as she confirmed that it was him in that little pub. Their conversation, their love making. Harry was an attentive lover. He paid attention to what she liked, what she didn't like and changed his technique accordingly.

Why hadn't they done this back in school. Why had she wasted her time with Zabini and Corner? Wasted time.

"Good morning."

Tracey looked up into his eyes again, unwilling to untangle herself from him. "Good morning."

"When do you have to leave?"

"Soon" she cuddled closer.

"Ever been to Bolivia?"

"What? No." What an odd question.

"I've got to be in La Paz by next Monday. I'm flying to New York tonight, to get used to the time zone change, then another flight to La Paz. Wanna come?"

"Harry, I'm getting married today."

"So don't do it. Last night you told me all about what the marriage was doing for 'Gerald' and what it was doing for your father and your family. You never said what it was doing for you."

"I've got obligations Harry."

"I know that. I'm suggesting that you ignore them. Think about yourself for a while."

"And why would 'myself' want to go to Bolivia with you?"

"Well, you could come along and point out all the times I'm being stupid when I'm chasing after the South American Dark Moron. That should be a full time job."

"You're offering me a job?"

He ran his right hand to the small of her back. "After what you told me you did to Malfoy last night, the very last thing I'm going to do is offer you money while we're in this position. I'm offering adventure and a whole lot of stupidity. I'm good at that."

"Why?"

"I don't know. Maybe I felt like we connected last night. Maybe I'm tired of being alone. Maybe I hate the idea of you wasting yourself on an old man who needs a contract to tie you down until you aren't you any more. Pick one."

"You're serious."

"Yes. I am." He smiled.

Tracey was amazed. She was actually considering his offer. Nothing had been signed yet. And...

"Maybe a little negotiation is in order?" Harry asked as he leaned down and kissed her. His hands began to play across her body.

Tracey arched her back to offer him more access. She had forgotten how much she liked morning sex.

---===oooOOOooo===---

"Maybe we should just do what you want to do. I think that you're going to kill me with these

negotiations.” Harry was lying on his stomach while Tracey was astride him nibbling on his neck.

“Wimp. That was fun, we should have gotten together back when you were still young and had energy.”

“Ah lost opportunities.” He moved his head to allow her better access. “I’ll give you three months to stop doing that.”

Tracey giggled from atop him. Some how that amazed him more than anything else... A giggling Slytherin...

“So, have you decided if you’re coming with me?”

“I think I did already three or four times.”

“Funny girl. Are you coming to New York with me today and to Bolivia next week?”

Tracy sat up. She paused for a moment and weighed her options. Then she decided. “Harry...” she said.



## Chapter Two: Tracey

This was her third try. Tracey had never imagined that just arranging to speak with someone could possibly be so difficult. Still, her friend was a busy woman. If nothing else the last two years had taught her a level of patience that she had never known before.

A meeting at Daphne's Agent's offices was the best opportunity to actually come into contact with her oldest friend. Tracey had attempted dropping in at her friend's Brownstone, and even just showing up at one of Daphne's photo shoots, but she could never manage to get past the security.

Not exactly true. If Tracey had actually tried, the security surrounding Daphne wouldn't have slowed her down in the slightest, but that would have called attention to her and her abilities, something Tracey would never do.

Seated in Daphne's agent's office (the man bore an odd resemblance to Gilderoy Lockhart) Tracey patiently waited for her chance to reconnect to her oldest friend. In order to get this far Tracey had been forced to invent a fictional company looking to employ the remarkable Miss Daphne. Hopefully Daph would forgive the ruse.

Behind where Tracey was sitting the office door opened.

"Daphne, I'd like to introduce you to our latest client..." the Agent said. Tracey turned to face the pair in the doorway. "Daphne, this is Ms..."

"Tracey?" The world famous model/actress said, before rushing forward to hug her friend. "Tracey!"

"Is there somewhere we can go to talk?" the strawberry blond asked.

"There isn't really a job is there?" Daphne asked, her eyes sparkling with silent laughter. Taking the look in Tracey's eyes for a negative answer, Daphne turned to her agent. "Tommy, I refuse to work for this woman. We're going to lunch."

Daphne waited while Tracey gathered her things, then the pair left the office and the building arm in arm.

-----oooOOooo-----

The pair spoke of meaningless things as long as they were in public. The sight of Daphne walking through the streets of New York attracted quite a bit of attention. Three times they were stopped by autograph seekers looking for their little bit of the beautiful Daphne. Their real conversation waited until the pair were safely ensconced in a secluded booth in the rear of a trendy restaurant.

Once they had ordered, Daphne watched as the waiter walked away, and then gestured with the tiniest wand Tracey had ever seen, erecting some most impressive privacy wards in a few seconds.

"It's good to see you Trace... How long as it been? Two years?"

“Almost three. Not since the reunion at Hogwarts. I’d tell you you’re looking good Daph, but you already know that.”

“Thank you. The career’s going well. It turns out I can do more than just stand around looking like I’m smelling something unpleasant, though that has paid the bills quite nicely.”

“I’ve seen your movies Daphne; you were very good in all of them.”

“Thank you, but we both know you’re lying. ‘Shattered Dreams’ was a horrible mess that I made even worse. I knew then that if I was going to branch out from modeling, I would need to be better than that, so I took some lessons. I was better in the other two.” Their salads arrived. Daphne thanked the server, and then took a bite of her Cobb Salad. “Why are you here Tracey? I got an owl two years ago from your father asking if I knew where you were, and now you show up out of the blue.”

“I wanted to see you Daph, that’s all.”

“Finally ran away from home did you? If you’d have come with me when I asked you to, you’d be hotter than I am.”

“Right.”

“I’m serious Trace. You’ve got the looks that really work. Women take a look at you and know that if they worked hard enough, they could look like you, and men think that you might actually speak with them. That right there is money in the bank.” Daphne’s brow furrowed for a moment. “Wait, you saw my movies? Since when do you go to the Muggle cinema?”

“Since I heard my best friend was going to be in a movie.”

“Well thank you. So, what happened between you and your father? I knew something had gone very wrong as soon as he wrote me of all people given how much he always hated me.”

“Gerald Llewellyn contracted with Father for my hand.”

“Llewellyn? He’s seventy if he’s a day!” Daphne said, her nose crinkled in disgust.

“Well, yeah. Anyway, the night before the contract was to be finalized, I went out to get away from my mother and sisters. I wandered around London for an hour or so, and then I came across a Muggle pub. I decided to go inside, have a drink, and maybe find a man.”

“Always a good plan the night before you get married.” Daphne smiled.

“Somehow I knew you’d approve.” Tracey reached across the table and pushed her oldest friend’s shoulder. “I got a drink, and then I saw him.”

“Him?”

“Harry Potter.”

-----oooOOOooo-----

Daphne choked on her mineral water.

Wiping her mouth with a linen napkin, she regarded her oldest friend with wide eyes. You were wandering about London at random, then you just happened to walk into a random Muggle pub and Harry Bloody Potter just happened to be there?" Daphne shook her head. "That just seems so utterly unlikely. What did you do?"

"I took my drink and sat down with him." Tracey said, smiling at the memory. "He didn't even look at me, just asked that I go away and leave him alone.

"Ooh." Daphne's smile got even wider. "How badly did you hurt him? As I recall, ignoring Tracey Davis is a one way ticket to pain."

Tracey blushed a bit. "I wasn't really that Tracey anymore Daph. I was feeling sorry for myself pretty much full time then. I knew I wanted nothing to do with the contract my father had negotiated, but I lacked the courage to do anything about it. My going out that night was my one conscious act of rebellion. I was going to fuck and be fucked. It wasn't until I saw the pain in Harry's eyes I knew just who it was I was going to fuck."

"So, you hauled him out of the pub?"

"No, we talked. We talked about the reunion at Hogwarts."

"Where was he anyway?"

It was Tracey's turn to smile. "He told me he was busy feeling sorry for himself and being drunk in Lisbon that night. He told me about his life since leaving school. He's traveled and resisted anyone trying to make him a hero. Harry spends the majority of his time hunting dark wizards up to that point."

Daphne shuddered. "He actually went looking for trouble? Back at Hogwarts, I always suspected he was a bit odd given his refusal to keep his head down, but to actually hunt dark wizards..."

"Anyway," Tracey said, retaking control of the conversation. "I told him my sob story, and then we laughed at each other's pathetic lives. Then Harry asked why I was wasting my time with him on the night before my wedding when I should be at my hen party or having a final fling."

"And?" Daphne seemed to be extremely interested in her answer.

"I told him I was having a final fling. The idiot thought I meant that I was waiting for someone and speaking with him to pass the time." Tracey smiled at the memory. "I asked him to take me home with him."

"Did he faint?"

"No. I was surprised how quickly he shifted from seeing me as an acquaintance to a potential sex

partner. We took a taxi to his flat; we talked for a little more. I told him what Draco tried to get us to do before the last Slytherin/Gryffindor match they both played in, and he bemoaned an opportunity lost.”

“We’d have hurt him.”

“That’s what I told him. I also told him what we did to Draco for offering us money. He laughed so hard I thought he was going to cry. We both did. Then I kissed him.”

“And?”

“And it was just lovely. I don’t know who she is, but someone trained him well, and if I ever find out who she is I’ll send her a thank you card.”

“Probably Ginny or Hermione Weasley.” Daphne said smirking.

“No, Harry told me that he never went that far with either of them.”

The use of ‘Harry’ caught Daphne’s attention, but she didn’t say anything.

“So, I asked him to take me to his bed. I went there expecting to fuck and be fucked. We didn’t. We made love. When we woke up in the morning, we did it again.” The waiter appeared, refilled their glasses, cleared their dishes and presented the bill.

“I’ve got this.” Tracey said, offering the waiter a credit card.

Daphne raised an elegant eyebrow... Tracey had a Muggle credit card? Where was this story going?

“Anyway, it was the morning of my wedding and I was in bed with Harry Potter, having the best sex of my life that didn’t include you Daphne. Harry asked if I had ever been to Bolivia.”

“Bolivia?” Daphne felt the pangs of the memories of the times she and Tracey had been together, both as a couple and with whatever man they both found attractive.

“Yes, Harry was heading to Bolivia to deal with a rising Dark Lord at the behest of a South American Ministry, and he asked me to come along. He offered me a job he described as telling him when he was being stupid. I suggested that he might be offering to pay me for sex, he denied it pointing out he knew my reaction to Draco doing that back at Hogwarts. No, he offered me, as he put it, ‘Adventure and a whole lot of stupidity’.”

“But why would he do that?”

“Harry suggested that he felt that we had connected that night. Or possibly he was tired of being alone, and thought that I might be as well.” Tracey blushed yet again. “What amazed me is that I found myself considering his offer.”

The waiter returned with Tracey’s credit card and the receipt for her to sign. The strawberry blond looked over the bill, and signed it. The young man (an actor between jobs no doubt Daphne thought) glanced at the receipt and seeing the generous tip smiled widely. “Thank you Ms. Potter, come again.”

-----oooOOOooo-----

Silence ruled over the table for a full ten count. “Ms. Potter?” Daphne finally asked.

“I sent Daddy a note saying that I wouldn’t be marrying Gerald, and I pointed out he had my younger sisters to sell if he felt the need. I accompanied Harry to New York where we spent three days getting used to the time zone changes and making love, and then a long flight to La Paz that ended up needing even more rest and intimacy before Harry went out into the jungle to find his target. He refused to let me come along on his hunt.”

Tracey took a long sip of her drink then continued. “Harry took care of ‘the problem’ as he called it, but he was horribly hurt in doing so. La Paz has an excellent Magical Hospital, but it still took most of a month and a half to put him back together again. I couldn’t leave his side. I knew I should, but... I couldn’t. I had actually fallen in love with the suicidal idiot somehow. As soon as he was healthy again, we flew to Las Vegas and married.”

Daphne’s lips twitched into a smile. “So to avoid getting married, you ran off and got married?”

“No, to avoid getting married to a man I didn’t love, I ran away. While running away, I found someone I did love and married him.” The two women rose from the table, Daphne deftly taking down her privacy wards. The pair exited the restaurant and began to walk along the crowded sidewalks of New York. “Harry doesn’t chase Dark Wizards anymore... I’ve guided his energy into his business holdings and he financed the Art Gallery I opened in the Village, and we’re doing very well. So well, Daddy would be salivating if he knew. It got so people wouldn’t leave him alone in Britain, even finding and besieging his Muggle flat. We relocated here. Almost no one here knows who Harry Potter is, and those few who do think him to be a man in his fifties.”

“You’ve done well Tracey. It sounds like when you ran from marrying an old man you saved two lives.” Daphne pulled her oldest friend into a hug. “I’ve missed you.”

“Have you got to be anywhere today?”

“No. I don’t have any jobs scheduled until Monday.

“Good. Would you like to come over tonight? Harry is quite handy in the kitchen.”

“He cooks?” Daphne was surprised. “I don’t think I’ve ever imagined Harry Potter cooking.”

-----oooOOOooo-----

In her life among the Muggles Daphne had visited many homes. A person’s home could tell you quite a bit about the person you were dealing with. The Potter home reflected the Potters in perfect detail. Tracey’s calculating brilliance counterbalancing Harry’s casual efficiency. The art on the wall were all original originals by talented unknowns, the furnishings classic pieces that faded into the decor without

overwhelming it.

Even though she knew he would be there, Daphne was startled by the sight of Harry Potter coming out of the kitchen drying his hands on a dish-towel. The years since Hogwarts had treated the still young man well. Still on the short side, his body had filled out to where he exhibited a 'healthy glow' where before he seemed to be a perpetual victim of starvation.

“Daphne Greengrass... Or should I say ‘Daphne’?”

“Daphne is fine Potter. You’re looking well. Domesticity seems to agree with you.”

That crooked grin that Daphne remembered so well from their time at Hogwarts appeared. “Life with Tracey agrees with me Daphne. Welcome to our home.”

Tracey had noticed the strange owl wearing the bands of an International Post Owl, sleeping on the perch in the sitting room. “I see we got mail, anything important?”

“A request for a personal appearance.” Harry explained, without the obvious distaste he normally exhibited over such things on the rare occasions they managed to find him. “Bill Weasley has evidently taken over the Defense Against the Dark Arts position at Hogwarts. He’s asked that I appear as a guest lecturer on the topic of the second rise and fall of Voldemort. Evidently Binns is still teaching history and doesn’t consider it being worth mentioning since it doesn’t involve a Goblin uprising. Bill tells me that the whole idea is something of a myth to the kids in the school. Most of them don’t believe such a thing happened.”

“You should go.” Tracey said. “Use it as an excuse to see Teddy if nothing else. He’s a fourth year now.”

“I was thinking much the same thing.” Harry admitted. “Anyway, dinner will be ready in about half an hour. Do you like salmon Daphne?”

“Oh, yes.” One of the many advantages of being a witch was that Daphne, unlike many of her peers could actually eat. Her metabolism kept her trim.

-----oooOOOooo-----

The meal was excellent. Daphne marveled at what the man had accomplished in the small kitchen of the Potter’s apartment. Her own was used mostly as a place to keep a microwave for reheating restaurant take out meals. The dinner conversation ranged from memories of their time at Hogwarts to the prices at the local art galleries.

As the evening wore on Daphne started thinking about heading home. Harry had retired to the kitchen to clean up after his meal preparation.

“Spend the night.” Tracey said.

“Really?” asked Daphne, her interest peaking. “But what about...”

“Harry knows that I’m attracted to women.” The strawberry blond said maintaining eye contact. “He knows I’m attracted to you. That you were my first love. I’ve told him about our adventures, both the two of us alone and with men.”

“Where would he…”

Tracey smiled. “In our room. You and I will be in the guest room. Stay with me Daphne.”

Ten minutes later Harry returned to the sitting room to find it empty. He smiled thinking of his wife’s good fortune in reconnecting with her friend. With a gesture, he turned out the lights in the room and retired to his own room. If his time with Tracey had taught him anything it was that in the morning she would be ravenous for him.

There were worse things.

-----oooOOooo-----

It was dark when Daphne woke. There was that momentary confusion that accompanies waking up in an unfamiliar place, and then the added confusion of noticing there was someone sharing the bed, while your memories reconnect and you recall the evening before.

Tracey. That was Tracey. A flush of happiness filled Daphne’s soul as she recalled the touch, smell and taste of her first love. But there was something wrong. Tracey was… crying?

Almost silent sobs wracked the body of her lover. Tracey was whispering something in her sleep. Pulling her close Daphne could just make out her friends mutterings.

“Harry? Oh Merlin Harry. Don’t die. Don’t leave me. Harry!”

The anguish in her whispers was palpable. Daphne didn’t know what to do. Should she wake Tracey up?

The raven haired beauty decided that her lover’s husband would know what to do. She separated herself from her old friend, and padded naked to the apartments master suite. Standing next to the bed she was about to call his name when he spoke.

“Is something wrong Daphne?”

A bit disconcerted that he could tell who she was even in the dark, Daphne answered. “I think Tracey’s having a nightmare. She’s speaking to you and crying.”

“Damn. She gets these nightmares from when I was stupid in La Paz. I’d best go to her. You can stay here, ok?”

“Harry…” Daphne hesitated. “Could I stay with her as well?”

She could feel his eyes burning into her, even though she couldn't see them. "Of course."

Together they moved in the darkness to Tracey. Harry slid between the sheets on Tracey's left and Daphne returned to her place on Tracey's right. Still sleeping the sobbing woman turned to bury herself into her husband's chest. Daphne spooned into Tracey's back.

Tracey's sobs lasted only a few more moments before she settled into a deeper calm sleep. Daphne heard Harry's breathing settle into a deep rhythmic pattern that suggested that he was asleep as well. His arm flowed over Tracey's body to embrace Daphne as well. It had been a long time since Daphne had been in a bed with a man and a woman at the same time... Not since the last night at Hogwarts when she and Tracey had ambushed Neville Longbottom in the room of requirements.

It was as she was drifting off to sleep herself she noticed just how good Harry Potter smelled... Perhaps in the morning, Daphne would find out if Tracey still... shared.



### **Chapter Three: Daphne Part One**

Daphne quietly closed the door to her sister's suite. She turned from the door to find herself facing an anxious Draco Malfoy.

"Astoria is resting now. It was a hard birth Draco, you should have let me take her to St. Mungos."

"Scorpius Hyperion Malfoy had to be born here. All Malfoys have been born in this manor since it was built six hundred years ago."

"So, in pursuit of some idiotic tradition that has no meaning to anyone but you, you risk the lives of my sister and your son? And Scorpius Hyperion? You just had to do that to him didn't you? Don't you remember the beatings you got before your father threw his weight around?"

"I remember that you tried to stop the beatings. I never thanked you for that Daphne."

She waved him off. "I seem to recall delivering one or two of those beatings Draco, but certainly not for your having an odd name."

He led her into his study and gestured her to sit. He poured a high end firewhiskey into two glasses and handed one to Daphne.

"To my son." He said raising his glass.

"To my nephew." She agreed tipping the amber liquid back.

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"So." Draco said now that the niceties had been observed. "Are you finished with that Muggle nonsense yet? Are you coming back to do your duty to some pureblood line?"

"Why would I want to do that Draco? Why would I want to waste myself on some pathetic loser clinging to his illusions of superiority in the face of reality when I have a job I enjoy and that pays very well??"

"Pays well? How well could it possibly pay Daphne? Astoria has shown me samples of your 'work'. How lucrative could dressing like a Muggle whore be?"

"As usual Draco, you show your abject ignorance at every opportunity. The job I canceled in order to be here for Astoria was a three day 'gig' paying 1000 galleons a day. I average five of those a month bringing in on average 15,000 galleons a month. When I have a film, I get a bit more than half a million galleons for what turns out to be about four months work on my part. In fact the contract my agents just finished negotiating for the film I am in next year, I get that and a percentage of the gross. It seems I am becoming something of a star."

"Get serious Daphne. No one makes that kind of money."

"Of course they do Draco, at least in my line of work. Why would I want to give all that up to return to a society that would treat me like a brood mare?"

"Because it's your duty. You know as well as I do that we all have responsibilities to our lines."

Daphne shook her head. How was it this idiot ever achieved a position of leadership was beyond her.

"Would that be the same duty that had our parents on their knees in front of Voldemort? Draco, you've got to quit parroting what your father taught you and learn to live in the new reality."

"What do you mean by that?" Draco hissed dangerously.

"Draco, the war for the way of life you claim want was over sixteen years ago, and in the end you

fought on the side against what you are wanting now, remember?”

Malfoy waved that argument off dismissively. “They were after power for that half blood Riddle, not for anything important for the Pureblood families. That damned war cost us so much, and now in the aftermath, most of the purebloods are diluting themselves. Longbottom has taken up with that Half Blood Abbott but at least he’s producing children for the Bones line, the only Weasley with a pureblood is the insane one that runs the joke shop, the Prewett line is gone, the Goyles are gone, the LeStrange line is gone, and the Blacks are gone. Our culture means something Daphne. You carry the bloodline of more than eight hundred years of magic. You have to help us maintain our culture.”

Daphne smiled. “Draco, do you remember that last Quidditch match between Slytherin and Gryffindor that you and Harry Potter were in, you tried to get Tracey and me to seduce Potter?”

“Yes. My nose never did straighten out. What about it?”

“I just thought you ought to know that your plot wouldn’t have worked. Potter was fully capable of shagging us both rotten, and would have still had the energy to destroy you on the pitch.”

“What?”

“When Tracey disappeared she ran off with Potter. They’ve been married for almost five years. If they ever decide to come back to Britain, she’ll be Lady Potter.”

“What?”

“I’ve been living with them for a little over a year now. Harry’s been asking me to join them legally... That would make me Lady Black.”

“Wait, the two of you and Potter?”

“Yes. We really should be thanking you for the idea.” Daphne rose from her seat to go and check on Astoria. “For the record, if we had tried your idea back in school, we would have joined him then... He’s very good.”

The Raven-haired woman left her brother in law gaping behind her, and forced herself not to laugh, and wondered if Astoria would enjoy the joke.

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### **\*Interlude\***

At the Hufflepuff table in the Great Hall of Hogwarts, Teddy (Call me Ted) Lupin reached out to take the serving platter from Neville Bones. Breakfast was his favorite meal of the day. It signaled a new day, and the possibility that today might be the day he finally managed to speak with Victoire Weasley.

He ‘casually’ glanced over toward the Gryffindor table to glimpse the perfection that his ‘sort of’ cousin personified. Having known the girl all his life wasn’t making it any easier. The fifth year ‘Puff sighed.

“You’re doing it again.” Bones said with a smirk, watching his friend’s hair cycle through the rainbow. “For Merlin’s sake, just go talk to her.”

“Who? What are you nattering about?” Ted said in what he thought was a masterful act of misdirection.

Bones presented him with a gimlet eye. “If you want friends dumb enough to not know who you’re mooning over you should start hanging out with some Gryffies. You’ve been staring at Victoire for a year now. You’ve known her all your life, just TALK to her.”

“It’s not that easy Nev. I get around her and I just...” To his embarrassment Ted suddenly noticed that he had lost control of his features and had mirrored his best friend’s appearance.

“Good idea Ted.” Bones laughed. “Now that you’re so damned good looking, she couldn’t possibly say no.”

“Somebody just kill me.” Ted murmured as he forced himself back to his own face.

“Mind if I join you two?” an adult’s voice asked. Ted looked up, and his jaw dropped.

“HARRY!” he shouted, drawing the attention of the eleven other Harrys in the Great Hall. “What are you doing here?”

Harry Potter slid into the seat next to his Godson, leaning a four foot long package against the table between them. “Your DADA Professor asked that I drop by for some guest lecturing last year. It took a while to organize, but here I am, using it as an excuse to get to see my favorite Godson.”

Ted took on a huge smile, and then suddenly realized that he and Harry weren’t alone. “Uh, Harry, this is Neville Bones, my best friend. Neville, this is Harry Potter, my Godfather.”

It was Neville’s turn to boggle. “The Harry Potter?”

“Well, a Harry Potter anyway.” Harry grinned at the boy. “I don’t know if I’m the definitive Harry Potter. So, Neville Bones of Hufflepuff? Any relation to Susan Bones?”

Neville nodded. “My Mum.”

“We were friends, back in the day...” Harry said, wanting to ask about the boy’s father, but suspecting that if his name wasn’t in the picture, most likely the man wasn’t either. “Next time you see her mention I was asking after her.” Harry returned his attention to Ted. “As I recall, I missed your Birthday.”

“No you didn’t. You got me this watch.” Ted said extending his arm to show the timepiece.

“Well, I’ve probably missed, or will miss something at some unspecified time in the past or future. What kind of see-you-twice-a-year Godfather would I be if I didn’t arrive with a present?”

“My favorite Godfather. I don’t expect presents Harry.”

“Good, that means this is a surprise.” Harry shoved the long package at the boy. “Andy tells me that you’re a seeker.”

Ted and Neville’s eyes both went wide as Ted tore at the brown wrapping paper to expose an oaken broomcase. The two boys cleared a space on the table and lay the case on it. Harry sat back with a wide smile of anticipation as the case was open.

“Bloody Hell.” Neville whispered.

“A Nimbus Velocity?” Ted Lupin looked into Harry’s eyes. “You got me a Nimbus Velocity?”

“And what would possess you to buy a schoolboy the fastest broom in the world Mr. Potter?” Minerva McGonagall asked.

“Hello Headmistress.” Harry said rising from his seat to greet his old teacher. “I didn’t. But only because Victor Krum ran into problems with his production facility, and the Blur won’t be in general production for another four months. I got Ted the second fastest broom in the world.”

“Ted, mate. I’m your best friend, right?” Neville Bones asked with deadly seriousness never taking his eyes off the Velocity.

“Of course.” Ted agreed, joining with his friends to ignore the adult’s conversation while admiring the

broom.

“So I get first shot at riding this, right?”

“In your dreams Bones.”

Fighting against the smile that threatened to break out after hearing that exchange, Minerva continued. “Fine, not the fastest then, but you still haven’t explained why you would purchase such a thing for a school boy.”

“Do I really need a reason?” Harry smiled himself, not fighting it at all. “Well, I seem to recall a strict, stern and frankly quite scary Head of House who purchased a similar broom for me using her own funds when I was just a firstie... A couple of years later my own Godfather replaced that broom when it was lost to the Whomping Willow, that same strict, stern, and quite scary Head of House allowed me to keep it... After disassembling it and checking for curses of course... You won’t be disassembling this one will you?”

The Headmistress’ eyes moved over the broom with a look of near rapture. “Not bloody likely.” She whispered. The Scot thought for a moment. “Would you like me to keep an eye on your new broom for you while you’re in class Mr. Lupin?” she asked hopefully.

She was rewarded what a pair of looks that suggested that she might be insane and a deep chuckle from one of her favorite former students.

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“It’s as I said in my letter Bill,” Harry said. “My schedule will only allow me to be here today. I don’t really see how I’m going to manage to speak with all your classes. I mean I’m more than willing to try, but I’ve got to be in Japan by Friday.”

The former Curse Breaker leaned back in his chair. “That’s not a problem Harry; we appreciate you making time for us.” Minerva McGonagall nodded from her place beside her DADA Professor. “To solve the timing problem, we are canceling the afternoon classes and planning on holding your lecture in the Great Hall for everyone.”

“Knowing your love for public speaking,” the Headmistress added, “We thought you might feel better about only making your presentation once.”

“I can’t say that isn’t an excellent idea.” Harry grinned for a moment. “Just to be clear though, all you expect out of me is a generalized history of the second war with Voldemort as I saw it, right? I mean I’m not teaching anyone any of the things I had to do to take the bastard down.”

“Considering what using them did to you, I think that is wise.” The old woman rose from her chair and laid her hand on Harry’s shoulder giving it a comforting squeeze. “You’re looking well Harry. I’ve duties to attend to; I’ll see you at your presentation.”

Bill Weasley waited until the Headmistress had left the room. “It’s really good to see you again Harry. I wasn’t sure we ever would.”

“It was close there for a while, but thanks to Tracey, I finally grew up. How are the Weasleys these days anyway?”

“Well it turns out that Mum and Dad enjoy being grandparents far more than they ever did being parents. It seems that spoiling the kids, then handing them back to their parents is some kind of sweet revenge.” Bill smiled. “I can assure you that they are quite good at spoiling kids.”

“I bet. Ted pointed out Victoire in the Great Hall. Having a beauty like that on your hands must be giving you grey hair.” Harry said theatrically peering at the red shock of hair atop the other man’s

head. “I noticed that she is noticeably lacking in Weasley Red Hair... Does she take after Fleur in other ways?”

“No. Fleur was so relieved that Victoire won’t have to deal with the allure. I’ve noticed your Godson sniffing around her. It would be a shame if I had to go all protective father over her.”

“Your own fault for producing a beauty. Of course Ted has inherited his mother’s abilities; you would have to extend that threat to everyone, given that he could be anyone.”

“I’ve taken that into account.” The big man ran his hand through his hair. “Fleur is teaching French at a local Muggle school. I’m told that she has the best attended language classes in the county.” Bill grinned. “Let’s see now; Charlie has married to a fellow dragon chaser, his daughter Katie starts Hogwarts next year.”

“There seems to be quite a few Weasley women in this generation.”

“Dad has commented on that. He thinks Ginny broke the curse. Percy has Dad’s old job as head of the Misuse of Muggle Artifacts office. He and Penny Clearwater got back together and married about six years ago. Their twins that they named, believe it or not, Fred and George are almost five.”

“No. How did George react to that?” the thought that Percy would name his children after his primary childhood tormentors...

“George has made it his life’s ambition to spoil them rotten and make pranksters of them. The joke is, the pair resemble Charlie at that age far more than they do their father or Gred and Forge, more interested in animals of any kind than anything else. George married Alicia Spinnet about a year after you left. No kids yet, the two of them have just poured themselves into their shop, I think more as a tribute to Fred than anything else. By the way, George wants you to stop by the shop if you get a chance.”

“I was planning on doing it tomorrow before I go to the airport.” Harry hesitated. “How are Ron and Hermione?”

“They’re happy Harry. Ron is the first assistant coach for the Cannons now and Hermione... Well, I don’t know how it’s happened, but she’s channeling Mum. She’s almost deliriously happy raising their children.”

“I have to admit I’m shocked by that. I don’t know, I half expected her to be the Minister of Magic by now.” Harry shook his head. “I just never pictured Hermione as a housewife.”

“You don’t have to tell me Harry, I was here watching as it happened and didn’t believe it. Truth be told, she isn’t totally a housewife. She is quite the successful writer. She’s penned the definitive history of the second rise of Voldemort, and has a fiction series that is hugely popular both in the Magical and Muggle worlds.”

“An Author? Now THAT is the Hermione I knew.” Harry’s smile grew even larger. “I bet Ron got VERY lucky the day her first book was published.”

“Well, I did notice my little brother wandering about with a dazed smile on his face at the party when she published the History.” The red head laughed. “Ron’s in Spain with the Canons for a series of exhibition games just now. Hermione and her wee ones are at their home. I didn’t tell them you were coming; I thought you’d want to surprise them.”

“I’ll stop by tomorrow morning. Maybe I’ll pick up a copy of her History for her to autograph... What’s it called?”

“**Dark Lords and Idiots: The Life and Times of Harry James Potter.**” The look of horror on the

younger man's face got Bill to laughing even harder. "If you think that's bad, you should have seen some of the working titles."

"Oh quit laughing, or I'll talk her into a history of your grave robbing exploits." Harry glowered at the laughing man. "So what about Ginny?"

"Ginny's fine. She's a starting chaser for the Harpies." Bill read the question in Harry's eyes and continued. "In some ways your leaving hurt her, in others your leaving was the best thing for her. You two weren't right for each other; those of us who were paying attention could see that within weeks of you getting together after you killed Riddle. The two of you were killing each other. She still hasn't settled on a single person for her life, but she's only 32."

The two sat in silence for a moment, each lost in a past they would rather forget. It was Harry who spoke first.

"What happened to the pony tail and earring anyway?"

Bill ran his hand down the back of his head where the pony tail had once been and sighed. "Fleur thought it was time I grew up and quit being such an adrenalin junkie. Same reason I don't work as a Curse Breaker anymore. I notice that your hair is slicked down like a Malfoy, and you don't seem to chase Dark Lords anymore... What's up with that?"

"Tracey thought it was time I grew up and quit trying to kill myself. Daphne said she was embarrassed to be seen with me unless I used the product she buys me."

Bill started laughing. "Merlin, we're whipped."

"Yeah, but it took two women to do it to me."

"You keep telling yourself that Harry." Bill swung his feet up onto the table. Leaning back in his chair he continued. "It took a Veela to tie this Curse Breaker down. And don't you forget it."

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When Harry finished with his presentation the Great Hall was almost completely silent.

"Hello? Have I given Professor Binns a new challenge? After all, he's never put the entire school to sleep at once has he?" He looked out at the student body. The House tables were gone; the students were sitting in a semi-circle facing him.

A few laughs rippled through the crowd. "Oh, rough crowd." Harry said wagging his eyebrows. That got a few more laughs from the Muggle Borns in the audience.

"Perhaps Mr. Potter would entertain a few questions." Minerva McGonagall said from her chair at the heads table.

A few more moments of silence. A small Blond girl in Gryffindor robes stood up. "I have a question Mr. Potter."

"I'm not 'Mr. Potter'. I'm just Harry. How about if you have a question, you tell me your name and tell me what year you are?"

"I'm Constance Longbottom, second year Sir."

"Neville's daughter?"

"Yes sir. My Mum's maiden name was Hannah Abbott."

"I knew your parents well Constance. Your dad saved my life at least once. Bravest man I know. What's your question?"

“All my life I’ve heard about you and what you did for us all. I thing that among those of us born to magical families stories about you were among the first we ever heard. I’ve always wondered, what’s it like being a hero?”

“I’m not a hero Constance.” Harry said shaking his head.

“But Dad always says…”

“Let me explain, ok?” Harry picked up the glass of water from the table he stood behind and took a long sip. “Let me try to put this so that everyone can understand it. Back in the dim mists of time when I attended Hogwarts, the loving caring teachers would assign homework for the summer holidays so that we didn’t get bored… Do they still do that?”

There was a general murmur of laughing agreement from the assembled students.

“Ok, you go home for the summer, and you have two choices, you do the homework, or you don’t, and the teachers punish you for it. Right?”

Again agreement came from the crowd.

“So you do your homework. Does that make you a hero?”

“But that’s not the same thing.” A voice from the crowd proclaimed.

“But it is. Before I was born, a seer, who shall remain nameless, issued a prophecy saying that someone who could defeat the Dark Lord was to be born at the end of July. Two magical children were born at the end of July in 1980, Constance’s father Neville, and me. The next line of the prophecy is what made the difference between Neville and me. ‘The Dark Lord will mark him as his equal’. Voldemort attacked my home, and killed my parents, then SOMETHING happened and Voldemort’s body was destroyed and his soul made into a wraith. In doing that, he marked me.” Harry pointed to the scar, still clearly visible on his forehead.

“So, what does that mean? It means that I had two choices as far as facing Voldemort, just like you have two choices about your summer homework. I could face him, or run and have him chasing me until he caught me and then I faced him. I made no heroic choices, I just did what I had to do.”

“So it was the prophecies fault?” came from the crowd.

“No. It was all Voldemort.” Harry explained.

“But you believed the prophecy?”

“Nope. As far as I’m concerned, all divination is just a pile of flobberworm droppings. The teacher when I was here predicted my horrible death every class, yet I still seem to be breathing.”

A young boy in the front row wearing Ravenclaw robes looked perplexed. “But you said…”

“I didn’t believe in the Prophecy. Voldemort did. He was attacking me, not the other way around.”

“So there were no heroes?” The boy asked.

“I didn’t say that. The War with Voldemort had many heroes; I just wasn’t one of them. Going back to the homework example. I think we’d all agree that doing your homework doesn’t make you a hero, right?” Harry looked about for disagreement. “Ok, so there you are with a killer Charms essay… say thirty six feet on warming charms and their uses.”

“What a wonderful idea!” Filius Flitwick said from the staff table, garnering a groan from the crowd.

“You’re evil.” Harry said to his grinning former teacher. “If any of you want to know how evil he is,

challenge him to a duel. He'll cut you to bite size pieces, all the while smiling and critiquing your technique and assigning homework designed to improve your dueling. Anyway you've got homework. Then some of your friends show up having done their homework on the train ride home. They take a look at your assignment and roll up their sleeves to help. That is heroic."

Harry paused to let everyone digest what he was suggesting. "There were many heroes in the war against Voldemort and his Death Eaters. The heroes had names like Lupin, Bones, Weasley, Diggory, Abbott, Longbottom, Granger, Lovegood, Finch-Fletchly, Li, Chang, Finnegan, Davis, Greengrass, Flitwick, Dumbledore, McGonagall, Hagrid and Thomas to name a few. These were people, who could have just laid low or run for the hills, and Voldemort would never have looked for them, but they stood by me, protected me, and in some cases died for me. They were heroes. All I did was what I had to do to survive."

A young man in wearing Slytherin colors stood in the back. "There are a lot of stories about those times bandied about. As the head of two Ancient and Noble houses, what are your real feelings about Blood Purity? And did you really consort with a Muggle Born back then?" he then sat back down.

"And you are?"

The boy scrambled back to his feet. "Sorry sir, Evan Bulstrode. Seventh year."

"Quite alright Evan. Any relation to Millicent?"

"My older sister sir." He blushed. "I was something of a surprise."

"I imagine" Harry said as laughter rippled through the crowd. "Millie was a friend and one of the heroes I spoke of earlier, which isn't to say we didn't have our differences... in our fifth year, she bopped me pretty good when she was on an enforcement squad for a certain unlamented temporary Headmistress... You asked about blood. Blood is very important, especially when you keep it inside your body. Blood purity is a silly concept at best, a sad bit of delusion at its worst. I, for example, am a half blood. So was Tom Riddle. Who was Tom Riddle? Anyone know?"

A girl wearing Slytherin robes and a prefects' badge stood. "Slytherin Headboy in 1944."

"Yep. If I could give points, you'd get some for that obscure bit of trivia. But Tom Riddle had another name. Lord Voldemort." Harry was amused that the children in front of him didn't react to the name at all, while some of the staff flinched. "Ok, so getting back to Mr. Bulstrodes' question. I am a half blood. If blood purity meant anything at all, then surely one of the purebloods here would be able to take me in a fight... Right? Anyone want to try?"

The question was met by silence. "Ah, you lot are no fun. Back in the day, I could have counted on at least one Slytherin at least to make a snarky comment. So, in a final roundabout answer to your question Evan, I consider the whole 'Blood Purity' argument to be a waste of good air. Magic isn't from your blood or from your breeding. I've known Muggle Born who were scary powerful, and do we really need to discuss the alarmingly high incidence of squibs in Pure Blood families? Whatever it is that makes someone magical, it doesn't make one person better than another. That comes from your actions, not your magic. Now, did I 'consort' with a Muggle Born? Yes. The smartest, best friend I ever had is a Muggle Born. The Goofiest, best friend I ever had is a Pure Blood. They've been married for almost 16 years. Next question?"

A small boy in Gryffindor robes stood after a few seconds of silence. "Harry Weasley sir, second year."

"Hello Harry." The boy had Ron's hair, but Hermione's features. "It's nice to finally meet you. How are your parents?"

"Mum tells me everything is fine at home sir. They named me for you."



“You and half the bloody boys in the school mate.” A voice came from the crowd.

“Not a fate I would wish on anyone. What was your question?”

“All my life I’ve heard my parents talk about you. The one thing I’ve always wanted to know is why you left, and where you went.”

McGonagall stood up “Mr. Weasley, that is hardly...”

“Professor, please.” Harry quieted his old teacher. “It’s a fair question, and if anyone deserves an answer to that question it is Mr. Weasley. The short answer is I left because I was having problems dealing with what I had to do during the war, and I was feeling sorry for myself. From first year, every year I ended up in a fight for my life, then in March of seventh year the fight was over, and somehow I had won. I didn’t know how to not fight. As soon as Voldemort was gone, I started fighting with my friends, just with words, but sometimes it was a close thing. I was stupid and hurt the people closest to me, until the day I couldn’t do that anymore and I picked up and left. I went Muggle, got a job and tried to build a life. I was working as a courier taking a package to Paris when an up and coming Dark Lord wannabe recognized me and we ended up in a fight.”

Harry took another sip of his water. “Frankly he wasn’t all that good; he thought throwing killing curses around made you a Dark Lord. He was slow, couldn’t shield to save his life and his regeneration time was pathetic. It turns out that the French had a bounty on his head, and I collected a pretty penny for my time. Unfortunately the package I was transporting got trashed in the fight, and I got sacked from my Muggle job. That was when I got an owl from the German ministry, asking if I was free to deal with a blood purist faction they couldn’t handle. That’s how I started. I started clearing out Dark Idiots for a living. I did that for almost eleven years.”

“Why did you quit?” a girl in Hufflepuff robes asked.

“The same reason most men quit doing stupid things. I met a woman. She went with me on a job, and I got hurt pretty badly. She nursed me back to health, and then gave me a choice. Hunt Dark Idiots, or be with her. Well, she was a lot more fun...” He smiled at the ‘ewws’ from the younger boys. Had he been like that? “These days I manage my investments pretty much full time.”

“What happened with the girl?” The Slytherin prefect asked.

Harry held up his left hand to display the gold wedding band on his ring finger. “Like I said, she was a lot more fun.”

Ted’s friend Neville stood up. “Neville Bones, sir. Fifth year. We’re doing our O.W.L.s this year, and I’ve been listening to the 7th years complain about preparing for their N.E.W.T.s. They tell us that good test scores are vital to getting a good job, but I remember reading that you left school and never took your N.E.W.T.s yet still seem to have a great job that lets you travel and see the world. Are they really necessary?” Neville sat back down and Harry hid a smile when he noticed Ted smacking his friend.

“Ok, I’ll probably get into trouble with the Headmistress for this, but I’ll let you in on the secret of having a great job like mine without higher qualifications from school. Take notes if you want. Everyone ready? Ok, the first step is kind of complicated: First, survive multiple attacks from a reigning Dark Lord and his minions, then end up the head of two Ancient and Noble houses because your parents and godfather are murdered so that you are also the heir of two massive fortunes, go into a deep funk feeling sorry for yourself, flailing away at your friends and drive them away. The final part of the first step is to be a recipient of an Order of Merlin first class. Of course if you can’t manage the first step, then you probably ought to study for your tests...”

The crowd broke into laughter. Harry answered questions for another hour.

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Harry whirled out of the fireplace and end up flat on his back staring up into a pair of bright cinnamon brown eyes set in a face ringed by bright red curls.

“Hi.”

“Hi.” Harry said. “Is your mum home?”

“Harry? HARRY!” The little redhead was replaced by a somewhat older version of the same face with bushy brunette hair. A pair of very strong hands took hold of the front of his shirt and pulled him to his feet, and then wrapped him into a hug. “You prat! Just showing up like this, you couldn’t call first?”

“Hi Hermione.” He said into the mass of hair in his face. “I didn’t know I was going to be in the country until last week, and I thought I’d surprise you.”

Hermione Weasley pushed him away, but kept her hands on his shoulders as if she was afraid he was going to disappear. “You succeeded you prat. My god you look good. Has it really been sixteen years?”

“This coming May, yeah. I’m sorry Hermione. I just couldn’t stay. I was hurting you, hurting Ron. I was likely to kill Ginny.”

“Sit down. I’ll make tea.

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While the tea was brewing (“Of course I boil water Harry, it’s better that way.”) Harry was given a tour of the Weasley’s home. In many ways it was like the burrow, but far more organized to reflect the personality of its mistress. As part of the tour he was introduced to the four youngest of the house hold. Carrie who he had met at the fire place was three. Arthur who was five was playing with a small fleet of trucks in the garden. And the fraternal twins Melissa and Michelle ten were busy in their room preparing to out do their mother’s scores at Hogwarts by studying from Hermione’s first year texts and several volumes of notes.

“Ron is going to be furious that he missed you.” Hermione said pouring the tea into mugs. “He’s in Spain.”

“Bill told me. I met your eldest at Hogwarts. He’s his mother’s son. During the question/answer period he made me explain why I disappeared.”

“What did you tell him?” Hermione hadn’t changed a bit, looking across the table at her is was almost as if they were in the Gryffindor common room.

“The truth. I left out the details of course, no sense terrifying the children.”

Hermione reached across the table and took his hand. “Harry... We’ve missed you.”

“Why did you hang ‘Harry’ on the poor kid? Do you know how many ‘Harrys’ there are at Hogwarts now?”

“Honestly Harry, as far as I’m concerned, we had first claim on naming our son after you.” Hermione huffed, making the smile on Harry’s face even wider. He had missed being told ‘Honestly Harry...’

“Speaking of Names, Teddy’s best friend is Neville Bones. He says he’s Susan’s son, who’s the father?”

“Neville.”

“Yeah, Neville Bones.”

“No you prat. Neville Longbottom is the father of Neville Bones.”

“But... When did this happen?”

“Well, since young Mr. Bones is fifteen, I’d say about sixteen years ago.” She struggled not to laugh at him. “Harry, don’t forget the toll the war took on our population. We have a real shortage of Wizards in our age group. Sue Bones and Hannah Abbott were more than just friends. They decided to share a husband, Neville Longbottom. Sue is the last of the Bones, so she didn’t take the Longbottom name, and both her children are named Bones. Hannah is Lady Longbottom since Augusta died and all three of her children hold the Longbottom name. They are rebuilding two families that way.”

Harry nodded. “Lucky man.”

“So, who is she?” Hermione looked deeply within his eyes.

“Who?”

“The woman who got you to deal with that hair of yours. And the one who got you to marry her.” She tapped the ring on his finger.

“Tracey Davis.”

“Oh very funny. You shouldn’t joke like that Harry, Tracey went missing a few years ago the night before her wedding. The DMLE had a huge investigation, they finally decided that she had wandered into Muggle London and somehow ended up in the middle of a Muggle crime.”

Harry just grinned at his old friend. It slowly dawned on her that he wasn’t joking.

“You ran off with Tracey the night before her wedding?”

“Yeah, we spent a few days in New York, and then went on to La Paz. I got hurt, and after I was healed up, she presented me with an ultimatum, I could keep chasing dark morons, or I could be with her, but not both. We got married in Las Vegas. Five years ago come December.”

Hermione shook her head. “You’re something else aren’t you? How do you get yourself into those situations?”

Harry shrugged. “You manage to live in interesting times yourself. Bill tells me you’re an author. He tells me you wrote the definitive history of the Voldemort’s second rise and fall.”

Hermione blushed. “I didn’t know that Bill thought that way.”

“Oh, he does. Imagine my surprise when I go to Scrivenshaft’s to pick up a copy for you to autograph and I find this.” From his pocket he withdrew a shrunken book, which expanded to its original size in his hand. He placed it on the table and turned it so that she could read the title. “Dark Lords and Idiots: The Life and Times of Harry James Potter. Catchy title there. Have you got anything to tell me Hermione?”

## ***Chapter Four: Daphne - Part two***

Astoria Malfoy was sitting up in her bed nursing her son. Daphne looked on in amazement at the look of contentment on her sister's face.

"Is it bad that this feels so good?" Astoria asked her sister with a smile.

"You're asking me?" Daphne asked laughing. "My sum total experience with new borns was trying to put a bow in your hair when I was six."

"I'm sure that I looked smashing." Astoria dimpled. "Thank you for coming to help me Daph. With mum gone, I didn't know who else to ask."

"You're my sister." Daphne said, feeling a bit silly for stating the obvious. "Where else would I be?"

"I don't know what I expected when I wrote you Daph." Astoria had fallen into her childhood habit of using a nickname that Daphne hated. "Daddy's pretty much out of the picture since he took up with HER." Astoria had taken their father remarrying following the war badly. "And you've got your career... Draco told me that coming to help cost you a lot of money."

"I backed out of a job, yes, but believe me Torrie," Astoria had childhood nicknames too. "Missing a couple of weeks won't matter in the slightest."

Astoria shifted her son to her other breast. "You really upset Draco. So, tell me about this man in your life, the one Draco hates so intensely."

Daphne smiled. "Harry and Draco were a bit competitive when we were all at Hogwarts."

Astoria goggled. "Harry? Harry Potter?"

"Yes. You've heard of him?" Daphne said with a grin.

"You're sleeping with Harry Potter?" The look on Astoria's face amused Daphne to no end.

"It might be more accurate to say that I sleep with his wife, and on those occasions when I want a man, with Harry."

That gave Astoria pause. "I didn't know you did that with women."

Daphne shrugged. "I always have. Is it a problem?"

"Oh, no." Astoria said shaking her head. "It's just that I never thought of you being with women, I just remember how all the men and boys looked at you. You probably shouldn't mention it to Draco though." A sly smile crept across her face. "So, tell me about Harry Potter... What lucky witch is his wife and your girlfriend?"

"Tracey Davis." Daphne said quietly.

"Tracey? But she... disappeared."

"She did, but didn't. The night before she was supposed to be married, she met Harry in a pub. Harry talked her into running off with him. She never looked back."

Astoria thought about that. "Tossing over a fossil like Gerald Llewellyn for a young stud a third his age? I can see that. What I remember of Tracey is that she was fairly calculating. What attracted her to him, his money, his body, his lifestyle?"

"She fell in love with him." Daphne saw the look on Astoria's face. "I'm serious. You haven't seen Tracey since I finished at Hogwarts, sixteen years ago, and you were too young to really know what was going on."

“What do you mean?” Astoria asked, raising her son to her shoulder and softly patting his back until he burped.

“Think about what was going on. Daddy and Mum kept you fairly isolated from what was going on, but people were dying every day, the lights, the darks, and even the Neutrals like Mum and Daddy. Yes Tracey was calculating, and so was I. We depended on each other for almost everything. The Darks were constantly playing their dominance games in the dungeons, and girls on their own could end up raped. We chose our ‘boyfriends’ based on how well they could protect us.”

“I didn’t know it was like that.”

“There was no reason for you to know.” Daphne stood and took her sleeping nephew into her arms, rocking him back and forth a few times before laying him into his cot at his mother’s bedside. “You didn’t start at Hogwarts until the year after Harry killed the Dark Lord, and the year after he purged the Dark Lord’s followers from the school.” Daphne sat back down in her chair, closed her eyes and paled a bit at the memories. “Harry was a very different man then, when he came into the Slytherin common room like a vengeful warlord of old, those who wouldn’t swear on their magic that they no longer followed the Dark Lord, he took away, almost begging them to fight him. Draco had already gone over to the light, a good thing too, because there was no way he would ever have backed down to Harry.”

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Daphne entered the dining room to find Narcissa Malfoy lingering over her morning tea.

“Good Morning Narcissa.” She said as she sat down. Instantly her preferred breakfast of a bowl of porridge sweetened with honey appeared before her, along with a cup of tea. The Malfoy elves were very well trained. For a moment Daphne was surprised that her time passing as a muggle had made her rather resent the slavery of the elves.

The blonde raised an eyebrow. “I don’t recall permitting you to use my given name Miss Greengrass. Your penchant for associating with Half Bloods and Muggles, has apparently given you ideas above your station.”

Daphne smiled widely. “Get over yourself Narcissa. You and your husband spent the better part of twenty years on your knees for a Half Blood, nearly bankrupting the Malfoy family in the process. I’ve heard tales of the Dark Lord’s practices following a successful culling, so I suspect that you did several things for him while on you knees.”

Narcissa’s eyes went colder than normal. “Mind your tongue girl. There are still ways that arrogant upstarts can be dealt with.”

Daphne swallowed a mouthful of porridge. “Oh, I’m frightened. In your day you might have actually been someone Narcissa, but that day is well and truly past. What do you suppose the Half Blood I share a bed with would do if you carried through with your threats old woman? I know you saw what he did to your husband.”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about.” Draco’s mother said hesitantly.

“Of course I don’t. Just like I don’t know that your presence in this house is at my sister’s sufferance.” She smiled when Narcissa paled. “I was raised to play these pure blood games too Narcissa.”

“Stupid girl. Draco would never allow his chippie...”

“Stupid old woman. Draco tolerates you. He lost any respect or love he ever held for you when he realized how you and his father were squandering his heritage. Astoria is the Lady of this house, not you. She has provided the next generation of Malfoys. You are no longer needed.”

Daphne smiled to herself and finished her breakfast in peace. She had evidently given the older woman a lot to think about.

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### **\*Interlude pt 2\***

From his pocket Harry withdrew a shrunken book, which expanded to its original size in his hand. He placed it on the table and turned it so that she could read the title. “Dark Lords and Idiots: The Life and Times of Harry James Potter. Catchy title there. Have you got anything to tell me Hermione?”

To his surprise Hermione simply smiled. “One of the perks of writing in the Wizarding Press is that you can call a book any damned fool thing you want and it will still be accepted as a scholarly work.” She laughed. “I titled it that mostly in hope that you’d come by to yell at me.”

“Well, it worked. Except for that ‘yell at you’ thing. I skimmed a bit of this bad boy last night.” Harry said tapping the book. “You made me sound like an immature berk.”

“Harry!” the bushy haired mother of five looked stricken.

“No worries Hermione.” Harry said smiling. “If I recall correctly, I pretty much was an immature berk back then. The years have been kind since then. Now I’m a mature berk. I’m surprised any Wizarding publisher would have touched this book. It’s logically laid out, annotated and it has an index. How did you manage that?”

Hermione shrugged. “As closely associated with you as Ron and I were, they would have published my grocery list if I put your name in the title.” An evil grin he recognized from their shared time in the Gryffindor common room made an appearance. It was the grin that told him that she had taken advantage of a stupid person in a position of power. “For the longest time I was worried that the only reason it sold well was your name on the cover. Then I made a few minor changes to the Muggle references, modified a few names and addresses, pulled out my foot notes, invented a love story between you and Luna and presto, I had a bestselling fiction series in the non-magical world under the title **Soul Quest: The Adventures of Duncan Blood.**”

“Duncan Blood?”

“A far cooler name than Gary Slaughter, the name I made up for you, or so my editor tells me.”

“I think I’ve seen your Soul Quest series in book stores. So it’s a dramatization of our lives?”

The Brunette dimpled. “Mostly your life, but yes, but Ron and I make appearances as well. It’s the epic adventures of Duncan Blood, Helen Farmer and Richard Marmott.”

“Marmott?” Harry smirked. “Duncan Blood suddenly doesn’t sound so bad.”

Hermione shared his smirk. “My first draft had him as ‘Donald Ferret’, and Ron thought that was hilarious; he thought I was referring to Draco. When I told him it was supposed to be him, he hit the roof. I’d never seen him so mad, not even the time George reversed the propulsion charms on his broom before his Cannon’s tryout.”

Harry’s laughter brought on Hermione’s own. Little Carrie Weasley stared at her mother and her mother’s friend while they were being silly. Adults weren’t usually that silly.

“Anyway,” Hermione continued as soon as she caught her breath. “The success of the series seemed to be a most poetic victory to me. I know everyone expected me to be the Minister of Magic by now, or to be the head Unspeakable with my own little ‘Bookworm’ signal in the sky when ever a puzzle needs unraveling, but honestly Harry, Ron and I got several lifetimes worth of excitement and stress from our school years and I felt no need to fight my way up a career path to high office.” Hermione sipped her

tea. "I write in the quiet bedlam of our home, and I still have more than enough time to care for our children and assist in the home schooling of my four who haven't left for Hogwarts yet as well as the children of a few friends. The money from the books allows us the freedom to do what we want. Ron can continue with his coaching of what is frankly a horrible team that he loves and not worry about needing to move to a team that can pay him a better wage to support our family. In short it's perfect."

"I'm happy for the pair of you, really I am." Harry paused for a moment. "Now I've got to read those damned books. You said you invented a romance between Luna and me? Why not Ginny? Why not you?"

"Harry, please. I tried to use Ginny, but her character just wouldn't work. In the first five books in the series she was almost a nonentity, with only a minor appearance in what should have been her star turn when she was possessed and opened the portal to the Void of Mysteries, she was far too two dimensional to become a love interest, so I used the wacky personality of the slightly odd Selene Truelove to capture the poor Duncan's heart. Luna found the idea to be highly amusing.

"She would." Harry agreed. "How is she anyway?"

"Happy and insanely busy. The Quibbler has gone international with local editions in almost every English speaking magical enclave. As far as why I didn't use Helen Farmer as Duncan's love interests, well, she has a thing for taller red headed men from large families."

"Ah, so Ron wins again." He flashed her a grin. "He gets everything, the girl, the girl's money, lots of kids..."

"Hmph." She huffed. "Of course now that I know about you and Tracey, perhaps in the next book in the series, I'll have Selene move on to a weirder boyfriend and have Duncan take solace in the arms of Tilly David, the conflicted genius of Serpents Coven."

"Oh yeah, write Tracey into the story, she'd love that. I'm not sure how happy I am that my life could so easily be made into a work of fiction."

The fire in the hearth flared green. "Hermione?" a woman's voice sounded from the flames.

"Yes?"

"It's Hannah. Alright to come through?"

Hermione winked at Harry, "Sure, come on through."

The fire flared and a pair of young boys about stepped through holding each others hands. Harry raised an eyebrow in envy. Why could everyone in the universe use the stupid flu except him? They were followed by a blond woman then herself followed by a redhead carrying an infant.

"Hermione! Did you hear?" The blond said breathlessly. "Neville and Constance owed to say that Harry was at Hogwarts yesterday!"

"And today..." Harry interrupted, "He's in the Weasley's kitchen."

"Harry!" Hannah Longbottom swept him into a hug. "How are you?"

"It's so good to see you Harry!" Susan Bones said when she replaced Hannah in the hug

"I'm good. Better than I've been in years. I don't need to ask how you two are. I hope Neville's managing to survive."

"Neville will be delighted to see you, can you come to dinner?"

Harry shook his head. "I'm sorry Susan, Hannah, but I can't. I have to be in Japan by the day after

tomorrow. I've got to catch a Muggle airplane at six pm this evening. Business waits for no Wizard I'm afraid."

"That's just like you Harry James Potter." Susan said with her hands on her hips. "You appear after disappearing for years, sow a little chaos and disappear again."

"What did I do?"

"You bought your godson that insanely over powered broom. Less than twenty four hours later I get a letter from my son detailing how it just isn't fair and how his father and I should rush right out and buy him one."

"Ah." A smile crept across his lips. "Well, you know Viktor Krum's Blur should be in full production in a few weeks. Since you know someone with direct intimate contacts with Viktor, you can probably get her to intercede with old Viktor to get you a discount."

Both the former Hufflepuffs turned to look at Hermione speculatively.

Hermione blushed, and then ground out through clenched teeth, "It was one date. One date, twenty years ago. He kissed me on the cheek. There were no direct intimate contacts."

The guests to the Weasley home began to laugh at their hostess's discomfort. Cassie Weasley once again wondered what it was about Mummy's friend that made the grownups act so silly.

**\*End of Interlude\***

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"Hello Daddy."

Cyrus Greengrass looked up from the paperwork on his desk. His mouth hanging open as he rose from his seat. "Daphne?" He crossed the room to embrace his eldest daughter. "Why didn't you let me know you were coming?"

Daphne shrugged. "I didn't want a fuss. Besides last time we spoke we both said a few things that hurt."

The older man colored a bit. "Well I know you don't like my wife."

"It's got nothing to do with her being your wife Daddy, I hated her when we shared a dorm room, and the years haven't improved her personality in the slightest as far as I can see. Mostly I came by today to let you know that you're a grandfather."

"What? Who?" Cyrus sputtered.

"Not me Daddy. Astoria and Draco. Your grandson is Scorpius Hyperion Malfoy."

"Of course. Wonderful. Where you hate my wife, Astoria hates me."

"She doesn't Daddy. It would mean a lot to her if you were to visit and meet your grandson. Sure he's saddled with that horrible name, but that doesn't mean he has to grow up to be a copy of his father. Draco managed to become far less of a bastard than Lucius was, and with a bit of Greengrass guidance in his life Scorpius should turn out to be a good man."

Cyrus Greengrass had spent many nights reliving the argument that had brought Daphne's last visit to his home to such a final end. It had started when his new wife had demanded that Daphne call her 'mother' out of some school girl revenge and had spiraled out of control from there. Daphne had accused him of thinking with his penis and stormed out of the house, back to her life among the Muggles.



Now his eldest daughter was back, asking that he attempt to reconnect with his youngest and meet his grandson. How had his life gotten to this point?

“I believe you are right Daphne. I should be able to get out their way tomorrow. Could you stay for dinner? I’d like to spend some time with one of my daughters.”

Daphne smiled. “Of course Daddy. I’d love too.”

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Dinner in the Greengrass home was much as she remembered it. The same china, the same silver service, the same food served by the same elves. The only real difference was the woman sitting to her father’s left.

Vanessa Greengrass had the ‘honor’ of being the last innocent killed by a Death Eater. It was during a raid on Diagon Alley the day before Harry had finally found and finished the Dark Lord. There was no indication that Vanessa had been specifically targeted, rather like so many others, she was just a random victim of the madman’s followers. The only thing different about her case was that she was the last.

For several moments the only sound was that of silver against bone china, until the silence became too much for her father’s wife to tolerate.

“So Daphne, how goes your career?”

“Quite well thank you. I am what is considered ‘hot’ in the industry. Many advertisers are willing to pay quite well to have my face associated with their products.”

“Your father mentioned that you have branched out into something called ‘motion pictures’. Don’t all pictures have motion?”

“No. In the Muggle world photographs are motionless. A motion picture uses a bit of Muggle technology to produce movement.” Daphne explained.

“But to what end? So they with technology produce photos that we do with magic. How can that be a job?”

“No, they aren’t duplication Wizarding Photographs, these ‘movies’ are in full color and can be as long as you would like them to be. I’ve done three, the last one lasting three hours.” She took a drink of her wine. “They are more plays than photographs. They tell a story.”

“Ah, I see.” The woman said when clearly she didn’t. “That pays well does it?”

“Well enough that I only need to make one of them a year to be very comfortable.”

“We’ll need to see the next one then.” Cyrus interjected.

“I’d like that Daddy. I’ll take you to the British premier.”

“British premier you said? Are there others?”

“Oh yes, if, for a big enough film, there are premiers in every major country.”

“So.” Her step mother said. “We’ve established that your career is going well. You aren’t getting any younger Daphne how is your love life?”

“Well...” Daphne paused to spear a few green beans with her fork and chewed thoughtfully. “The man I’ve been living with for the last year has been asking me to marry him.”

Cyrus choked on the mouthful of wine he had just taken. His wife took a calculating look.

“Daphne, please. Tell me he isn’t a Muggle.”

“No, he’s a Wizard. You even know him Pansy.” Daphne fought to keep the smile from her lips.

The former Pansy Parkinson ran through ever wizard she knew, trying to think of any that would be living in North America, much less living with Daphne for a year.

“Who is it Daphne?” Cyrus asked quietly.

“Harry Potter.” She said simply.

Once again the silence was deafening.

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**\*Yet Another Interlude\***

As the door opened a bell chimed. Harry froze expecting... anything. When nothing happened, Harry continued his way into the store feeling more than a bit silly, not really knowing what he had expected to happen. At the counter was a pretty dark haired woman dusting display merchandize, who Harry instantly recognized, though he was puzzled as to what Penny Weasley nee’ Clearwater would be doing working at Weasley’s Wizarding Wheezes. The woman looked up from her ministrations, moving a lock of her long curly hair from her face with her left hand.

“Could I help you...” she stopped in mid sentence with her mouth hanging open when she recognized him. “Oh, bloody hell. Just one minute Harry.” She turned to the wall behind the counter and beat on the wall. “George! Get out here!”

After a few moments the door to what Harry recalled as the Twin’s inner sanctum opened and George Weasley stumbled out straightening his robes. “I swear to Merlin Penny. I think you live to do that. If you weren’t the best bookkeeper I’ve ever met, I’d fire you for that.”

Penny smirked at Alicia emerging from the back room looking as disheveled as her husband. “But I am, so you won’t. And you have a guest.”

For the first time George noticed Harry standing there, and Harry was amused to see the joker shift to business mode. The surviving twin strode up to Harry and extended a hand. “Sorry I missed you old man. George Weasley, Senior Partner, Weasley’s Wizarding Wheezes.”

Harry took the offered hand, a bit confused that George hadn’t recognized him.

“George!” Alicia said. “Put on your glasses you vain prat, that’s Harry.”

“Harry?” The redhead fumbled at an inner pocket of his robes and withdrew a pair of spectacles and placed them on his face. “Harry!” George pulled Harry into a bone crushing hug. “Bill said that he had asked you to come to the school to guest lecture.” George released the hug, but held onto Harry’s shoulders. “Have you seen Ron and Hermione?”

“I just came from their house. Ron’s on the road with the Cannons, but I’ve met their children.”

Alicia pushed George out of the way. “Got a kiss for an old team mate?”

“Well, all right.” Harry said. “I was worried that it might make you jealous.” He made a move to embrace George.

“Prat. You were a smartass even back in school.” She kissed him.

“So, you and George huh? I’d have bet on Angelina.”

“We flipped a coin.” Alicia shrugged. “I lost.”

## **Chapter Five: Neville**

Coming home was always the best part of his day. Neville stepped out of the hearth with the ease that only came from lifelong practice. He handed his travelling cloak to Kami, the family House Elf, who immediately disappeared to where ever elves went when they were putting things away.

“Dad!” Nine year old Edgar ran to him from the table in the corner of the great room where the boy had been drawing.

“Hey Eddie,” Neville said as he ruffled the hair on his son’s head. “How was your day? Did you get in a good visit at the Weasleys?”

“Sure did Dad. No school today. Aunt Hermione had a visitor. Aunt Hermione and both mums were too busy with him to have class. Me and Nathan and Arthur got to play trucks all day.”

“Hmm.” All of his sons had loved the Muggle ‘truck’ toys that Hermione had routinely given them as gifts through their lives... Not for the first time Neville contemplated the fortune available to the first shop to carry Muggle toys for magical children... He would have to suggest that to George Weasley then next time they met. “Where are your Mums anyway?”

“They’re putting Nathan and Megan to bed,” Eddie said, immensely proud of his own recently earned 8pm bed time.

“Neville.”

The big man pulled his wife into a hug. “Hello Sue.”

“Ew! Cut that out,” Edgar Longbottom said as he returned to his drawing.

“Hannah’s getting Nathan settled,” the redhead said. “Did Eddie tell you the news?”

“He said something about the Weasley’s having a visitor that kept you ladies from having classes today.” Neville sat down in his favorite chair, pulling Susan onto his lap, much to the disgust of his middle child.

“It was Harry.”

“Harry? Really? How was he?” Neville asked.

Susan stood, and pulled her husband to his feet, led him to the dining room where Kami had laid out the evening meal. “He looked... I don’t know... I guess, happy.”

“Good,” Neville said, pulling out her chair for her. Augusta Longbottom’s etiquette lessons still held firm in Neville’s mind.

“He’s settled in New York City, and he’s spending his time managing the Potter trust and what he called ‘pursuing his own interests’ though he didn’t stay what that might be.”

“Really? I’ve got some meetings coming up in New York in January... Maybe we could arrange a visit.”

“That’s my thrifty husband,” Hannah said entering the dining room. “Always willing to finance his pleasure with a little business.”

Neville rose and held Hannah’s chair for her. He was constantly surprised, even after all these years how these little things made the two women so happy, especially when he considered how fiercely independent they had been in school.

“Of course he wouldn’t be Harry is he hadn’t left a bit of chaos in his wake,” Susan noted.

“What did he do?”

“He bought his godson an insanely overpowered broom,” Hannah said, “and presented his gift in front of your son.”

“Oh Merlin, so I’m guessing Neville has been hinting that he should get one too?”

“‘Hinting’ might be a bit of understatement,” Hannah laughed. “According to his letter Ted let him try it out and it seems that the broom is ‘wicked sick’.”

Neville considered that for a moment, reflecting that ‘wicked sick’ might have been a fairly accurate description of how he felt immediately following his first flying lesson at Hogwarts.. “Should I assume that something being wicked sick would be a good thing?”

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Neville stood under the hot water spray feeling the day’s tension leaving his body, as well as the accumulated paper dust he had gathered during his day spent in the print room, checking the proofs as they came off the line. Even with magic, the dust got everywhere.

The evening’s talk of Harry had Neville reflecting on his life, the way that the return of a figure from one’s past will do.

Following Harry’s defeat of the Dark Lord, Neville found himself an adult with for the most part average qualifications and no real goals in life. For a while he considered trying to apprentice himself to a Master Herbologist, but the family business beckoned... limping along in the hands of place holder management since the passing of Neville’s grandfather most of a decade before.

Then, of course, there was Hannah. She and Neville had dated off and on through their last two years at Hogwarts and she had become the one true focus of his life. However Neville was honest enough with himself to admit that he wasn’t the focus of her life. Hannah loved Neville, she really did, but she was deeply devoted to her oldest friend and first love, Susan Bones.

That was why Neville was surprised when the Hannah and Susan were escorted into his suite by his Grandmother. Looking more pleased than she had a right to be Augusta left them alone. It seemed that the girls had a proposition for him.

Like Neville, Susan was the last of her line, and like Neville, she found herself under pressure from many sources to ensure the continuation of her family name. Bonding herself to Hannah, the love of her life was not even a possibility.

Susan and Neville had very similar problems. Susan needed to marry a man willing to allow his heirs to take her name. Neville needed a wife to provide the heirs to continue his own line. At first blush this seemed to make them incompatible.

Hannah had problems of her own. As the third daughter of a pureblood merchant and his Muggle born wife, she was a young woman with seemingly many opportunities, except that her chosen love was denied her due to Susan’s responsibility to her line. The recent war had almost completely destroyed her father’s business making it impossible for him to cover the dowry routinely demanded by suitors, and that was before one noticed the bloody swath the two purity wars of Voldemort had cut through the male population of Magical Britain. This alone would ensure that whatever man Hannah was likely to bond herself to would likely be either as old as her father or disturbingly younger than she was... or Neville.

Hannah’s problem with marrying Neville was that he would be moving in the same social circle as Susan, and Hannah didn’t know if she would be able to deal with seeing the love of her life only on social occasions.

From this came the plan that they presented to the scion of the Longbottom line. Neville would marry them both, first Susan to satisfy the need for pure blood propriety, then Hannah, as the 'second wife'. Susan could keep her name and any of her children would further the Bones line, and Hannah would become the newest Lady Longbottom. This would allow both lines to continue unabated.

To say that Neville had been shocked by this proposal was something of an understatement. Though he was dimly aware of the 'second wife' option available to those of certain resources, he hadn't ever in his wildest imaginings thought that he would ever find himself being offered such an opportunity.

It turned out that Hannah could be very persuasive. Very very persuasive. Susan made a most convincing argument as well, whispering in his ear while pressing against him in ways that made basic thought difficult.

Fundamentally Neville never stood a chance.

That only left convincing the families. Susan of course had no family left, outside of some cadet branches of the family that did not bear the Bones name. Augusta Longbottom seemed at first surprised that Neville was going along with the young witches plan, and then to Neville's amazement fully supportive. Byron Abbott on the other hand was a hard sell. Neville met with the man seven times before he gave his permission.

Six months to the day that the two women came to him with their plan, Neville found himself standing before the surviving cream of the British Magical society holding Susan's hand as their wedding photos were being taken.

In order for the plan to work, Neville and Susan had to prove themselves fruitful. As befitting their place in society, the Bones/Longbottom wedding was the social event of the year, with invitations to the ceremony were highly sought after. As pure bloods their union was held up as the first, best sign of the renewal of the British Wizarding Society, and both were instructed by the elders of their respective families' (Augusta in Neville's case, and a distant cousin of her Aunt Amelia in Susan's) that they should remain coolly formal with each other, even in their bedroom. So they had both entered their bedroom on their wedding night and addressed each other in the stiff, formal, traditional way. Even what Augusta Longbottom called 'the coupling' was to be formal, constrained, over quickly, and never ever spoken of.

That first night together, being dutiful scions of their respective lines, Neville and Susan maintained their formal personas... for almost a minute, before they both broke into laughter.

In truth they spent that first night fully clothed just talking, for beyond their heritages, the only thing the new couple had in common was a deep abiding love for Hannah Abbott. The next morning when a bright eyed Hannah had appeared demanding details, they told her the truth.

And were immediately rewarded with a blond mass of fury the likes Neville hadn't seen before outside of an irate Hermione Granger ripping into Ron Weasley for not studying the night before their NEWTs. Hannah had informed them both in no uncertain terms that she wasn't going to risk her and her future children's prospective happiness because certain people were too old fashioned, staid, and stupid to get naked and consummate their marriage sufficiently that her own would be legal. The blond force of nature pushed them both back into their bedroom and told them not to come out until Susan was pregnant, and that if necessary, she would stick them together at the crotches and leave for the weekend with their wands.

Nine months later Neville Edgar Bones was born, and Hannah was extraordinarily pleased with herself. Hannah moved in with them and three weeks later Neville Longbottom caused quite the stir in society when he took a second wife.

Shaking himself from his memories, Neville turned off the water and stepped from the shower into a steamy bathroom. There had been a time when he simply would have cast drying charms on himself, but Hannah had taught him the pleasures of a thick thirsty towel on his skin. He wrapped himself in a terrycloth robe, and still toweling his hair dry he exited his private bath entering his bed chamber.

When he lowered the towel he was pleasantly surprised to find a very naked Susan waiting on his bed. Even after being married to these two wonderful women for most of two decades he never really knew which of them would show up in his bed or when.

“Hello my husband.” She purred stretching on his bed.

“Hello wife.” He responded, staying in the stiff pureblood character that the pair had assumed for so short a time on their wedding night. It remained their private joke.

“Being reminded of Harry got you thinking of your glory days at Hogwarts?” The redheaded woman asked with a small smile on her lips.

“Actually,” Neville said sitting on the edge of the bed. “I was thinking of you, and how lucky I am.”

Susan’s smile grew and she took hold of the lapels of his robe, pulling him down on top of her. “Good answer.”

-----ooOoo-----

“Your 2 pm appointment Mr. Longbottom.”

Neville looked up from his desk, blinking owlshly. 2 pm? Had he worked through lunch again? He needed to get a tighter hold on his work habits. “Show them in Chastity,” he said quietly. “And could you arrange for some tea please?”

Hermione Weasley entered his office followed by Justin Finch-Fletchly. Hermione was carrying a small container that appeared to be of Muggle manufacture. “I brought you this,” she said placing the small white container in front of him. “From what Hannah tells me you rarely take the time to eat lunch at the office, she’s worried about you.”

“Please, sit down.” Neville said while examining the container trying to figure out how to open it and see what Hermione had brought him. The wizard turned the white package completely around twice, and then lifted it to look on the bottom much to Justin’s amusement.

“Oh for goodness sake Neville,” Hermione huffed as she reached across the desk and squeezed the tabs of the Styrofoam box allowing the lid to flop open. “Sometimes you remind me of Arthur Weasley, over thinking the simplest things just because they’re Muggle in origin.”

Neville grinned at her and then he examined the sandwich within the box. “Thank you Hermione. What is it?”

“It’s called a Rueben,” the bushy haired woman said impatiently. “Corned beef, swiss cheese, sauerkraut and Russian dressing on Rye bread. It’s a bloody sandwich Neville, we’re here to talk about what could be the most important news of our lives and you’re worried about a sandwich?”

“Hey, you’re the one who brought it, and wrapped it in this puzzlebox thing. Besides, this is lunch, and there isn’t much in life more important than a good lunch.”

Justin stifled a chuckle, while opening his brief case and sliding a folder in front of his friend and colleague. “Here’s the offer from Warner Bros.”

Neville opened the cover of the folder with his left hand while lifting half the sandwich with his right. The pair in front of him saw his eyes widen when he came to the price the movie studio was willing to

pay. “That’s a whole lot of zeros.” Then he idly took a bite of the sandwich. His expression took on a look of amazement and he pulled the half sandwich away from his mouth to stare at it reverently. “Sweet Merlin on a Bicycle! Where have you been all my life?”

“Neville!” Hermione growled threateningly.

“No, seriously, this is good. Did you bring any napkins?”

Hermione stood. “I’ll find some. Neville you’ve got to learn when to take things more seriously.”

The two men watched as the woman left the room.

“I don’t believe you get away with doing that to her.” Justin laughed. “If I tried it, she’d kill me.”

“She still sees sweet little harmless Neville from first year,” Neville said reaching into a desk drawer for a napkin on which to wipe his hands. “It has never occurred to either Hermione or Ron that I grew up a bit, so I abuse them whenever possible.” He took another bite of the sandwich in his hand. “It is a really good sandwich though. So, how much is this in real money?”

Justin mentioned the conversion to Galleons.

Neville whistled. “Well that should setup on the Weasley clan for a few generations.”

“Our businesses as well Nev.” Justin stood and went to the window of Neville’s office looking out over London. “You know, they day you brought Hermione’s manuscript to me may well turn out to be the luckiest day of my life.”

“Broadmore Books and I had the Wizarding world covered, Finch Publishing offered access to the Muggle market. Without your resources we wouldn’t be reaching the audience we are. As soon as I read Hermione’s history of Harry’s life I knew that I had a best seller on my hands.” Neville smiled. “I just wish the Statute of Secrecy didn’t keep me from giving that to you to publish. Then when Hermione approached me with the idea of dramatizing Harry’s life as a children’s story, I knew I’d found a source of gold. Honestly though until you came to me last year to tell me that the Muggles wanted to make a movie out of the books... I mean I’d never heard of such a thing, but the research you showed me... so much money. Now I’m just frightened of one thing.”

“What’s that?”

Hermione reentered the office with a tea towel in her hands. “That Harry finds out that Neville here is the one who hung ‘Duncan Blood’ on him in the series.” She eyed the napkin on Neville’s desk in front of him. “And I swear to god Neville, if you keep messing with me like this, I’m going to tell him.”

-----oooOOOooo-----

Neville raised his glass, “To Jean Kathleen Riley!”

“Here here” Ron Weasley agreed, raising his own glass. “And far more important that that imaginary lady, to the woman whose name is on the cheques Hermione Jane Weasley”

A murmur of agreement came from around the table of the private room of the restaurant, while Hermione blushed prettily. “Thank you Ron, for cutting to the heart of the matter. Now all I’ve got to do is finish the last two books of the story without it sounding too much like I’m just transcribing Harry’s life.”

“No worries there my Love.” Ron said from her side, “I was there with him through most of it, and I don’t recognize hardly anything in your books.” Ron suddenly noticed that the table had gone silent and everyone was looking at him. “What?” he asked.

“You read a book?” George asked incredulously.

“Without your lovely wife standing over you with a club?” Bill chimed in joining in on the fun. “I’m a bit surprised that Muscle-head can recognize a book that isn’t filled with Quidditch strategies.”

“Oi! What is this? Pick on Ron day?” The youngest male Weasley huffed.

“When have we ever needed a special day for that?” Ginny asked sweetly.

“As much fun as abusing Ron is,” Hermione said coming, not for the first time, to her husband’s rescue, “I’ve gotten a letter from Harry.”

“Bloody hell, why didn’t you tell me?” Ron yelped.

“Because it was addressed to me Ron.”

“Well, are you going to read it to us or not?” Ginny demanded.

Hermione smiled, and put her glasses on and began to read.

*Hermione:*

*First of all, I have to say congratulations for the success with our story. I’ve gotten hold of copies of the first four of the series (as far as the fifth book, **The Thunderbird’s Faction**, goes, I’m thirty four years old now, I’m not standing in a queue made up of teenagers and younger children at midnight to buy a bloody book. I’m waiting a few days for the furor to die down before I pick up my copy.)*

*I’ve actually finished **The Seer’s Talisman**, and I must say it’s a ripping good yarn, though if your Duncan is really based on me, I don’t remember being quite so whiney first year, but there you go. I’m currently up to the third chapter of **The Void of Mysteries**, with **The Captive of Sylt**, and **The Vessel of Power** all on my bedside table waiting their turn. So far the second book is a page turner, and I’m really surprised that I can’t wait to find out how it ends.*

*How it ends, how sad is that? I guess that it’s a tribute to your skill as a writers that I’m wondering how it ends, despite knowing fully well how it ends.*

*Anyway when I finished ‘**Talisman**’ I was on an international flight and had most of five hours to think about your novel and it occurred to me that we never really finished our conversation about your stories when I visited. When we were interrupted by the arrival of Susan and Hannah, we were discussing how you were beginning to feel guilty over how you were profiting by telling the stories of my life.*

*Having now read your first story and being engrossed in the second, I believe I can assure you that you aren’t telling stories about my life in the slightest. Your Dimsdales are abusive asses who are almost certainly criminal in their treatment of Duncan. My Dursleys were loveless authoritarians, but they certainly didn’t abuse me nor did they starve me. Ron and the twins did rip bars off my window before second year, but only because they never gave me a chance to open the security enclosure that Vernon had installed the previous winter when the house was robbed. I wasn’t locked in, nor was I fed through a cat flap.*

*Honestly, when I read that I had to stop and wonder where it had come from. Then I remember what Ron told his Mum to excuse the ‘borrowing’ of Mr. Weasley’s car. I’m guessing that the retelling of that story had somehow mutated a bit with each retelling. My cousin Dudley could be an ass on occasion, but then as you well know, so could I. More often than not, it was Dud and me against the world, as he was subject to the same rules that I was, and we shared the work load around the house. I’m really not all that sure how a complete waste of flesh such as your Dwight Dimsdale could possibly survive long enough to become the ‘pig with a wig’ that you write about.*



*I rarely spoke of my home life, because, well, I hated it there. So did Dudley. We both lived for the day that we would leave for the school year, and Dudley hated that he was home a week before I was each year, so that he bore the brunt of Vernon's rules and regulations for that week before I returned home. He never blamed me for the summers I got out early, but he suffered for my leaving.*

*I have to tell you, Dudley is a bit put out with you. He and his family came to visit and his seven year old daughter is a huge fan of your series. Dudley evidently reads your stories to young Missy at bedtime. When he spotted the books in our home he teased me about reading 'children's literature', so I told him that the series was being written by an old friend and that he was the inspiration for Dwight. His immediate reaction was to proclaim to the heavens that 'none of that ever happened!' and then, after a bit of reflection asked if he had ever actually been that bad.*

*I assured him that he hadn't. That seemed to make him feel better. Sending Missy Dursley an autographed set of your books would likely go a long way toward healing that hurt. Oh by the way, Missy exhibited a bit of accidental magic while visiting. Yet another red haired green eyed witch from the Evans line.*

*Why am I telling you this? To show that the adventures in your stories are your own creation grafted onto the basic framework of our adventures at school. That's all. You aren't 'stealing' my story so you can quit worrying about it. Take that portion of your proceeds from your books that you told me you have set aside as my 'share' and add it to your family's vaults, if not that then start a trust for orphans in Sirius' name. You owe me nothing Hermione, really you don't. (Though an autographed set of the books with a special dedication to me wouldn't go amiss. Hint hint.)*

*Tracey just walked through the room ranting about some idiot artist or other who wants to knock down one of the load bearing walls of her gallery to display his latest kinetic sculpture in an 'organic environment' what ever that means. Evidently being a talented artist requires being dropped on the head repeatedly according to the gentle and loving love of my life. She says Hi and that she never in her wildest imagination thought you would be a writer of fiction. She told me to add a hearty well done for defying expectations.*

"Wait." Ginny interrupted. "Tracey? Who's Tracey?"

"Oh, his wife." Hermione explained.

"Harry's married?" The redhead asked as if the idea pained her.

"He is." Bill Weasley confirmed. "It's been more than fifteen years flame top. You had to expect that."

"I know, I guess I did, but I'd hoped..."

"Wait a tic," Ron interjected. "Tracey? Tracey Davis? Harry married a bloody Slytherin?"

"Ronald." Fleur spoke for the first time since Hermione began reading from Harry's letter. "I love you like the brother I never had, but you need to grow up. Harry spent the night at our home when he visited Hogwarts, and we had a long conversation. For the first time in his life he is happy. If you are truly his friend, you need to be happy for him."

"Yeah, but..." Ron hesitated, stealing a glance toward Ginny. "But a Slytherin?"

"There's more to the letter." Hermione said, gaining the attention of the group again.

*Between Tracey's gallery and my obligations, I'm not sure when I'll be able to get back to the UK again. I do know that when I do come back it will be for a longer visit than the two days I managed last time, and I'm bringing Tracey with me, if for no other reason than to dispel that silly idea that she's been kidnapped I heard floating around.*

*That being said, I can't think of any reason that a world famous author and an international level Quidditch coach (even if he does work for the Cannons) could manage a trip out with their kids over the summer... Say July 15th through August 15th when my Godson is going to be visiting and we're going to be doing the tourist things for instance... If you could convince the rest of the Weasleys, and the Longbottoms to come along as well, which would just be gravy. I happen to know that a certain hotel will be holding rooms in those names... Just a thought.*

*Again, Hermione, congratulations on your success, looking forward to hearing from you and the rest of the family.*

- Harry.

*P.S. cough~autographed copies~cough*

-----oooOOOooo-----

What's wrong Nev?" Hannah asked as she wrapped her arms around her husband's waist.

Neville continued to stare out the window of the Master Suite onto the grounds at the rear of Longbottom Hall. He still believed that the view from his old suite was better, and somehow that didn't seem fair. He hoped that his eldest appreciated what he had. Probably not, Neville hadn't when it was his.

"Nothing. Everything."

"Well that clears up my confusion." The blonde said, slipping her hand inside her husband's dressing gown.

"Yeah, that's me Mr. Clarity. Mostly I'm hoping that Harry meant what he said in his letter about not caring about the money or the story. I'd hate to think we're hurting him in any way."

"The Harry I remember was nothing if not blunt. If what was happening bothered him, he never would have written Hermione, he'd have suffered silently. It would have been Tracey we would have had to worry about" She nuzzled into his neck. "The fact that Harry wrote to congratulate Hermione tells me that he's more than ok with it. He supports her, and by extension you all the way."

"How am I supposed to be all emotional and pathetic when you are nibbling on my neck like that?"

"You're not. Come to bed. Let's see if we can't make another Longbottom."

"Oh, bloody hell. You make the best arguments." He turned and took her into his arms.

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### **\*Yet Another Interlude\***

A fourteen hour flight was hell, no doubt about it, even in first class. It was so very good to be back on the ground.

Harry Potter collected his bag off the turnstile and patiently stood in line for the Customs inspections. The agent at the end of his line was pretty good. He processed through everything in Harry's two bags in less than three minutes, immediately noting the two green with silver trim silk robes still in their packaging, and verifying their inclusion on Harry's Customs Declaration forms.

"Different sizes Mr. Potter?" The agent asked.

"My wife and her girl friend." Harry explained earning himself a wide grin from the Agent who seemed for some reason to think that Harry was joking. Harry cheerfully paid the duty on his souvenirs, retrieved his passport and green card (which for no reason Harry had ever managed to

understand was most specifically not green) and exited the customs area of JFK Airport.

He was mildly disappointed that Tracey wasn't there. It wasn't really that big a deal, catching a cab home was easy enough, but after three months of nothing but phone calls he had been looking forward to enjoying the return to the city with Tracey sharing the ride. That was when he spotted the uniformed chauffeur holding the sign that read 'POTTER'.

"I'm Harry Potter."

"Welcome home Sir. Mrs. Potter asked that I pick you up." The man said taking Harry's bag. "This way sir."

This was odd. Tracey usually just met him at the Airport unless she was busy at her gallery, when she let him take a cab home. She had never sent a car for him before. Harry followed the driver to the area set aside for hired cars. A stretch Limo? Why had she sent a limousine to pick him up? The driver opened the rearmost door on the driver's side so that Harry could enter.

"If you don't mind my saying sir, you're a lucky man."

Harry blinked. "Thanks, I guess." Harry was wondering what the hell was going on as he ducked into the back of the car.

"Hello Harry."

A wide grin moved across Harry's lips. "Tracey!" He reached for her hand. "What's all this? Why didn't you come in?"

Tracey shrugged out of the dark overcoat that she was wearing to reveal a blood red teddie. "I had a very good week at the gallery, and I wanted to celebrate. Luckily for you, you came home tonight, so we can celebrate together."

"That's the old Potter Luck in play there." Harry agreed as his wife pulled at his belt. "I missed you."

Tracey pulled his trousers down straddled him, and brought her lips to within a fraction of an inch of his own. "Show me."

## ***A Day in the Life***

Harry stirred in the dark, his left hand searching for Tracey... and found nothing.

That was odd; his not quite awake mind told him. His beautiful wife had been there when they had gone to bed; she rarely rose before he did. Harry didn't like odd. There was still enough Dark Wizard Hunter in his instincts to equate 'odd' with dangerous.

Dangerous was bad. He usually had to kill things that were dangerous. He cracked open an eye and saw that the clock at the side of his bed read 4:23.

The bed shifted as someone laid down behind him. Harry relaxed. She must have needed the toilet or something. He rolled onto his side and took the woman into his arms, his face nuzzling into her neck, finding a mass of hair.

Not Tracey then.

Dimly remembering that Tracey had mentioned something about Daphne returning from shooting her latest movie, Harry sighed. They did this to him on occasion, swapping out in the middle of the night. He had never figured out just how they scheduled these things, the two of them just did it. She rolled to face him and cuddled into his chest.

Life, Harry mused as sleep reclaimed him, was turning out to be pretty damned good.

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Harry's alarm clock sounded its wake up call spot on 7 am. Unfortunately for his schedule, Daphne decided to assist in waking him up in the nicest way possible, a light kiss, a murmured "I've missed you," and then a sly smile as her head disappeared beneath the sheets.

This of course led to Harry returning the favor. One thing led to another and Harry didn't get to his shower until 8:20. By the time he had returned to the bedroom, he found Daphne cocooned in the blankets blissfully asleep.

He shook his head with a smile and dressed as quietly as he could.

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Tracey was waiting for Harry when he got to the kitchen.

"Finally," she said with a grin. "My breakfast isn't going to make itself you know."

"Witch," Harry said, stating the obvious, as he retrieved his favorite omelet pan from its cupboard. "You could have had breakfast waiting for me you know."

"And spoil the main reason I keep you around?" his wife laughed.

"It's good to be needed," Harry said cracking an egg into a bowl. "One or two eggs?"

"Two and toast please, I'm famished. Did Daphne tire you out?"

"I'm fine, you'll still have your slave labor around your gallery today," Harry smiled as he poured his egg mixture into the omelet pan, allowing the egg to start to set before he added the cheese and mushroom buttons Tracey liked so much.

"Excellent, free labor all day and a free lunch."

"Of course," Harry sighed in a long suffering manner, "I get to do your scut work for free and buy you lunch, I'm such a lucky guy."

"That's 'buy you an expensive lunch.'" Tracey corrected with a smile.

"Yes dear,"

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The Davis Gallery opened its doors exactly at 10 am, so Tracey was there by 9:30 at the latest. She presented Harry with a list of things that she needed done in the large space she rented from one of Harry's holding companies at what was frankly a ludicrously low rate for the neighborhood.

That fact had cause Harry a bit of tax trouble when an IRS agent had suggested that he might be subsidizing his wife's 'hobby' rather than investing in a business. Then Tracey turned over a half million dollars in the next quarter, and all suggestions that she might not know what she was doing went away.

Harry busied himself with his list, fixing a jammed window here, making a note to ask Tracey what colour she might like that room to be since it was past due to be repainted, changing the filter in the furnace, and just generally making himself useful in small tasks that he could have easily paid someone else to do, but for the fact that the act of doing them made him feel as if he was sharing in his wife's passion.

Even though he didn't. Harry had consoled himself that he just didn't understand art a long time ago.

Harry finished up with his list at 1:30 and went in search for Tracey. Lunch time, and he knew just the little Italian restaurant a couple of blocks over that Tracey would love, mostly because none of her trendy art friends would be caught dead in a place more concerned with how the food tasted rather than what it looked like, or perhaps more importantly who saw you noticing what it looked like.

He found his wife in her main gallery surrounded by people he didn't recognize and staring up at a canvas.

"Isn't it wonderful?" an odd fat man said from his position to Tracey's left. The man's question was immediately answered with a chorus of agreements. Harry smiled to himself as he reflected that this weirdo must be someone important... or at least important enough to rate groupies and sycophants.

Occasionally Harry found himself channelling Vernon Dursley. This man would most definitely earn

Vernon's worst condemnation, 'Weirdo'. An odd hair cut, shaved on the left side and back of his head, long and shaggy on the right side and hanging down into his eyes, the man wore some of the oddest glasses Harry had ever seen, neon green frames that clashed with the man's shiny orange suit.

Harry found himself wondering if the guy was just seeing how much he could get away with before someone called him on it.

"Oh, there you are Harry," Tracey said when she noticed him, her eyes twinkling the way she did when she was about to abuse someone. "This is my husband Harry everyone."

"Ah, Mr. Davis," the fat man said his eyes sweeping Harry up and down. "You aren't in the Arts yourself, are you?"

"My name is Potter," Harry said with an easy grin. "No, I have to admit that I can't make heads or tails of most of what Tracey tells me are important pieces. I know what I like, but beyond that..."

"Excellent, you have the view of the common man," the fat man how had never bothered to introduce himself turned back to the large canvas the small group was clustered around. "What do you think of this piece?"

A quick glance to Tracey showed the smile she used to tell him to do whatever he wanted, so Harry looked up at the large painting. It was approximately six by eight foot, the canvas painted a uniform chromium yellow, with a single brush stroke of red paint that appeared to start in the middle of the canvas and extend tho the upper left corner where it left the painting.

"Well," Harry said in considered terms. "It's crap."

"What would you say," a slim woman standing next to the fat man asked, "if you were to learn that this painting just sold for 56 thousand dollars?"

"Honestly?" Harry shrugged. "I would suggest that there is a sucker born every minute and that the hack that made this mess should get that check cashed as soon as possible, because the buyer might sober up. I know it's morally wrong to allow a moron to keep his money, but this..." he gestured to the painting, "it's just horrible. The artist should be ashamed of himself and go back to painting houses."

"I see," the woman looked Harry up and down. "And what if I were to tell you that the artist is a woman?"

"Well, that's completely different," Harry said. "In that case I would suggest that there is a sucker born every minute and that the she should get that check cashed as soon as possible, because the buyer might sober up. I might also suggest that she should be ashamed of herself for being such a fraud. I sort of expect that sort of thing from men, but..."

The woman's eyes narrowed, "and what would you say if I were to tell you that I was the artist?"

Harry's face showed his surprise and he glanced at his wife's smiling face. "You set me up, didn't you?" Returning his attention to the disgruntled artist Harry continued. "You really should get that check cashed as soon as possible. Seriously. And I retract that comment about going back to painting houses. Now that I look at the painting, the quality just isn't there. You can even see the roller marks

in the yellow."

"You know nothing of art!" she declared with a sniff.

"I fully admit that, and remember, I was asked for my opinion," Harry pointed out. "I just know what I like. As a basic rule of thumb I define art as something that looks interesting and that I personally cannot do." He pointed to the painting in question, "I can do that. In fact I have done that several times when I changed my mind about the color I was using when I was painting a room. That is crap. The technique used to waste that canvas would look horrible on a wall."

---===oooOOOooo===---

"I've been waiting for years for someone to ask your opinion about the art I sell," Tracey laughed.

"And did you ever come through. They'll be talking about this for years. I'll get invitations to so many parties with the hope that you'll come along."

"I'll be quiet," Harry said apologetically.

"Don't you dare!" Tracey laughed. "You just said what needed to be said. Once the word gets out a lot of people who have been thinking the same thing will have the courage to speak their minds and a fair portion of the hacks will be laughed out of the business."

"But you own several of that woman's paintings," Harry pointed out as he opened the door to the restaurant, "and a lot by other artists using basically the same style."

"I do," Tracey admitted. "Because I suspect that after the word gets out about what my dear husband had to say, and they are driven to honest work, there will be a bit of a backlash in about three years and my inventory's value will skyrocket."

Harry had to laugh at his still so very Slytherin wife's plans and plots.

"Harry!" the young woman behind the podium called.

"Afternoon Ingrid," Harry responded. "table for two please?"

"Of course," the blond woman said, gathering a pair of menus and leading the way to the back of the dining area. "Here we are, your usual table."

"Thank you Ingrid, this is my wife Tracey."

Ingrid offered Tracey her best smile, "Welcome to Ermilio's, and I hope you don't mind when I say that your husband is a wonderful man."

"That's why I keep him around," Tracey answered with her own smile.

"This is one of your investments I assume?" she asked as soon as they were left alone with a pointed look at the hostess who was now back at her station. "Should I be worried that you are here enough to have a 'usual table'?"

"What? Ingrid? Come on love, you know I don't like them tall leggy and blonde with big luscious boobies," Harry grinned while reaching across the table to take her left hand, his thumb rubbing small circles in her palm. "I like them short, cuddly and feisty with boobies just the right size."

"I'm going to hurt you," Tracey explained.

"Ok, ok." Harry laughed. "Last year when you went to that show in Atlanta I wandered into a little hole in the wall dive and ordered dinner. The place was a absolute pit, but the food... just amazing. Anyway I was sitting there being amazed by the Baccala alla Vicentina when the places' owner was following this young lad out of the kitchen screaming at the top of his lungs. Ermilio was screaming right back about the poor quality of the produce that was purchased and the lack of cleanliness of the place."

"Only you Harry," Tracey said shaking her head.

"Hey, I didn't go looking for it. The idiot owner of the place fired him then and there and Ermilio stormed out into the street. I was finished with my meal, and decided that I didn't need dessert. So I paid my bill and ran after the guy. I introduced myself and asked if everything he cooked was as good as what I had, and he apologized over the poor quality."

"You are amazing," Tracey said. "You could fall in a manure pile and come out smelling sweet."

"I just happened across a very good chef working in a very bad restaurant."

"So, you set him up?"

"Partnership," Harry explained. "Three way, I'm a third, Ermilio is a third and his wife Ingrid is the other. I provide the money, Ermilio provides the artistry, and Ingrid provides the sanity. We agreed to give it five years to turn a profit. He has good nights, but nothing consistent yet. We'll get there, or pull the plug. Either way great food in the meantime."

A waitress arrived and took their orders.

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"You were right," Tracey said as they left Ermilio's, "he's great. Does he cater?"

"I don't know, I could ask."

"I think catering a few of my little shows would raise his profile with quite a few people," she smiled. "Ermilio gains a reputation and makes a little money, which goes to you and you spend it on me. A perfect plan."

"Your altruism knows no bounds," Harry laughed. "I finished your list of chores, oh great taskmistress. What would your bidding be for this afternoon?"

"I've got a few things that need done in my office," she reached out and squeezed his left butt cheek as they walked along the busy street. "Important things."



Harry's eyebrows rose. "You're going to kill me, woman."

"If you're lucky anyway."

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The looks of shocked amazement on the faces of Tracey's staff as he exited his wife's office annoyed Harry a bit, but not enough to pull the smile off his face. ***Yes children***, he thought, ***people in their thirties have sex. Even during the day if the mood strikes them.***

"Nobody move!"

Harry's back had been to the door so he missed the entrance of the speaker, but the look of shock on the girl Tracey employed as a Gallery assistant told him the story. The Davis Gallery was being robbed. Again.

Harry slowly turned to face the thief. He was in for something of a disappointment. Everyone seemed to think that an art gallery was flush with cash, ignoring the fact that no one really dealt with that kind of money used cash.

"All I want is the money, no one needs to get hurt!" the thief declared.

Harry busied himself in trying to identify the pistol in the man's hand. Having never encountered a real gun during his time in Britain, he had become familiar with the weapons when he hunted Dark Wizards. It turned out that not all magic users shared the dismissive attitude toward Muggle weapons held by most European Wizards. The thief was carrying a weapon smaller than those popular with the Dark Wizards of a few years before, possibly a 9 millimeter.

The Gallery assistant screamed, which brought Tracey running from her office.

"Give me the money!"

It took Tracey all of half a second to figure out what was going on. "Calm down. We don't have that much money around here. Most of our business is done with credit cards. I've got about \$200 in my wallet."

"Don't lie to me!" the man screamed.

***Lie to him***, Harry thought at Tracey as hard as he could. ***Lie to him and give him what he wants.*** A minor duplication spell would make her \$200 into thousands for an hour or so.

Tracey had other ideas however. Being called a liar had actually made her angry. "I'm not lying you arse. This isn't a bodega, this is a high end gallery. We don't deal in cash!"

"Bitch!" the thief spat as he moved to strike Tracey across the face with the pistol.

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Harry glanced at his watch and sighed. Four hours in this stuffy room explaining his actions to a pair

of policemen who seemed to be doing a bad Good Cop/Bad Cop routine. He'd over done it with the thief, and Tracey was going to make his life a living hell for it.

"Are we boring you Mr. Potter?" the 'bad' cop asked.

"No, not at all," Harry lied to the police detective. "I was just thinking of the hell I'm going to catch from the wife over today."

"So, once again, tell me what happened." The 'good cop' asked. Actually he wasn't all that much of a 'good cop' he was the 'slightly less offensive cop'.

"I was spending the day helping out around my wife's art gallery. I did a little maintenance in the morning, took Tracey to lunch, we fooled around in her office for a while, and then that idiot tried to rob the Gallery."

The Bad Cop seemed to take on a Snape like sneer. A very neat trick. Harry idly wondered if the detective could make his rain coat billow behind him. "From what I've been able to find out about you, you're stinking rich, why were you doing maintenance at an art gallery?"

"I own the building and am fairly handy, so I see no real reason to pay for something that I am fully capable of doing as long as I've got the time."

"And McFarland? How did he figure into your free time?" the Slightly Less Offensive Cop asked.

"The thief? He tried to hit my wife."

"You broke his jaw, his left arm, and fractured his skull when you shoved his head through a wall. He's got a concussion and hasn't woken up yet," Bad Cop pointed out. "The paramedic said that he might die."

"He tried to hit my wife," Harry repeated, slowly as if he were explaining things to a child. "His arm probably broke when I hyper extended his elbow joint to get him to drop his weapon. He kept fighting after he lost the gun, so I had to get nasty about it." Harry shrugged.

"The employees at the gallery all said that they'd never seen someone move as fast as you did when you were fighting McFarland," Bad Cop said.

"I find it interesting that McFarland is a head taller and out weighs you by a good hundred pounds, yet you managed to fuck him up so badly," Slightly Less Offensive Cop said.

"I thought I fucked him up rather effectively," Harry said. "He's a big man. Big men rarely learn how to fight. They almost never need to."

"Where did you learn to fight?" Bad Cop asked for perhaps the fiftieth time.

"Private school in Scotland," Harry answered. "You'd probably never heard of it before today. It's called Hogwarts and the School Board believed that the ability to defend yourself was a cornerstone of a good education. I was good at it and took private tuition after I left school. I could give you the names of the Dojo's I studied at if you'd like, but it's been years and none of them are in the US, so I've

no idea if they're still open."

"You're evidently pretty good at it, why didn't you just put him into a sleeper hold or something?" Bad Cop asked, pushing his point.

"Why are Police Officers trained to shoot for the center of body mass?"

"That's hardly the same thing," Slightly Less Offensive Cop said.

"I disagree, it's exactly the same thing. Step one of the encounter is to disarm your opponent. After I did that, he kept fighting. He is, as you pointed out bigger and stronger than I am. I wasn't going to play nice with someone who just tried to hit a woman in the face with a pistol. I took him down hard because he made me take him down hard."

Slightly Less Offensive Cop asked. "What would you have done if he had actually hit your wife?"

"If he had managed to hit my wife, I'd have killed him. Slowly." Harry explained.

That answer seemed to surprise Slightly Less Offensive Cop while Bad Cop slammed his fist down on the metal table that separated the two policemen and Harry. "I hate vigilantes."

"A vigilante would be someone out looking for trouble," Harry pointed out as he rose to his feet. He had had enough of this. "I was minding my own business spending the day with my wife and the thief you're so concerned about came to me. And he tried to hit my wife. I suppose it is possible that I overreacted, but he was armed and I was not. I did what I felt I needed to do to protect my wife and her employees. Now then, as you so politely pointed out, I am stinking rich. I'm tired of your questions, I'm getting angry at your veiled accusations, and I'm ready to leave. Unless you are charging me I think I'll be leaving."

"Sit down Mr. Potter," Slightly Less Offensive Cop said.

"I think we will be charging you." Bad Cop smirked.

"Ok, what are you charging me with? No, never mind. I want my lawyer. Hell, I want my Lawyer's whole firm," Harry laughed. "It will give them something to do to earn those retainers I pay them."

"You seem awfully confident for someone in as much trouble as you are." Bad Cop snarled.

Harry raised a finger. "Ah ah ah. I've seen enough television cop shows to know that as soon as I ask for my lawyers, the interview is over. You don't want to blow your case against me by giving me the technicalities I need to walk away do you?" Harry paused and waved at the mirror on the wall of the interrogation room. "To repeat, I want my lawyer."

The door opened and a man in a suit entered the room, followed by a uniformed Police Captain. "This interview is over, Mr. Potter is free to go," the suit said.

"Who are you?" Bad Cop rumbled.

The man in the suit offered an ID Card and a raised eyebrow.

Both of the police detectives looked at the card and then turned to look at Harry with surprise. "What kind of pull do you have with the Feds?" Slightly Less Offensive Cop asked.

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"If you had used magic against the idiot," the man in the suit said as he fell into step with Harry outside the police station, "we would have been able to react faster and and would have prevented the police from bothering you Mr. Potter."

Harry glanced over at the man. "Do I know you?"

"Me personally? No. But we at the NSA Magic Directorate know about you Mr. Potter, you and your history,"

Harry wasn't really sure how to respond to that, so he motioned to call a cab. He wanted to get home, but he wasn't going to apparate in front of some stranger.

"Mr. Potter, I've been directed to offer you a ride home. If you take a cab, or use *other methods*, I could get into trouble..."

Harry stopped and raised an eyebrow.

"Not Voldemort level trouble granted, but my boss can be a cast iron bitch."

"Fine," Harry said surrendering to the inevitable, while wondering just who this guy was. He watched as the man raised his left hand to his mouth and spoke some nonsense phrase into his wrist. With instantly a large black sedan with windows tinted black pulled up at the curb, seemingly ignoring the traffic around it.

The man in the suit opened the door. "Get in Mr. Potter."

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Harry was only moderately surprised to find that the car was significantly larger inside than the outside would indicate.

"Mr. Potter," the Gray haired black woman sitting in the back seat said looking up from a file folder, "do sit down."

A rear facing seat folded out at her gesture. Harry seated himself. "And you are?"

"My name is unimportant," she responded. "For the record, telling the police that you would have killed anyone is an exceptionally bad idea. You should remember that."

Harry regarded her for a moment. She appeared to be an older woman, not that her appearance was necessarily important. Witches could look pretty much any way they wanted, and this woman most specifically was a witch, that much was clear.

"I am far too busy to deal with unimportant people with unimportant names, I have an upset wife who

is going to need to scream at me for a while before she can calm down," Harry said in a cold voice.

The stress of dealing with the thief and then having to put up with a pair of detectives with major sticks up their arses was beginning to tell on his attitude. "Either tell me who you are or tell me good bye."

The woman smiled. "I had worried that your retirement might have dulled your edge Mr. Potter. Your performance at your wife's gallery and with the policemen have proven my concerns to be pointless. My name is Marsillia Johns and I head the Magic Directorate of the National Security Agency."

Harry slid into the offered seat as the door closed and the car began its journey. "And what can I do for you Ms. Johns?"

"It's more of what we can do for you Mr. Potter. We always appreciated the fact that back when you hunted Darks you never did so within our jurisdiction."

"I never worked in a whole lot of jurisdictions," Harry noted. "Magical societies that are relatively stable aren't usually targets of internal unrest. Besides, the FBI got Ridgway the same day I picked up a contract on him, or I would have."

"Yes, I know. I counseled against offering you that contract. We could and did handle Ridgway. More recently there have been incidents that required far more resources than we could afford to lose to deal with effectively. I would like to be able to call on your services if we need you," she pressed.

"As you said, I retired from hunting Darks."

"Mr. Potter," Johns said in a manner that was disturbingly like that of Minerva McGonagall whenever she thought Harry was being particularly stupid. "I think your actions today demonstrated quite clearly that you haven't retired. You've simply taken a break. I am not really all that interested in hiring a new enforcement arm, I want the experience you earned the hard way. I want you to train my people."

The woman paused, studying Harry's face. "In the last year I've lost almost a dozen agents to stupid mistakes. I have no one at my disposal with your level of experience, and I need you as a trainer.

What I am proposing is that you come on board as a consultant, coming to our facilities once or twice a year as needed and share what you've learned."

"Why should I?"

"Well, we've always known who you were and what you were doing, and we've left you alone, while monitoring for any problems concerning you.. You didn't get that kind of consideration from your birth nation."

Harry's eyes narrowed. "I'm not sure I'm pleased to know you've been spying on me."

"Not spying on you Mr. Potter. We have no interest in your daily life. We monitor for your magic. If you were to start casting offensive spells, or for that matter large amounts of any kind of magic we would check on your situation. You are a man who has destroyed mages that threatened to overthrow entire nations. If my people didn't pay attention to you I wouldn't deserve my position would I?"

Harry blinked at that. He really hadn't considered how dangerous he might appear to the world.

"Well, we've arrived at your home," Johns noted. She smiled when she noticed the surprise on the younger man's face. "Our cars employ the same charms as the 'Knights Bus' of your childhood home. It gives a bit of an advantage in dealing with city traffic." She extended her right hand and placed a business card into his hand. "Consider my request. That card has my direct number. For whatever reason you've chosen to live in the United States, I'm just asking you to assist the United States in defending itself."

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As soon as he entered the apartment she was wrapped around him.

"You stupid, stupid Gryffindor," Tracey sobbed into his chest. "He had a weapon. Did you use your wand? Of course not, you took him on hand to hand. Moron! Idiot! Fool! Gryffindor!" she punctuated each of the last four words with her right fist thumping against his chest.

"He was going to hit you," Harry said quietly while pulling her tightly against his body. "I couldn't let that happen. Was everyone else alright?"

"I sent everyone home, and we may not open tomorrow. Damn it Harry, what were you thinking? I've too much time invested in you to allow you to just throw it all away!"

"He wasn't that much of a challenge Tracey," he whispered in her ear. "I'm sorry for worrying you."

"You should be. When they took you away, it was all I could do not to start hexing people," she blew her nose into his shirt. "You deserve it."

"I know," Harry said rubbing her back and wondering how quickly he could get the shirt off. "Come on, after today I need a shower."

Tracey looked up into his eyes. "Just like that? Do you really think I'm going to let you..."

"I think I'm sweaty and need a shower," he pressed his forehead against hers. "I also think that it would do you some good as well."

"I thought I was going to lose you," Tracey said in a small voice. "It was like Bolivia all over again."

"I'm not going anywhere Tracey, I promise."

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The hot water ran down Harry's body as he held Tracey close.

"You're sure it's over?" she asked.

"Yes. The police were trying to make something of my reaction before the NSA showed up."

Tracey stiffened in his arms again. "The NSA?"

"Yeah," Harry responded as he nuzzled her neck. "They did the whole 'spy' thing as if it were a bad movie. They offered me a job."

"No," she looked up into his eyes. "You aren't going back to that. I'll leave you if you ever think about it."

"I'd already decided that I was turning them down," Harry said as he began soaping her up, paying special attention to her chest that for some reason he seemed to find particularly dirty and in need of scrubbing. "I'll call in a few days and let them know."

The door to the shower swung open.

"There you two are," Daphne called out with an evil grin. "I had lunch with my agent today, he's got me an audition for with a great script. It's a real chance to get exposed to a whole new audience, a real find." she paused, taking in Tracey's expression. "Did I miss something?"

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"Welcome to Swinehurst."

Harry looked up from the book he was reading to find Daphne sitting in the chair she used to go over scripts. The chair was nominally a spare for the room and was used infrequently. Since it wasn't part of the room setting Daphne found it a convenient place to practice without being distracted by others in the room.

"Welcome to Swinehurst," she said again, this time trying another dialect.

"What are you working on Daphne?" Tracey asked from her desk.

"It's just that audition I mentioned. Oh, Harry it's going to be based on that Duncan Blood series you like so much, maybe you can make suggestions to help me get the character down. The author, J. K. Riley is going to be at the audition. She's insisting on an all British cast you see, and if I do well maybe I could get her to autograph one of your books."

Tracey and Harry exchanged a look and smiled. Evidently neither of them had told Daphne just who Duncan Blood was based on. "What character are you trying for?"

"The Deputy Head Mistress, Athena McAllistor."

"Ah, that will be a good role for you. Try it like Professor McGonagall did when we arrived for our sorting."

Daphne thought for a moment and then nodded. "Welcome to Swinehurst," she said in a Scots dialect matching that of Minerva McGonagall. "The start-of-term banquet will begin shortly, but before you take your seats in the Great Hall, you will be sorted into your houses. The Sorting is a very important ceremony because..." she trailed off.

"What's wrong Daph?" Tracey asked.

“This is what McGonagall said that night,” Daphne said, staring at the script in her hand. “This is exactly what she said.”

“Well, there is a reason for that,” Harry grinned. “Swinehurst is, well, sort of based on Hogwarts.”

“And Athena McAllistor is...”

“Minerva McGonagall.” Tracey smiled at her friend.

“That means that Duncan Blood...”

“That would be,” Harry laughed, “me, sort of.”

“But who is J.K.Riley?” Daphne asked.

“You know her as Hermione Weasley.” Tracey answered.

“Oh bloody hell. No pressure for this audition.”